

Developing community tourism, rural tourism in Quang Ngai - Opportunities and challenges

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Abstract

In recent years, with the orientation of making tourism a spearhead economic sector, Quang Ngai province has focused on investing in this smokeless industry and achieved initial results. However, these results have been still very limited, not commensurate with the province's potential. Typically, community tourism has been increasingly attractive to tourists and it has been a new trend in the journey of promoting and developing tourism in many places, but has not received much attention and investment in development in Quang Ngai, a province with a rich history and culture, beautiful scenery and many traditional handicrafts. Faced with opportunities and challenges for tourism development, the paper has assessed the current situation of the tourism industry and pointed out the potential of community tourism in Quang Ngai province, thereby providing a SWOT matrix to assess the potential and propose some solutions to develop rural tourism and community tourism in Quang Ngai in the future.

Keywords: Rural tourism, traditional craft villages, opportunities and challenges

Introduction

Vietnam is a country with many famous beautiful landscapes and a particularly rich treasure of craft knowledge and craft village culture. Unique traditional craft villages, which have existed for hundreds of years, are attractive destinations for domestic and foreign tourists on their journey to discover Vietnamese civilization and culture. Therefore, developing community tourism and rural tourism associated with traditional craft villages is a promising direction for Vietnam tourism in general and for localities in particular, including Quang Ngai. Despite its diverse potential, community tourism and rural tourism in Quang Ngai are still not commensurate with their existing advantages. Therefore, it is extremely necessary and correct to research and evaluate the opportunities as well as challenges and difficulties encountered to improve the efficiency of exploiting and developing community tourism in Quang Ngai province.

Overview of rural tourism

1. Concept of community, rural tourism

Rural tourism is a unique form of tourism that combines cultural experiences and the natural environment in rural areas. It is a multifaceted concept that encompasses a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural communities to attract and serve tourists. Rural tourism includes: farm tourism, agricultural tourism, craft village tourism, festival tourism, eco-tourism.

The term "rural tourism" does not have a uniform meaning globally. For example, in Finland, it could simply mean providing accommodation and catering services in a rural environment. Meanwhile, in Hungary, the term "village tourism" is used to describe activities and services concentrated within the village, not necessarily related to agriculture. This demonstrates the diversity and flexibility of the concept of rural tourism around the world.

In Vietnam, modern rural construction and tourism development are closely related. The construction of modern rural areas plays an important role in actively supporting the development of rural tourism by improving

and perfecting the infrastructure system, ensuring environmental sanitation, preserving and promoting cultural values, traditional craft villages, etc. On the contrary, rural tourism also contributes to improving the quality of modern rural construction through creating income and livelihoods for people, while promoting the consumption of regional products.

2. The role of community tourism and rural tourism in tourism and socio-economic development

Developing rural tourism models is extremely necessary because it will bring many advantages to tourism activities: Not only does it change the face of the countryside, it also creates a lot of value; contributes to preserving and promoting unique local cultural features; brings profits to the locality, creates jobs for a large number of local workers, improves people's lives, and brings sustainable economic development.

At the same time, rural tourism is becoming a trend in tourism development today; not only is it an effective solution in hunger eradication, poverty reduction, and new rural construction, but it also builds a tourism brand, an opportunity to promote the image and people of Vietnam in the integration period.

Potential for rural tourism development in Quang Ngai

1. Current situation of tourism development in Quang Ngai

Quang Ngai is a coastal province in the South-Central Coast region, with a 129 km coastline, a large territorial waters of 11,000 km² and 6 estuaries with many beautiful beaches. In addition, Quang Ngai is located between two attractive tourist routes, the "Central Heritage Road" and the "Central Highlands Green Road", but the number of tourists choosing Quang Ngai as a destination is not really commensurate with the province's tourism development potential.

