ENHANCING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIETNAM'S TOURISM ECONOMY

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Abstract: ***In recent years, Vietnam's tourism industry has become one of the key economic sectors, contributing significantly to GDP growth, job creation and the promotion of the national image. However, its rapid development has also posed numerous challenges related to the environment, culture and tourism resource management. This paper focuses on analyzing the current state of sustainable tourism development in Vietnam, assessing the limitations of the current growth model and proposing solutions to enhance the sustainability of the tourism economy. The research results aim to provide policy and practical implications for developing Vietnam's tourism industry in a way that is both economically efficient and harmoniously aligned with environmental protection and cultural preservation.***

• Keywords: *sustainability, development, economy, tourism, Vietnam*

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1. Introduction

Tourism today is not simply an activity for leisure or recreation but has become a comprehensive economic sector with strong spillover effects on various fields such as trade, services, transportation, culture and agriculture. In Vietnam, tourism has been identified as one of the key economic sectors, playing an important role in the country's socio-economic development strategy. Recognizing the potential and strategic significance of tourism for national development, the Politburo issued Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW on January 16, 2017, on developing tourism into a spearhead economic sector (Central Committee, 2017). This resolution created a strong driving force that encouraged localities, enterprises and communities to actively participate in tourism activities, thereby contributing significantly to economic growth, job creation and the promotion of Vietnam's image worldwide.

According to the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, the number of international visitors to Vietnam in the first 11 months of 2025 reached over 19 million, an increase of 20.9% compared with the same period in 2024. This figure marks a record high, surpassing the 18 million visitors in 2019, before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This growth has generated substantial revenue for the state budget and strongly stimulated the development of the service sector. However, along with these achievements, the rapid and sometimes uncontrolled expansion of certain tourist destinations has given rise to several problems such as environmental pollution, overexploitation of natural resources, commercialization of local culture and ecological imbalance. These challenges highlight the urgent need to shift toward sustainable tourism development that ensures harmony between economic growth, conservation of natural resources and preservation of cultural and social values. In the context of Vietnam's efforts to promote a green growth model and implement its international commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), improving sustainability in the development of the tourism economy has become a strategic mission.

2. The Current Situation of Vietnam's Tourism Economy Development

2.1. Achievements

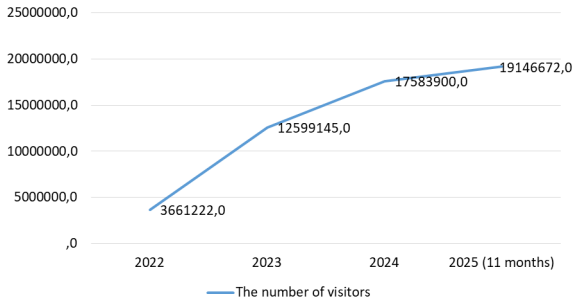
In recent years, Vietnam's tourism industry has made remarkable progress, becoming one of the key pillars of the national economy. Thanks to the attention and guidance of the Party and the State, especially after the Politburo issued Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW on January 16, 2017, on developing tourism into a spearhead economic sector, Vietnam's tourism industry has achieved positive transformations in scale, quality and professionalism. Subsequently, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 147/QĐ-TTg on

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January 22, 2020, approving the Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2030. This strategy clearly sets out the goal of making Vietnam an attractive destination, ranking among the leading countries in Southeast Asia in terms of tourism development and developing the industry in a professional, high-quality, sustainable and branded manner (The Prime Minister, 2020). The promulgation of these important strategic policies has provided a solid foundation and clear orientation for Vietnam's tourism development in the new period. Sustainable tourism development is a major and consistent policy of the Party and the State, aiming not only at economic growth but also at comprehensive and balanced development (Do Van Quan & Nguyen Thi Ung, 2025).

