WORKSHOP ON "ROLE OF ECOTOURISM IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM"

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1. Overview of global tourism and the situation of Vietnam:

In the world, tourism has become a necessary demand in social life and has been developing at increasing speed. After World War II, tourism activities around the world soared. The number of tourists globally has increased from 25 million persons in 1950 to 214 million persons in 1975, 330 mil. in 1985, reaching 592 mil. persons in 1996. It is expected to reach 702 million persons in 2000 and 1,018 million tourists by 2010 (source WTO).

Over a period of 30 years (1960 - 1991) the turnover from tourism activities around the world increased about 38 times, from $ 6.8 bil. in 1960 to $ 260 bil. in 1991. Alone in 1996, it was $ 423 bil., the figures expected for the years 2000 and 2010 are $621 and $1,550 bil respectively. With such an increasing income, many countries consider tourism as a key industry in their social - economic development strategy.

Being located in South-east Asia, where tourism activities have soared, Vietnam occupies a good position not only geographically, but also economically and in terms of international relations/trade, that will help Vietnam integrate rapidly with the region and the global tourism development movement.

Vietnam’s tourism potential is based on the diversity and richness of both natural and human cultural resources.

These tourism resources are mostly concentrated in clusters along the coastal areas, the national highway, near large cities, important international border gates: which is conducive and favourable for planning and establishing the large tourism centres of Vietnam.

In the recent past, thanks to the Party's and Government's implementation of Doi Moi, Vietnam tourism has experienced certain improvements and has played a more active role in people's economy.

Like many other economic industries, Vietnam tourism has also attained considerable achievements. During the period 1991-1995, the number of tourists to Vietnam increased greatly, at some 30%/per year. In 1996 and 1997, the growth rate partly decreased. However, it is believed that with Vietnam's integration into Asean and Aseanta; the completion of trans Asian transportation routes in the future; simplification of procedures for movement between ASEAN countries, plus Vietnam’s tourism efforts, will ensure that the amount of International tourists to Vietnam will continue to be as large as expected.

The total domestic and foreign investment capital in the hotel sector and tourism areas has increased fast. As of 1997, the total of registered foreign capital has reached over $6.3 bil. At present, in Vietnam there are more than 3 thousand hotels and other accommodation types with more than 50 thousand hotel rooms, of which 25 thousand rooms are of international standard, which is capable of meeting the demand of an increased number of international visitors to Vietnam in coming years.

The quality of tourism products has improved step by step, with rich and diversified kinds of tourism products being offered, such as: sea, climbing, cave, sport, green, countryside tourism, and especially cultural tourism involving visiting cultural historical vestiges, customs and traditional holidays full of original national characters.

So far Vietnam has signed 12 bilateral tourism agreements with 12 different countries, become an official...
member of WTO, ASEANTA, PATA, and co-operated with the countries belonging to the Mekong river sub-region to develop tourism. Vietnamese tourism enterprises have relations with 800 tourism agencies in over 50 countries.

1995 saw the signing of a tourism cooperation agreement between Vietnam and France, that began accelerating tourism development with EU countries. Besides this, Vietnam also has participated in International tourism fairs, conferences, seminars on international tourism... and in co-ordination with International Agencies held International Conference and workshops on tourism in Vietnam.

Together with the development of accommodation and upgrading infrastructure, there have been many large projects on tourism zone construction, sanatoriums such as Bac My An (Da Nang city), Fairyland (Ba Ria - Vung Tau) sea tourism zones. Projects are being carried out in areas of Ha Long bay (Quang Ninh), Van Phong bay (Nha Trang), Lang Co coastal area (Thua Thien-Hue), Dankia - Suoi Vang (the gold stream) (Lam Dong).

2. Development targets and strategy for Vietnam tourism to the year 2010:

The Master Plan for Vietnam tourism approved by Prime Minister in May, 1995 defined short-term, medium-term and long-term targets for development by 2010. At the same time they defined development foci concerning culture, landscape and environment. To realize these targets, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism has outlined the basic strategy of tourism development projects.

