

THE PROMOTION OF DARK TOURISM IN VIET NAM

PHÁT TRIỂN DARK TOURISM – DU LỊCH HOÀI NIỆM Ở VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt:

Việt Nam là quốc gia được biết đến nhiều với những cuộc thảm sát trong lịch sử, những thảm họa thiên tai, các nghĩa trang, ngục tù, các chiến trường, các bảo tàng trưng bày tội ác của quân xâm lược...Đó là một trong những điều đặc biệt tạo nên sức thu hút đối với khách du lịch quốc tế đến Việt Nam và là sản phẩm mang tính chất hết sức đặc thù cho loại hình du lịch “dark tourism”. Tuy nhiên, ở nước ta, dark tourism vẫn chưa được định nghĩa một cách rõ ràng; theo đó, việc khai thác phát triển “dark tourism” ở Việt Nam là chưa tương xứng với tiềm năng và rất hạn chế đối tượng khách. Bài viết này sẽ phân tích tiềm năng, hiện trạng và đưa ra những định hướng, đề xuất khai thác có hiệu quả hơn loại hình du lịch đầy tiềm năng này.

Từ khóa: *du lịch tưởng niệm, du lịch thảm họa, dark tourism*

Abstract

Vietnam is a well-known country with historical massacre, natural catastrophes, cemeteries, prisons, mausoleums, museums, war battles,...Those were the pain and lost of all Vietnamese, but nowadays, they become attractive destinations that have pulled a lot of foreign tourists. They have also created a unique kind of tourism - dark tourism. However, in Vietnam, the concept of dark tourism has not been specifically defined yet. Accordingly, the development is not corresponding with its potential and the number of tourist is still limited. This paper will discuss the potential, status quo and propose some ideas to exploit more effectively this special tourism.

Key word: *du lịch tưởng niệm, du lịch thảm họa, dark tourism*

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1. The unique destinations in the world

Nowadays, the human being still relates the pilgrimages in ancient history to the Coliseum arena to spectate gladiators fighting until witness the death of a certain gladiator. The history also refers to spectators of colorful sacrificial rites of Mayan. During the medieval period, the trend of excursion to places relating to the death was quite popular. Many documents recorded about flocks of people pilgrimaged to the tomb area, the site of a martyr or the public execution places. The preference for those death sites was getting more and more popular through the Renaissance period, from the late 18th century to the early 19th century. One of the famous names was Waterloo – the place witnessed the final battle of Waterloo campaign which was the last battle of Napoleon. Another one was the ruins of Pompeii which had been completely destroyed and buried after a volcanic eruption. The tourism researcher Tony Seaton called these places as the most deadly ones of the Renaissance.

Recently, human history has recorded a terrible case of mud volcano disaster in 2006 in Sidoarjo, Java Island (Indonesia) which caused hundreds of families to leave their home. Just 10 years afterwards, that field became a fascinating destination in the Southeast Asia and attracted numerous tourists. In 2004, a series of deadly tsunamis crossed The Indian Ocean and devastated a mass of coastal communities in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, etc. More than 225,000 people were estimated to have been killed in eleven countries. Thailand's Phuket Island was one of the places got the most severe consequence. But nowadays, it has become a tourism paradise. The tourist comes here, not for the entertainment only, but they come here for commemorating the deadly disaster. Mostly, they are from Southeast and North Asia, North America and North Europe. There are a lot of such disaster destinations. The city of Hiroshima in Japan, Death Railway in the northwest of Thailand, Genocide Museum of Khmer Rouge, and the U.S. Financial Center in the September 11 attacks have become well-known names that have charmed tourists all around the world.

Those are some typical instances that prove the appeal of special destinations in the world – which used to be ruins of natural disasters and wars. They are destinations of dark tourism or Thana tourism (the concept derives from ancient Greek: Than Atos - the personification of Death).

2. The concept of dark Tourism and tourist motivates

Recently, dark tourism has been becoming a hot trend that attracting a growing number of tourists throughout the country and abroad. It was first known in 2000 in the book "Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster" by Malcolm Foley and John Lennon. In the Oxford Dictionary, "dark tourism" is defined as a type of tourism involves travelling to places associated with death and suffering such as relics of terrible events in history, the massacres, natural disasters, cemeteries, prisons, tombs, battle, the museums where exhibits crime in the past. In Vietnam, the term of "dark tourism" is known as “du lịch đen”, “du lịch thảm họa” or “du lịch tưởng niệm”.

Remarkably, most travelers to dark sites claim that they want to get to place where disaster had taken place to have special experience and understand more about that land, to help local community to overcome difficulties, or simply to express sympathy for suffering and loss. Some tourists also reveal that when they get to such a miserable spot, it would make them realize their life is much better than many people. This is another motive that pushes tourists to join in Dark Tours.