Statistical data show that the period from 2022 to 2025 marks a strong recovery and breakthrough for Vietnam's tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the number of international visitors to Vietnam in 2022 reached 3,661,222 arrivals, signaling a significant comeback of the tourism market after nearly two years of stagnation. This figure reflects the positive impact of the comprehensive reopening policy implemented in March 2022, along with the restoration of international flight routes and the relaxation of entry regulations for foreign tourists.

Chart 1. Number of International Visitors to Vietnam, 2022-2025



Source: Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2025

In 2023, the number of international visitors increased sharply to 12,599,145 arrivals, more than 3.4 times higher than in 2022. By 2024, Vietnam welcomed approximately 17,583,900 international visitors, an increase of nearly 40% compared to 2023, surpassing industry expectations and approaching the pre-pandemic level of over 18 million visitors in 2019. In the first 11 months of 2025, the number of international visitors to Vietnam reached 19,146,672 arrivals. This indicates that Vietnam's tourism industry is entering a phase of stable and sustainable growth, moving toward the goal of welcoming over 20 million international visitors in 2025 as set out in the Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2030. The rapid recovery and surpassing of pre-pandemic levels demonstrate the strong appeal of Vietnam as a destination while also reflecting the effectiveness of tourism management, administration and promotion at both national and local levels. Along with the robust rebound in visitor numbers, total tourism revenue in recent years has also recorded impressive growth, clearly showing the economic efficiency of the tourism sector in the post-pandemic period.

Table 1. Total Tourism Revenue, 2022-2024

Year	Total Tourism Revenue (trillion VND)	Growth Rate (%)
2022	495	175
2023	678,3	37
2024	840	23,9

Source: Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2025

According to statistical data, in 2022, total tourism revenue reached 495 trillion VND, increasing by 175% compared with 2021, marking the highest growth rate in the history of Vietnam's tourism industry. In 2023, total revenue from tourists continued to rise strongly, reaching 678.3 trillion VND, equivalent to a growth rate of 37% over the previous year. This impressive increase reflects positive changes in both domestic and international visitor segments. Vietnam's tourism not only regained traditional markets such as South Korea, China and Japan but also expanded to potential markets like India, Australia and Europe. At the same time, the diversification of tourism products, especially resort tourism, eco-tourism and cultural tourism, helped increase the average spending per visitor and enhance the overall economic value of the industry.

By 2024, total tourism revenue was estimated at 840 trillion VND, up 23.9% compared with 2023. Although the growth rate slowed compared with the previous period, the scale of revenue continued to expand, showing a shift toward deeper and more sustainable development. During this period, the travel consumption trend among domestic tourists changed significantly: instead of choosing low-cost tours, travelers preferred high-end resorts, quality services and environmentally friendly destinations. Major tourism centers such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Nha

Trang and Phu Quoc remained the main drivers of revenue growth. In 2025, Vietnam is expected to welcome 21.5 million international visitors and 135.5 million domestic tourists, with total tourism revenue exceeding 1 quadrillion VND (Vietnam Tourism Information Center, 2025).

State management, institutions and tourism policies have been improved through important documents such as the Implementation Plan for the National Tourism System Planning for the 2021-2030 period, the Prime Minister's Directive No. 34 on promoting tourism growth and several resolutions on tourism stimulation and visa exemptions for many countries. These efforts have created favorable conditions for enterprises and localities to develop. Tourism promotion and marketing activities have been carried out more professionally, spreading Vietnam's image through major international fairs and the communication campaign "Vietnam - Timeless Charm," which has helped strengthen the position of the national tourism brand.

Tourism products have become increasingly diverse, focusing on green, smart and high-value development. Typical forms include community-based tourism, night tourism, wellness tourism and culinary tourism. Digital transformation in tourism has been strongly promoted, contributing to innovation in management, marketing and visitor experiences. Vietnam has also continued to receive international recognition from UN Tourism and the World Travel Awards in many categories, affirming the country's position and reputation on the global tourism map (Vietnam Tourism Information Center, 2025).