- Human resource strategy: concentrate on retraining and new training to meet immediate requirements and prepare for long-term targets by several means: on the spot training, domestic and overseas training. Attach special importance to tourism education for all people in the country.
- Product strategy: Diversify and enhance tourism product quality to come in line with the world tourism market, creating original tourism products with national character, especially cultural, historical, art traditions which offer competitive advantages and market expansion. Specialist tourism products should be developed such as tourism in combination with convalescence, sea tourism, cave tourism, golf playing, sport, fishing, boat tours or tourism for people interested in art and craft products, traditional occupation villages, plant nurseries, festivals, traditional cultural activities, conference tourism...
- Strategy of raising the quality of tourism service: improve service quality in all three areas: service attitude, diversity and conveniences of service goods, and abilities to be ready to serve and to receive tourists.
- Strategy of maintaining, restoring and developing tourism resources and environment (including natural and human cultural resources). It must classify functional zones in a large tourism area, hence defining the zones that have to be protected completely, the land reserved for planning, the zones needing restoration. To set out regulations on classification, exploitation and protection of the landscape.
- Tourism investment strategy: Stimulate domestic and foreign investment (including state-owned and private sectors) under concrete plans and investment projects.
- The market strategy: Researching, analysing, appraising current and potential markets for Vietnam tourism so that it can integrate more quickly into regional and international tourism markets. The main markets sending tourists to Vietnam will be: South-East Asian countries, Asia-Pacific then West-European and North-American markets...

3. Ecotourism and sustainable tourism development:

To date, tourism development has mainly focused on construction investment and hotel business. Hotel construction has not been considered carefully, nor followed a long-term strategy for the whole country, and each area or locality has done its own thing. As a result it has lead to rambling construction, destruction of landscape and environment, low occupancy, and has reduced the effectiveness of investment capital.

At the same time, actions to prepare Vietnam for integration into the world tourism market has not been good in awareness raising, human resources, organisational mechanisms, technical facilities, tourism management experience and knowledge. The co-ordination and cooperation between branches and agencies aiming to foster tourism development has been poor, while tourism competition in the region is severe. Contradictions between increasing tourists and current hotel capacity, between tourism development and harmonious, long term development of infrastructure aiming to conserve environment and ecological systems are still barriers
and challenges to Vietnam tourism.

In order to carry out the Master Plan for Vietnam tourism and to integrate environment and resource management activities, apart from implementing Vietnam’s laws - natural protection and environmental conservation law, tourism ordinance and other relevant regulations - attention should be paid to the implementation of a sustainable tourism strategy that includes exploitation, management and development of ecotourism.

The phenomenon and development of Ecotourism has been interesting many people because it is a kind of natural tourism, with promising prospects to improve protection of natural values and local community development. It is estimated that ecotourism accounts for about one third of the total number of the world international tourists in 1996 (about 190 mil.). Ecotourism has a special meaning in sustainable development from the point of view of natural resources and environment. Many countries in the region are interested in cultural, education and economic values of ecotourism activities in natural zones with small or organised groups. Most of the nations in the region have set out and have been maintaining systems of national parks, forests, functioning to develop ecotourism, bringing economic, preservation and educational benefits.

Vietnam is a country with rich tourism potential in general and ecotourism potential in particular. At present, many natural tourism resources such as: beaches, national parks and nature reserves, are being exploited, serving the development of tourism in general and ecotourism in particular.

Although ecotourism is considered as a specific kind of tourism and it is one of the potential advantages of Vietnam tourism, so far the exploitation of ecotourism potential has been spontaneous. Effective, rational development and exploitation of ecotourism potential will create the conditions for integration into nature, recovery of health, education of tourists & those responsible for preserving natural areas and the environment, preservation and development of cultural values of local communities as well as bringing authentic benefits to local people.

4. Conclusion

To concentrate investment towards changing the tourism development situation in Vietnam; to maintain a sustainable tourism environment; to exploit effectively the country’s huge ecological tourism potential; to reduce costs of restoring environmental damage and reach maximum benefits; to actively contribute to common tourism development around the country - both ecotourism development and research are important & necessary:

1. Immediately, there must be appraisals of ecotourism potential and tourism planning for natural protected areas, making legal and scientific bases for investment in ecological tourism development, guaranteeing sustainable development of forest ecological systems.