In recent years, the number of domestic and foreign tourists coming to Quang Ngai has increased and Quang Ngai is gradually being marked on the tourism map of Vietnam (see tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Number of tourists to Quang Ngai in the period 2022-2024

Year	Total tourist arrivals		Domestic tourist		International tourist	
	Estimated number of tourists	% increase over last year	Estimated number of tourists	% increase over last year	Estimated number of tourists	% increase over last year
2022	650,000	217%	639,000	115%	11,000	320%
2023	1,065,000	64%	1,049,000	80%	15,200	38%
2024	1,490,000	39%	1,461,000	39%	29,000	91%

Source: Report on socio-economic, defense and security situation of Quang Ngai Provincial People's Committee

Table 2: Number of tourists to Quang Ngai in the period 2022-2024

Year	Total revenue		Foreign exchange revenue	
	Revenue (billion VND)	% increase compared to last year	Revenue (million USD)	% increase compared to last year
2022	700	298%	2.7	385%
2023	1,018	45%	5.8	10%
2024	1,434	30%	6.6	18%

Source: Report on socio-economic, defense and security situation of Quang Ngai Provincial People's Committee

The above data shows that the number of tourists coming to Quang Ngai as well as tourism revenue has been increasing gradually over the years, especially the number of international tourists has been not only increasing rapidly in number but also in revenue. In 2020, the number of tourists to Quang Ngai witnessed a sharp decline with negative growth rate due to the Covid-19 pandemic. By 2021, the number of tourists to Quang Ngai began to recover at a strong growth rate, and by 2023, the number of visitors was basically equivalent to pre-pandemic levels. This result is thanks to the whole country controlling the Covid-19 epidemic, bringing safety to the community and tourists. People and tourists feel more confident when traveling without worrying about the risk of infection. Furthermore, the Government has adopted tourism incentive policies to restore the economy and tourism industry after the pandemic, including discount packages, advertising campaigns and other measures to attract international and domestic tourists. However, in reality, tourists to Quang Ngai are mainly domestic tourists, while international tourists account for a small proportion (In 2023, Quang Ngai welcomed more than 1 million tourists, but international tourists only reached 15,200). In other words, Quang Ngai tourism industry is dependent on the domestic market.

This can be considered a very important stepping stone to promote the development of this still quite young smokeless industry of the province. This is a result of the increasing investment focus on tourism infrastructure. Tourist destinations all have convenient transportation, even traveling in and out of Ly Son Island becomes easier with 5-6 trains running every day and additional trains during peak season. In addition, tourism promotion and advertising have been more proactive; increasingly promoting Quang Ngai tourism at fairs, seminars, domestic tourism events and social networks.

Rural tourism resources

Quang Ngai city is developing 6 rural tourism development models including: The model of community tourism in Tinh Khe commune; the model of developing tourism in the flower village of Nghia Ha commune; the model of eco-tourism combined with visiting safe vegetable gardens of Nghia Ha commune; the model of community tourism in Nghia Phu commune; the model of community tourism in Nghia An commune's beach and the model of community tourism associated with visiting historical sites. With an area

of about 110 hectares, under the mangrove canopy there are many species of fish, shrimp, crabs; the poetic beauty, richness in natural colors makes many people surprised; seen from above, Bau Ca Cai mangrove forest (Binh Son district) is like a green carpet floating in the sky.

Ly Son district implements the model of "A Day as an island farmer - The mystery of Ly Son volcanic island", developing community tourism according to the homestay model. Duc Pho town develops community tourism model associated with Sa Huynh salt fields and homestay. Nghia Hanh district continues to develop the fruit garden tourism model in Binh Thanh village.

Binh Son district develops community tourism model of Ganh Yen, Bau Ca Cai; Ca Ninh water coconut forest. Ba to district develops the cultural experience model of the Hre people in Ba To. Mo Duc district develops the community tourism model of Gao tree hamlet, Duong Quang village, A Mo village.

Currently, Quang Ngai is implementing the construction of community tourism promotion model products, developing destinations associated with Sa Huynh Cultural Relics and A Khe Lagoon, Son My Relic Site. There are few provinces in Vietnam that have as diverse tourism as Quang Ngai. With historical relics and scenic spots, Quang Ngai has all types of tourism such as: spiritual tourism, revolutionary historical relic tourism, eco-tourism and beach resort tourism. Tourists coming to Quang Ngai can freely choose for themselves a suitable itinerary to have the most interesting trip.