The continuous increase in total tourism revenue in recent years shows that Vietnam's tourism industry is recovering firmly, gradually regaining its pre-pandemic growth momentum and confirming its important role in the national service economy. The high growth rate during this period results not only from the rise in visitor numbers but also from improved service quality, product innovation and the advancement of digital transformation in tourism activities.

2.2. Challenges and Limitations

Alongside the remarkable achievements gained in recent years, Vietnam's tourism industry continues to face a number of persistent challenges and limitations that must be recognized and addressed to ensure long-term, sustainable development. These challenges relate not only to infrastructure and service quality but also to environmental management, institutional coordination, human resources and the country's capacity to adapt to global changes.

First, tourism infrastructure and transport connectivity remain inconsistent.

Infrastructure plays a crucial role in supporting tourism development, yet Vietnam still faces many bottlenecks in this area. Although many localities have actively invested in upgrading facilities, the transport network linking major tourism centers with satellite destinations remains underdeveloped. In particular, mountainous, remote and island areas often suffer from poor road conditions and limited access to public transportation, restricting tourism potential and visitor mobility.

The uneven quality of infrastructure can be seen not only in transportation but also in the supporting facilities that serve tourism activities. Accommodation systems, shopping areas, entertainment venues and facilities for hosting international events, such as cultural festivals, sports tournaments and conferences, are still lacking or have not met international standards. The absence of large-scale integrated complexes reduces Vietnam's capacity to attract MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) and high-spending tourist segments. Moreover, infrastructure development remains fragmented across regions, with limited coordination between provinces, leading to inefficiencies and weakening the competitiveness of the overall tourism network (Government, 2023).

Second, the quality and uniqueness of tourism products and services are not yet consistent.

Despite progress in diversifying tourism products, many offerings remain repetitive and undifferentiated. Similar tourism models, such as beach resorts or sightseeing tours, are often replicated across regions without distinctive cultural or experiential elements. As a result, many destinations fail to leave a strong impression on visitors or encourage repeat travel. Some areas have developed tourism projects spontaneously, without alignment to overall regional or national tourism planning.

In addition, service quality still varies widely between destinations. While some major cities

and established tourist hubs provide professional services, smaller or newly developed areas often lack qualified personnel and standardized service processes. This inconsistency affects visitor satisfaction and limits Vietnam's ability to attract international travelers with higher spending capacity. Green tourism and smart tourism development, though frequently mentioned in strategic documents, are still in their infancy, with insufficient investment and weak linkages between stakeholders. The absence of comprehensive, sustainable value chains that integrate production, services and community participation remains a major barrier (Doan Manh Cuong, 2025).

Third, tourism promotion, marketing and technological application remain limited.

Promotion and marketing activities have improved but are still not commensurate with Vietnam's tourism potential. The country's image as a travel destination is not consistently or strategically projected in international markets. Financial resources for marketing campaigns remain limited, making it difficult to maintain long-term visibility and brand recognition. While neighboring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore have built powerful and continuous marketing identities, Vietnam's tourism communication still lacks continuity, creativity and emotional appeal.

The application of digital technologies in promotion and destination management remains fragmented. Although some provinces and enterprises have developed tourism websites, mobile apps, or virtual reality tours, these initiatives are often uncoordinated and fail to form a unified digital ecosystem. Data on visitor behavior, spending and satisfaction are not systematically collected or shared across regions, which limits evidence-based planning and forecasting. This lack of integration hampers the effectiveness of Vietnam's tourism digital transformation agenda and reduces the country's competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Fourth, awareness and practice of environmental protection and sustainable development are not yet consistent.

Environmental degradation is becoming one of the most pressing issues in Vietnam's tourism industry. In many destinations, rapid and unregulated tourism development has led to pollution, waste accumulation, overexploitation of natural resources and destruction of local landscapes. Popular tourist spots often face challenges related to solid waste management, untreated wastewater and uncontrolled construction, which diminish the natural beauty and ecological balance of the sites.