   Besides this, joint circulars between Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Culture and Information and Vietnam National Administration of Tourism have to be set out, guaranteeing coordination in effective exploitation of forests with respect to ecotourism development.

2. Concentrate on investment completing infrastructure systems and creating transportation routes, connecting national transportation systems with natural protected areas. Currently, the transportation system is poor, and electricity has not been provided to many protected areas, which has influenced the capacity to exploit these areas.

3. Work out a management model for investment activities, tourism business exploitation for each kind of natural protected area, guaranteeing effective and united activity and management. Strengthen training and education, especially for professional tour guide staff, in natural knowledge, ecological environment, so that organised ecotours are made interesting.

4. Rationally balance social equality and economic interests between owners, using forest ecological resources, local community and tourism exploitation organisations. Rightly the conflict between these players has been the main cause of impacts on the ecological environment, and limiting sustainable development of ecological environment in general and tourism in particular.

5. Have active propaganda, raising people's & tourists' awareness of protection of the ecological environment in protected areas. Promulgation of concrete regulations pertaining to forest ecological resource protection for tourism activities in natural protected areas.
1 Introduction

It is almost impossible, with a title for a paper such as this, to avoid getting into a discussion on definitions, and debate about the merits and shortcomings of ecotourism as a tool for or component of sustainable development. There are many critics of ecotourism, who see it as a form of environmental opportunism that allows continued exploitation of natural environments by mass tourism. Mass tourism cloaked in a green name. Ecotourism is certainly a buzz word, and is becoming as ambiguous as the word ‘natural’ on the supermarket shelf.

Here is another definition of ecotourism:

"A form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures.

The ecotourist visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity.

The ecotourist practices a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents.

The visit should strengthen the ecotourist’s appreciation and dedication to conservation issues in general, and to the specific needs of the locale.

Ecotourism also implies a managed approach by the host country or region which commits itself to establishing and maintaining the sites with the participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations, and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area’s land management as well as community development.”


This is a tough definition of ecotourism but we believe it is appropriate and necessary in order to highlight the special nature of genuine ecotourism - what ecotourism should strive to be. Further, it is important to emphasise that ecotourism does not equal nature tourism, rather it is a distinct niche/segment of the more general nature tourism sector.

Figure 1: The Nature-based Tourism - Ecotourism Spectrum

One of the reasons for continued debate on the merits of ecotourism to achieve sustainable development is that there is no blueprint for successful ecotourism development in all of its facets. Rather, there are examples of different projects in which particular components are innovative or well-implemented (Ziffer, K. 1989, Boo, E. 1990). Sites and potential projects need to be considered on a case by case basis, as many local factors - environmental, human, political, economic, social, cultural etc will work for the benefit of, or to the detriment of, an ecotourism project.

In some cases it will be very hard to ‘develop’ ecotourism. For example, in Cuc Phuong National Park mass tourism is already well established and the Park has developed facilities, hardened sites, opened up areas, to cater for these tourists. It will be very hard for ecotourism to be developed, unless the Park is able to restrict the number and movement of visitors, unless it can create specific ecotourism zones to direct ecotourists away from the present built up areas. But this may place even more environmental pressure on the Park.

Despite the lack of a blueprint, the last few years have seen a number of Codes of Sustainable Practice, Codes of Responsible Behaviour, Guidelines for Ecotourism and Sustainability etc developed for tourists, tour operators, national park managers, policy makers alike. These have been developed by environmental NGOs; NGOs dedicated to raising awareness of the negative impacts of tourism and striving to make the tourism industry more responsible and sustainable; national parks and nature reserves; and, within the tourism industry itself, international or regional tourism organisations; tour operators; outdoor equipment suppliers....
The Principles for Sustainable Tourism proposed by Tourism Concern/WWF in *Beyond the Green Horizon: a discussion paper on the Principles for Sustainable Tourism* (Figure 2) are targeted at the tourism industry (and all its stakeholders). The 10 Principles are accompanied by examples of bad and good practice around the world, and recommendations. Our Project is currently undertaking to have this translated into Vietnamese.