In addition to famous historical sites and scenic spots, Quang Ngai tourism also attracts visitors with its unique traditional craft village culture. Each traditional craft village contributes to the tourism development of Quang Ngai province. Coming here, visitors will be able to visit and learn about the daily lives of the people through daily activities and production labor. Moreover, they explore the process of creating products by hardworking and creative farmers. Some typical villages include Duc Chanh bed weaving village, Phu Chau rice-paper village, Thu Ha - Co Luy sedge mat weaving village, Duc Loi fish sauce village, Dong Cat - Thi malt.

From around the 16th and 17th centuries, the pottery profession in Quang Ngai began to develop strongly, and up to now My Thien pottery village (Binh Son) is the most famous. Located in Binh Son district with many attractive tourist attractions such as Dung Quat Oil Refinery, Thanh Thuy - Ganh Yen 3D mural village, and beautiful beaches

such as Khe Hai, Le Thuy. developing My Thien pottery village in the direction of tourism combined with visiting and experiencing the craft village is a very potential direction.

Along with My Thien pottery, brocade weaving products of the Hre ethnic group are also displayed and introduced at the Hue Traditional Craft Festival with the theme “quintessence of Vietnamese crafts” and are evaluated as not inferior to the brocades of the Ta Oi ethnic group (Thua Thien Hue), Cham brocade (Ninh Thuan) from the fabric material to the lines, patterns, and motifs. In the South of Quang Ngai, tourists can visit the memorial house of the late Prime Minister - Pham Van Dong, and Sa Huynh beach which is famous not only for its many kinds of fresh seafood but also for experiencing the typical salt making profession here; they also can visit Dang Thuy Tram Infirmary, go up to the mountainous region to visit Ba To Museum, tourists cannot help but stop at Teng village to see the brocade weaving artisans. Located in the downstream of Tra Khuc River, Ve River, which is adjacent to Dai and Lo estuaries, with many brackish and acidic swamps, is suitable for sedge as the main material for weaving mats. Thu Xa and Co Luy (Tu Nghia) are famous sedge weaving villages of Quang Ngai. In addition, Tu Nghia district is also promoting investment in building Bai Dua eco-tourism area in Nghia Hoa commune. This can be considered a favorable opportunity for local authorities to promote the development of eco-tourism combined with visiting craft villages. Especially, it is necessary to mention the onion and garlic

growing profession on Ly Son Island. Coming to Ly Son, everywhere you can see garlic fields covered with white sand and surrounded by rocks in squares. Over the years, Ly Son garlic has become a famous agricultural product both domestically and internationally. Becoming a farmer and taking care of or harvesting each onion and garlic root will definitely be a memorable experience for tourists when visiting Ly Son Island.

Besides the achieved results, Quang Ngai tourism development is not commensurate with its potential. Tourism products and services are not unique or outstanding, and there are no tourism products that create a unique brand for Quang Ngai tourism. Community tourism, agricultural and rural tourism activities are still seasonal, lack connectivity, and the role of the community in tourism development has not been fully promoted. Some people are still hesitant to participate in service and tourism development, and have inadequate awareness of community tourism and experiential tourism for economic development. Furthermore, tourism promotion and advertising lack a synchronous, long-term strategy and lacks professionalism; tourism activities and events are organized on a small scale.

SWOT matrix to assess the potential for rural tourism development in Quang Ngai

Through analyzing the current situation and potential of rural tourism models in the province, we can point out the SWOT matrix to evaluate the potential for rural tourism development in Quang Ngai as follows:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Located in a key area of tourism development associated with the marine economy - Convenient transportation: Located on 1A National Highway, near Chu Lai airport, ... - Has great untapped tourism potential including natural tourism resources and human resources - There are traditional craft villages that represent regional culture, some relatively famous crafts such as: onion and garlic growing, rock sugar making, unrefined sugar making, malt making, etc. - Craft villages near scenic spots and resorts can be connected with tours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The tourism industry has a rather low starting point, tourism products are still poor, lacking tourism products that are typical of the culture and traditions of the province. - Most craft villages mainly produce on a small scale, for consumption, and do not care about displaying or building spaces to attract tourists. - Human resource quality is not guaranteed: Lack of professional operators, lack of tour guides who are capable of presenting and introducing destinations and traditions of craft villages, and weak foreign languages, especially Japanese and Chinese. - There is no official provincial information page to promote tourism or introduce the province’s traditional craft villages.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The province has paid more attention to developing rural tourism forms. The development of cultural tourism products, including rural tourism, has been included in the orientation for tourism development in Quang Ngai until 2025. - The number of domestic and foreign tourists choosing Quang Ngai as a destination is increasing. - The trend of tourism combining learning about traditions as well as experiencing the culture of the destination is very popular. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neighboring provinces have outstanding craft villages such as: Thanh Ha pottery village (Quang Nam), Non Nuoc fine arts village (Da Nang). - The province does not have a specialized training school for tourism, so on-site training is difficult. High-quality human resources are often concentrated in big cities or localities with developed tourism industries. - The current organization and management of craft villages is still not strict, lacking synchronization and inter-sectoral coordination.