Moreover, the principle of "responsible tourism" has not yet been widely adopted. Some tourism businesses prioritize short-term profit over long-term sustainability, while local authorities sometimes allow excessive exploitation of resources to achieve short-term economic gains. The lack of strict monitoring and enforcement mechanisms further exacerbates environmental pressures. Without stronger policies and public awareness campaigns, these practices threaten to undermine Vietnam's tourism brand as a clean, green and attractive destination for future generations.

Fifth, external factors and climate change exert significant impacts.

Vietnam's tourism industry operates in an increasingly complex global environment shaped by economic volatility, geopolitical conflicts and climate change. Fluctuations in the global economy, rising fuel prices and changes in travel behavior after the COVID-19 pandemic have made international tourism markets more unpredictable. In addition, regional tensions and natural disasters disrupt travel flows, affecting the stability of the industry.

Climate change, in particular, poses long-term threats to tourism sustainability. Many coastal destinations, including Da Nang, Nha Trang and Phu Quoc, face rising sea levels, coastal erosion, coral bleaching and more frequent storms. These impacts not only damage infrastructure but also alter local ecosystems, diminishing the attractiveness of natural landscapes. In mountainous areas, landslides and flash floods have caused serious damage to tourist sites and communities. These challenges highlight the urgent need for Vietnam's tourism industry to strengthen its resilience, diversify products and markets and integrate climate adaptation measures into tourism planning and management.

In short, the challenges and limitations outlined above reveal that Vietnam's tourism development still relies heavily on extensive

growth, emphasizing quantity over quality. To achieve sustainable progress, the industry must shift toward intensive growth based on innovation, efficiency and sustainability. Recognizing these issues accurately and designing appropriate, forward-looking solutions will enable Vietnam's tourism sector not only to recover strongly but also to achieve long-term stability, competitiveness and greater contributions to the national economy.

3. Solutions to Enhance Sustainability in the Development of Vietnam's Tourism Economy

In order to overcome existing limitations and move toward sustainable tourism development, Vietnam's tourism industry needs to adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates policy reform, infrastructure modernization, product innovation, digital transformation, human resource development and environmental protection. These efforts should be implemented in a systematic and coordinated manner, ensuring alignment between national and local strategies as well as close cooperation among the State, enterprises and communities.

First, *improve infrastructure and strengthen regional linkages in tourism development.*

Infrastructure is a key foundation for sustainable tourism growth. The government should continue prioritizing public investment in major transportation projects that connect national tourism hubs such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang and Quang Ninh with surrounding satellite destinations. Developing a multimodal transport system that integrates road, air, rail and waterway networks will facilitate visitor mobility, reduce travel time and help distribute tourist flows more evenly to avoid overloading at popular sites.

In addition, it is necessary to invest in synchronized infrastructure systems such as modern accommodation facilities, shopping centers, international convention halls and large-scale cultural and sports complexes. These projects will provide the conditions for Vietnam to develop into a regional center for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) and luxury tourism. Localities should also promote inter-provincial cooperation and regional tourism corridors, especially in key economic regions, to create linked and competitive destinations that share infrastructure, services and marketing resources.

Second, *enhance the quality and distinctiveness of tourism products.*

Tourism products should reflect Vietnam's rich cultural diversity and natural heritage. Each locality should develop tourism products that highlight its unique cultural identity, traditional craft villages, festivals and cuisine while integrating modern creative elements to meet new consumer demands. The goal is to offer authentic, memorable experiences rather than homogeneous products that reduce the value of the destination.

Special attention should be given to the development of green, community-based, agricultural and wellness tourism, as these forms align with the global trend toward sustainable consumption and responsible travel. Encouraging cooperation among enterprises, local authorities and residents will help build sustainable value chains that ensure equitable benefits. This approach not only supports the economy but also preserves traditional livelihoods, cultural heritage and the environment. Furthermore, innovation in product design should integrate digital storytelling, smart tour guidance and personalized experiences to enhance visitor satisfaction and competitiveness.