The Ecotourism Society has produced *Ecotourism: A Guide for Planners and Managers*. Three chapters from this informative manual have been translated and are included in the additional material provided to you today. In our visits to National Parks in Vietnam we have in all instances been asked for assistance in ‘developing ecotourism’. We acknowledge that there is a DIRE need for information and particularly practical manuals on ecotourism and sustainable tourism, and the Project would like to assist in bringing the right people to Vietnam to develop a manual on ecotourism and hold training courses for national parks managers. Such a manual would of course be useful for all in the industry.

The Project’s resource centre is open and available to anyone with a stake in or mere interest in sustainable tourism and the issues. We are starting to collect books, journals, newsletters, guidelines, manuals, case studies, academic/theoretical papers, bibliographies and publications lists, conference papers etc.

### 2.0. Carrying Capacity and Limiting Numbers

Ecotourism markets are expanding faster than any other tourism market segment. Ecotourism is inherently limited in the extent to which it can be developed and promoted, given that it cannot support large numbers without setting in train a process of succession and change which destroys the reason for its existence.

A big difficulty for Vietnam and other countries wishing to embrace ecotourism is the idea that in order to achieve a sustainable ecotourism industry planners/managers/policy makers must impose limits. How difficult is it to impose restrictions on the number of visitors to an area...when there is the lure of expansion, as people queue up at the gate? And in a country with a huge domestic population...the concept of limiting numbers appears almost ludicrous and is certainly controversial. It is natural that there will be concerns about equity and elitism, especially if fees or charges are used as a means to limit numbers.

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<th>Figure 2: The Principles for Sustainable Tourism (Tourism Concern/WWF)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Being resource sustainable:</td>
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<td>the conservation and sustainable use of resources - natural, social and cultural - is crucial and makes long-term business sense;</td>
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<td>2. Reducing over-consumption and waste:</td>
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<td>reduction of over-consumption and waste avoids the costs of restoring long-term environmental damage and contributes to the quality of tourism;</td>
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<td>3. Maintaining diversity:</td>
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<td>maintaining and promoting natural, social and cultural diversity is essential for long-term sustainable tourism, and creates a resilient base for the industry;</td>
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<td>4. Integrating tourism into planning:</td>
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<td>tourism development which is integrated into a national and local strategic planning framework</td>
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and which undertakes environmental impacts assessments, increases the long-term viability of tourism;

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<td><strong>Supporting Local Economies:</strong></td>
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<td>tourism that supports a wide range of local economic activities and which takes environmental costs and values into account, both protects those economies and avoids environmental damage;</td>
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<th>6.</th>
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<td><strong>Involving local communities:</strong></td>
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<td>the full involvement of local communities in the tourism sector not only benefits them and the environment in general but also improves the quality of the tourism experience;</td>
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<td><strong>Consulting Stakeholders and the Public:</strong></td>
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<td>consultation between the tourism industry and local communities, organisations and institutions is essential if they are to work alongside each other and resolve potential conflicts of interest;</td>
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<td><strong>Training Staff:</strong></td>
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<td>staff training which integrates sustainable tourism into work practices, along with recruitment of local personnel at all levels, improves the quality of the tourism product;</td>
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<td><strong>Marketing Tourism Responsibly:</strong></td>
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<td>marketing that provides tourists with full and responsible information increases respect for the natural, social and cultural environments of destination areas and enhances customer satisfaction;</td>
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<th>10.</th>
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<td><strong>Undertaking Research:</strong></td>
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<td>on-going research and monitoring by the industry using effective data collection and analysis is essential to help solve problems and to bring benefits to destinations, the industry and consumers.</td>
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How to decide when enough is enough, when restrictions need to be imposed? The management tools of ‘limits of acceptable change’ and carrying capacity are very important management tools to assist in achieving sustainability **NOT ONLY for ecotourism or nature tourism, but for the tourism industry as a whole.** However their application is far from easy and unfortunately there exists a lack of understanding and awareness of the concept as applied to tourism.

Carrying capacity has four branches: physical, biological, psychological, social. All are related to the number of visitors/tourists to a site or area:
• Physical is the actual number of visitors a site can hold;
• Biological is the point at which environmental degradation occurs to the extent that it is irreversible or unacceptable;
• Psychological is the point at which the tourists feel the quality of their experience is damaged by the number of other tourists and/or their behaviours, and
• Social is the level at which the local inhabitants of the site (possibly the tourist attraction themselves) feel disrupted, intruded upon etc.