Rural tourism development solutions

From the analyzed SWOT matrix, we can build strategic options as follows:

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	<p>SO, Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take advantage of the fact that craft villages are located in areas with many scenic spots to build combined tours to capture the current trend of cultural exploration and experience tourism. 	<p>WO Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With the approved policy of developing tourism, including rural tourism, the province needs to invest more to help craft villages operate more stably and professionally. - It is necessary to invest in building a separate tourism

	- Grasping the increasing number of tourists coming to Quang Ngai to have a program to actively promote the potential of community tourism and rural tourism of the province.	information page to promote the cultural identity in general and the craft villages in particular of the province so that tourists have more opportunities to learn before choosing a destination.
Threats	ST Strategy - Can combine with neighboring localities to build tours through craft villages to discover the unique characteristics of each locality.	WT Strategy - Invest heavily in training as well as attracting human resources, which is a major weakness of the province's tourism industry.

By building strategies from the SWOT matrix, some specific solutions can be proposed as follows:

First of all, it is necessary to order the Department of Culture - Sports and Tourism of the province to conduct a survey of tourists on rural tourism as well as survey the readiness of craft villages for development in combination with tourism. From there, propose investment directions and strategies for craft villages to best serve the needs of tourists.

Selecting some typical craft villages with characteristics and strong cultural identity of the province, with advantages in landscape, and that can be connected to tourist attractions to focus on investment according to the model of tourist craft villages including production and processing areas and exhibition areas for tourists to visit. In addition, it is possible to combine with provinces such as Quang Nam, Da Nang, Binh Dinh, etc. to build themed tours to explore and experience craft villages.

Promoting the branding of traditional handicraft products. In addition to Ly Son garlic which is already a famous brand, other products from craft villages such as My Thien pottery, Thu Xa sedge mats or other specialty products also need to be invested in to develop diversity and create unique products, which are suitable for souvenirs and gifts for tourism.

Strengthening promotion from tourists who have come to Quang Ngai through the media, especially social networks to attract more tourists. It is still emphasized that the province needs to build a separate information page specializing in activities to promote the local tourism potential.

Developing programs and activities to promote awareness of the practical value of preserving and promoting the traditional values of craft villages. Thereby, it is possible to attract quality human resources to build the homeland. On the other hand, it is necessary to focus on building human resources, supporting training facilities in tourism, and at the same time, encouraging artisans and skilled workers to continue to teach and pass on their skills to the younger generation as the core for sustainable development of craft villages in the future.

Finally, in order for the above solutions to be put into practice, helping rural tourism truly become a spearhead form of tourism attracting tourists, it is necessary to have close cooperation between local authorities and relevant departments and agencies, along with the coordination of artisans and workers in craft villages in particular and the community in general.

Conclusion

The beautiful rural landscapes and diverse traditional craft villages in Quang Ngai show that community tourism and rural tourism are potential forms of tourism in the locality. Focusing on investing in rural tourism development not only brings economic and social benefits, but more importantly,

craft village tourism also contributes to the preservation and promotion of unique cultural values of the province in the integration period.

Hopefully, in the future, community tourism in Quang Ngai will be recognized, received proper investment and in the right direction, becoming one of the effective channels to promote the image of the homeland and people of the province on the journey of constant innovation for integration and development.

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