Third, *innovate tourism promotion and strengthen the application of digital technology.*

Tourism marketing plays a decisive role in shaping national image and attracting visitors. Vietnam should develop a coherent national tourism brand strategy emphasizing its identity as a "safe, friendly, unique and attractive" destination. Collaboration with international media agencies, global tourism organizations and online travel platforms should be intensified to enhance the country's presence in key and emerging markets.

Digital transformation must become a central pillar of tourism promotion and management. Applying technology in destination management, data collection and visitor analytics will improve decision-making and enhance visitor experience. Building a unified smart tourism platform that integrates central and local data systems can help monitor tourist flows, manage capacity and optimize marketing efforts. Moreover, encouraging private sector participation and start-up innovation in digital tourism (such as virtual tours, AI-based recommendation systems or digital ticketing) can boost efficiency and competitiveness.

Fourth, *strengthen training and develop a high-quality tourism workforce.*

Human resources are the cornerstone of sustainable tourism. Training institutions and enterprises should establish partnerships to design curricula that combine theoretical knowledge with practical training. Programs should emphasize professional competencies, foreign languages, intercultural communication, customer service and technological proficiency.

Policies should also be introduced to attract, reward and retain skilled professionals, especially those with international expertise. Building a professional network of tour guides, destination managers and community-based tourism workers is crucial for maintaining service quality. For rural and mountainous areas, vocational training programs tailored to local contexts can help residents participate directly in tourism activities, improving their livelihoods while preserving local traditions and ecosystems.

Fifth, *enhance environmental protection and promote responsible tourism.*

Sustainability must be embedded in every aspect of tourism development. Local governments should rigorously enforce environmental impact assessment requirements in tourism planning and operations. Monitoring systems for waste management, wastewater treatment and ecosystem conservation need to be strengthened at all tourism sites.

At the same time, businesses and tourists should be encouraged to participate in green initiatives such as "Zero-Waste Tourism" or "Green Destination Certification." Integrating natural and cultural heritage conservation goals into tourism projects will create a balance between economic benefits and ecological preservation. Awareness campaigns on responsible tourism should be widely implemented to promote environmentally conscious behavior among both service providers and travelers.

Sixth, *improve resilience to climate change and global fluctuations.*

Climate change and global crises pose significant risks to tourism sustainability. The tourism sector should actively develop risk management and disaster response plans tailored to different regions, especially coastal and mountainous areas that are more vulnerable to natural hazards. Investments in resilient, eco-friendly infrastructure such as flood-resistant resorts and renewable energy systems will enhance long-term sustainability.

4. Conclusion

In recent years, Vietnam's tourism industry has confirmed its role as one of the key sectors of the national economy, contributing significantly to GDP growth, job creation and international integration. The period from 2022 to 2025 marks a strong recovery and comprehensive progress of the industry after the COVID-19 pandemic, reflected in record growth in visitor numbers, revenue and Vietnam's rising position on the world tourism map. However, along with these achievements, Vietnam's tourism still faces a number of structural challenges such as incomplete infrastructure, unstable product quality and limited attention to environmental protection and sustainable development. To achieve the goals set out in the Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2030, the industry needs to continue transforming its growth model from extensive to intensive, focusing on quality, identity and sustainability as the main pillars. Efforts to improve infrastructure, diversify products, promote digital transformation, train a high-quality workforce and protect the environment should be implemented in a coordinated way through cooperation among the government, enterprises, communities and citizens. With the right orientation, consistent policies and joint determination of the whole society, Vietnam's tourism can become a truly leading economic sector, making major contributions not only to economic growth but also to cultural exchange and the promotion of a dynamic, friendly and culturally rich national image on the international stage, moving toward sustainable and inclusive development.

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