As carrying capacities include qualitative as well as quantitative aspects, there is consequently no ‘correct’ or empirical figure for an area. Nevertheless it is vital that an attempt is made to arrive at some estimations of the carrying capacity of each site, using the best methods and knowledge available. This research will assist in management decisions. Putting such work in the ‘too hard’ basket is counter to the principles underlying sustainable development.

The target audience/market needs to be carefully considered in establishing carrying capacity. Ecotourism does not cater for all and any type of tourist, just as a beach-side resort holiday does not appeal to all.

There is a cultural component relating to carrying capacity that may be obvious but is important to highlight: An Australian will have a different concept of psychological and social carrying capacity and even physical and biological carrying capacity from their Vietnamese or Asian colleague. At the most basic, the perception of and tolerance towards crowding will be very different.

3.0 The Target Market(s) and Managing for the Target Market(s)

The above leads to some questions:

• WHO, WHAT TYPE of tourist does Vietnam want to cater for?
  high, middle or low income;
  short stay visitors, long stay visitors, high spenders, low spenders;
  those seeking relaxing beach resort holidays away from it all;
  those seeking physical challenge and close encounters with locals in remote areas, eg: trekkers;
  those interested purely in cultural and artistic features of Vietnam who also like to travel and stay in comfort;
  those who travel in tours on the major routes, or those who travel independently;
  those who want to travel to natural, undisturbed areas and learn about the environment;
  those who stay in small hotels and guest houses, those who prefer large;
  visitors from the region ie: ASEAN, China, Japan, Korea, or Europeans or Australasians;
  domestic tourists...
  Can Vietnam target and successfully cater to all these categories?
  Does Vietnam, in developing ecotourism, want to provide ‘add on attractions’ for tourists already coming to Vietnam or does it want to try to attract a new market?
  What are the implications for achieving genuine ecotourism when the domestic tourist often acts as though the environment is a resource to be ‘exploited and developed’ - exemplified in the consumption of wildlife for food and medicine?
  Is the Vietnam domestic tourist compatible with the international visitor to natural areas or the international ecotourist?
  Is there a difference between Asian tourists and Western tourists?

If Vietnam wishes to bring the international ecotourist to visit its protected areas, then this decision will have considerable implications for how it handles the domestic tourist and manages those areas.

It is important to match the numbers and types of ecotourists/nature tourists with the characteristics of the destination. This requires the monitoring of nature/ecotourists. Understanding customer groups, their motivations and characteristics, is essential for promotion, marketing, planning for improvement of facilities and services including information needs, controlling impacts via restrictions on numbers or zoning of protected areas for different types of use and different types of visitors (Cater, E. 1997; Boo, E. 1990; Ziffer, K. 1989).

The Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) developed by Clark and Stankey is a useful management tool to assist here. The ROS is an integrating framework for resource management, its underlying rationale being the assumption that providing a diverse range of recreational opportunities will best assure quality recreational experiences as it will provide for the many tastes and preferences that motivate people to participate in
recreation. Division of the resource into zones with certain biological, social and managerial characteristics helps establish objectives and guidelines for their management, regulations and limits on activities, and enables assessment of optimum and maximum carrying capacity conditions and the level of change tolerated (Koeman 1989:26) (Figure 3).

Inadequate data collection on the market can lead to decision makers developing an area in such a way that they lose their market.

Numerous studies of visitors to national parks around the world have shown that nature tourists are generally more accepting of conditions different from home than are other types of tourists, that they do not demand international glamour, but are satisfied with or want to use local goods and materials and eat local foods....and that they are more demanding in seeking information about their destination (Boo, E. 1990).

Nature/ecotourists are also generally willing to spend more, to make an active contribute to conservation causes or community development by their visit or during their visit. Part of the attraction to the ecotourist or dedicated nature tourist is the ability to experience an undeveloped area which is in stark contrast to the urban existence of many travellers from the industrialised world. They are looking for something new and meaningful (Boo, E. 1990; Ziffer, K. 1989).