3. Dark tourism in Vietnam

According to the telegraph.co.uk, Vietnam is one of the 15 countries that have the most dark destinations. A big series of museums like the War Remnants Museum, the Museum of Revolution, The Viet Nam Military History Museum; or the series of prisons: Hoa Lo Prison, Phu Quoc Prison, Con Dao Prison, etc. are well-known dark sites that cannot be missed when visit Vietnam. In fact, most tourists, especially foreign tourists, disclose they are interested in tours to Cu Chi tunnels, Dang Thuy Tram clinic, My Lai village, or destinations of “Nostalgia for old battlefields and comrade” tour and DMZ tour in Quang Tri - “the land of cemetery and foreign wind”.

Without doubt, the potential for dark tourism development in Vietnam is really plentiful. Dark sites spread across all regions of the country. Each of them links to special historic dates and contexts of nation. What is more, this type of tourism contributes to raise awareness of people and educate the country’s heroic revolutionary tradition and patriotism for the young generations.

With its specific characteristic, the primary target market segments of dark tour are students; veterans (including country veterans and Vietnam-era veterans who

stationed in Vietnam during the Vietnam War); and all peace-loving people in the world.

4. The status quo of dark tourism development in Vietnam

Actually, dark tourism in Vietnam has not really developed as a specific type of tourism like ecotourism or MICE tourism. The dark tourism destinations are only exploited in the DMZ tour program and the "Nostalgia for old battlefields and comrade" tour, or just combined with other types of mass tourism. Tourists who want to take a trip to dark sites mostly have to self-organize. They also can buy tour from travel company but must be on special days such as Martyr's and Wounded Soldier's Day (27/7), National Day (2/9), or Liberation Day (30/4). Besides, some schools have put some dark places (such as museum, historic relics,...) into studying tour and field trip to educate and arouse national tradition, the pride and patriotism for students.

Obviously, in Vietnam, this kind of tourism is facing many difficulties, the typical ones are:

Firstly, not all of tourists like to see the death and suffering. The specific trait of dark destinations is related to the death, sacrifice and disaster. It will be a real tragedy for a travel company if its package tour merely consists of woeful sites. Western visitors may be attracted by this type of tourism, but it is boring and tedious for Asians, especially for young travellers. What makes them be interested in is something new and extraordinary.

Secondly, an on-site tour guide in dark spots must be skilled and knowledgeable. Each relic, each monument links to a historical context or a tragic event, and how to authentically recreate those incidents, how to satisfy all tourists whose interest varies from each other is really arduous. Meanwhile, the on-site tour guide staffs are mostly young and have different level of qualification. At many museums and monuments in Vietnam, tour guides are not majored in history or tour guiding.

Thirdly, not all of tourists who love and engaged in "Thana tourism" or "disaster tourism" have sufficient understanding and knowledge to appreciate the magnitude and significance of cultural – historical value at the places that they have just visited. The rude actions and improper expression are not rare in mourning sites, since not all

of them are aware of terrible hidden stories in those places. Some visitors even get to those sites simply because of curiosity. They want to satisfy their nosiness and to take a picture to show off “I was there” or to brag on social network that they have travelled to places where their friends and relatives do not have chance to come.

5. Orientation for development of dark tourism in Vietnam

To promote dark tourism in Vietnam, it is necessary to execute some schemes as follow:

Firstly, it is necessary to identify the market segments that are interested in dark tour. Who are they? what are their occupations? Where do they live? What age they are at? Which activities they want to experience during the journey? Those are basic information for travel organizations as well as dark site management board give appropriate services to reach the maximum level of visitor satisfaction.

Secondly, dark sites must promote the role of tour operators and marketing intermediates in advertising; especially in orientating tourist behavior during the tour at relics. The term of “dark tourism” itself create a mystery, curiosity that urge people, specially the youngsters, to go and explore. The travel organizations should base on that to create a content marketing strategy and develop products that match to the needs of the target travellers.

Thirdly, it is essential to improve professional qualification for staff at the dark sites. They are the tourist-connecting bridge and propagandist. They create soul for the relics; revive the hidden value of destination that not all of tourists are fully aware of. To attract the concern and involvement of tourist, the tour guide/on-site guide must have affection for their job, have comprehensive knowledge of relic’s history, be competent at communication skill (especially in English) and have team building skill.

Fourthly, diversifying services and activities in the travel package in order to create excitement for tourists during the trip. Just imagine a two-day and one-night tour that travel from prison to prison, from battle to battle, through out all dark spots, then it would be incredibly tedious and monotonous. To make a dark tour become more interesting, the travel organization should create an innovate product such as an

experience of “one day in jail” (the tourist will be treat as a real prisoner). This is a special and unforgettable feeling for the participant. They also can develop types of restaurant in jail so that the visitors can undergo the sense of having lunch / dinner in prison; surely, this would be a very interesting experience that any visitor will be very excited to be involved.

Fifthly, audio voiceover should be used at dark sites as the lack of on-site tour guide, especially the English speaking guide. This is flexible and appropriate with foreign independent tourists who are the main market segment for this kind of tourism.

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