Thus ecotourism can be promoted without excessive capital requirements and infrastructure developments. Though this may mean there is no need to build a concrete hotel inside a park with air-conditioning and TV, it does not mean that nothing needs to be done to cater for ecotourists. It is very important that a quality experience be offered.

Quality includes considerations such as the amount and type of information and interpretation, the environmental and cultural sensitivity and skills of guides and park managers, the level of professionalism, dedication and hospitality exhibited by all involved, the degree of local community involvement, the direction of fees paid by the ecotourists to conservation and local community development projects...

There is an inherent risk, however, in assuming that everyone calling themselves an ecotourist is environmentally sensitive and aware. Amongst those included in the definition of ecotourist are those persons who visit a natural place for a few days, unlikely to ever return...they may not care of the long-term repercussions of their activities, especially if they have paid a considerable amount for their travel. The phenomenon of affluent tourists jet-setting the world to visit famous natural sites has been coined the “this year the Galapagos, next year Antarctica” syndrome (Cater, E. 1994:77).

4.0 Environmental Education and Awareness

There are initiatives underway in Vietnam to improve environmental education in schools in Vietnam, however it is still obvious that lack of environmental education and information for students (from pre-school level up), the general public, tourists and local communities alike is a major problem in developing sustainable ecotourism. Environmental education and information dissemination is of prime importance to the realisation of genuine, sustainable ecotourism or nature tourism in Vietnam. We need to educate the tourists, both present and potential, both domestic and international.

- Where are all the interpretative and environmental information centres in national parks and nature reserves in Vietnam?
- Investing in such centres is investing in the future, investing for sustainability. Should they be given greater priority than the purchase of vehicles, or even the building of large new park headquarters?
- Is it not essential that every new park HQ have an interpretive/environmental information centre included?

Allocating the space is not all however; the centres need to have extensive materials developed, staff trained in management, hospitality skills, language, culture of local communities, environmental education and sustainable tourism.

There is the very real danger that any ecotourism initiative/project in Vietnam will be overtaken, overrun, swamped by mass tourism to natural areas, or general nature-based tourism (that has none, or only some of the principles of ecotourism). A problem not only of lack of environmental awareness but also simply because of sheer numbers!
"The National Parks in North America are being "loved to death" by almost 400 million visitors in 1991 "trampling over the fragile habitat, ruining the flora with the pollution from their cars, scaring the animals, destroying the wilderness..." In Kenya, the central circuit of Amboseli National Park has been reduced to semi-desert by visitors' vehicles, while in the Maasai Mara, which receives 200,000 visitors a year, the construction of a large number of lodges outside the controlled area threatens to overload the system." (WWF/Tourism Concern 1992:6).

5.0 Supply-oriented management

It is important to note that ecotourism CAN be, but is NOT automatically, a form of sustainable tourism. To achieve sustainable ecotourism involves balancing economic, environmental and social goals within an ethical framework of values and principles.

Ecotourism faces considerable challenges, not least is the challenge to keep foremost a supply-oriented management perspective. A supply-oriented management perspective has as its primary considerations the nature and resilience of the resource, cultural or local community preferences, and interpretive and conservation programmes. Essentially a supply-oriented management perspective puts the resource - national park, protected area, local culture and community - before the demands of tourists. Growth can only go so far, and not nearly as far as with other forms of tourism given the dominance of ecosystem and ecological considerations.

6.0 Who is responsible for ecotourism?

Ecotourism/nature tourism cannot be solely developed by the Ministry or government agency of tourism or by the national park department as tourism crosses over many sectors. There is a need for strong interagency cooperation and linkages. This could be achieved through a Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Taskforce. The Task-force could be responsible for working towards the development of a national ecotourism or nature tourism strategy for Vietnam (Figure 5), which could have as goals the establishment of a Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Association and Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Commission.

Further, ecotourism needs cooperative, collaborative arrangements between govt at all levels, parks, NGOs, local communities, tour operators. In developing a national ecotourism strategy, these stakeholders need to be fully included in the process.

Figure 5: National Eco/Nature Tourism Strategy for Vietnam

If Vietnam wants to promote nature tourism; tourism to both protected areas and NON protected natural areas, then it needs to develop a national ecotourism or nature tourism strategy. We recommend that a Think tank on the Development of a National Ecotourism Strategy be convened as a first step.

The objectives of the Think-tank could be to gather together key decision makers and implementers from the tourism, planning, environmental, educational, socio-economic sectors in Vietnam to:

1. discuss the need for a National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) or Nature Tourism Strategy (NNTS) for Vietnam;
2. clarify where or to what extent tourism and ecotourism can occur in protected and non-protected natural areas in Vietnam, by clarifying what use rules apply to the different categories of protected areas ie: nature reserves, national parks, marine/coastal zones etc;
3. learn about ecotourism, alternative tourism and sustainable tourism principles and management tools, actions/strategies...;
4. learn about the development and composition of National Ecotourism Strategies from other countries, their implementation and component activities or programmes;
5. consider options for a national definition of ecotourism;
6. suggest key elements of a NES or National Nature Tourism Strategy (NNTS);
7. draft a methodology and timetable for the development of a draft Strategy;
7.0 Tour operators

Tour operators are an extremely important component of successful ecotourism. The way they function, their choice of destination, the way they package and sell trips, the type of support services they provide, and their cost structure, are all important factors to understand how to make changes in the way nature tourism impacts host countries.

It is important that the role of private small business in the tourism industry be recognised and encouraged. Private operators (or guest houses or guide services etc) are often smaller than government owned operations. They have the potential to be more efficient, flexible and innovative...in a carefully controlled and regulated ecotourism market. Small is supposed to be beautiful in ecotourism.

It is also essential that cases of Eco-Exploitation: using ‘green’ or ‘eco’ to falsely sell a tourism product that is far from ecologically responsible or sustainable, are exposed, whether the culprits are state or private operators.

A quote:

"You don’t become an ecotourist operator by just having nature as your destination...what do you do with waste? What do you do with hazardous chemicals? How do you transport? Do you buy locally?...Are you encouraging wildlife? What are you doing with your sewage?

It is these kind of nitty gritty things that will make the difference between ecotourism being a force for the environment or simply being another threat.” (Figgis, P., 1993)

A good step, if Vietnam wants to promote sustainable tourism, would be to develop, adopt and disseminate National Codes of Conduct or Practice for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism. A formal system of accreditation - such as a ‘green stars’ system could be considered and worked on for ecotourism operators (see Appendix 1, Crinions Green Star System for Accreditation of Tour Operators). Non compliance to such a ‘green stars’ system by those proclaiming to be ecotourism operators would mean they are required to dissociate from (not use) the term ecotourism.

Ideally, these activities should be undertaken in co-operation and consultation with all tourism stakeholders, not decided by government alone, in order to ensure acceptance of the measures. How to get such a consultation process going? How about allowing the establishment of a non-government body to bring together all operators in Vietnam - a Vietnam Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Association? Could the Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s proposed Business Council for Sustainable Development play a valuable role?

This Association could work together with the Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Task-force to establish an independent Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Commission to be responsible for assessment, certification and policing of the industry. The Commission could have broad representation from the various stakeholder segments eg: government; protected area managers; hotels; tour operators; travel agents; guides; foreign tour operators; airlines; transport firms; local authorities; conservation organisations; NGOs (Elper-Wood, M. 1998).

The Ecotourism Society has produced Guidelines for Nature Tour Operators, which our Project is going to translate into Vietnamese, hopefully for distribution nation wide. In the future, such guidelines could be adopted by managers of protected areas as rigorous standards as part of a supply-oriented management regime. Though this may undermine freedom to practice for all and any tour operator, and incur considerable additional costs, operators, whether state or private, would have to comply.
The challenge is for host countries, regions and national parks to enlist the support of operators, for the purposes of conservation, education of tourists, appropriate behaviour etc, not simply rely on imposing restrictions from above. Co-operative partnerships need to be formed.

**Figure 4: Tour Operators Segmentation.**

Practices need to be established that prevent the do’ers - those operators who are pro-active and eager to co-operate on constructive conservation and community development projects, who are active in conserving and improving the areas they visit - from being placed at a competitive disadvantage in the industry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro-active &quot;Do’ers&quot; in the tourism industry: sharing responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boo (1990) notes that small companies visiting national parks seem to be contributing more to conservation than large ones. She provides an example of a responsible operator, ‘Journeys’ in the US, which donates a portion of the land costs of their trips to a non-profit conservation organisation and offers ‘active conservation tours’ such as a cleanup of the Machu Pichu trail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multatuli Travel in the Netherlands establishes relationships with local NGOs in Indonesia, Philippines and elsewhere and brings tourists to visit and contribute to their development projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour participants of such tours are likely to make contributions of their own. There are many more examples...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Such operators should not be placed at a disadvantage in the competitive tourism industry for being so environmentally aware, responsible and pro-active, rather they should be acknowledged and in doing so the level playing field would be raised for the entire industry, so that others will also become active do’ers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.0 Local, community participation

- What is the main reason for developing ecotourism?
- Is it purely economic ie: is it to be used for generating foreign currency for national or provincial general revenue?
- Is it for developmental purposes ie: to provide local, rural communities with the opportunity to raise their standard of living and quality of life, increase their participation in natural resource management and conservation?
- Is it for conservation, ie: to provide national parks with the opportunity to strengthen conservation capabilities through increased income, and community participation in ecotourism?

Tourism to protected/natural areas can benefit rural, remote regions when other industries are centred on cities and towns, ports and transportation routes. There is a growing gap between the rural and urban areas in Vietnam, the former are missing out on many of the benefits and advancements of a more open economy...Ecotourism can assist in spreading the benefits of development, stimulating economic activity and growth and provide an opportunity for diversification of the economy (Boo, E. 1990).

Ecotourism can be a tool for conservation and rural development, but this will only materialise

"if a concerted effort is made to incorporate local populations into the tourism industry. Involvement with local people and consequent rural development will not happen automatically. In some cases [including Vietnam] tourism to protected areas is not benefitting the surrounding population. Nature [eco] tourism will not contribute to rural development unless rural people are brought into the planning and development of the industry" (Boo, E. 1990:49).

The Galapagos Islands of Ecuador, a UNESCO natural heritage site, have suffered considerable social conflicts (in addition to severe environmental problems) due to tourism.
“Competition between the wealthier tourism sector and others is producing direct cultural conflict, aggravated by the fact that most of the tourism labour force is brought in from mainland Ecuador. Newcomers now outnumber those who grew up with and learned to value the special, fragile nature of the islands” (WWF/Tourism Concern 1992:14)

Careful consideration should also be made to the distribution of benefits of ecotourism amongst local populations - does the project benefit the local poor, often ethnic minority population, or is it controlled by local elites and hence reinforce long-standing inequalities between the majority and minority groups? (Ziffer, K. 1989).

In elephant conservation projects on wildlife reserves in Zambia, local people, including former poachers, have been provided stable jobs and incomes as guards and tourist and hunting safari guides through training initiatives. This has raised the quality of safari tours (WWF/Tourism Concern 1992: 29)

What is the extent of participation? Ecotourism projects are often directed by expatriates who are not necessarily familiar with local conditions and needs. Training local people to manage their own projects can avoid misunderstanding and possible hostility. Training should thus not only be for low paid and low status jobs, but for higher level management jobs.

Local resentment to being cut-off from the benefits of tourism can be explosive. An oft-cited case is the Maasai in Kenya. Widespread resentment exists amongst the Maasai nomadic pastoralists over the inadequate compensation paid to them for their displacement from traditional grazing lands with the establishment of national parks. The Maasai have resorted to killing wildlife in the parks in protest. Experience shows that with local people fully integrated into tourism projects, and receiving the benefits, infringements such as tree felling (Nepal) and poaching of wildlife (Zimbabwe) reduce markedly (Cater, E. 1994 in Cater, E. & Lowman, G).

It is important to be aware of the abuse of the term "participation". Participatory approaches have been used in some cases to increase acceptability of tourism projects and as a means to detect potential conflicts and mitigate ‘local threats’ early on, rather than being truly committed to fostering democratic decision-making and empowerment of local people (Pleumarom, A 1997:6). Participation means different things in different societies and political structures. The level of participation will influence the sustainability and success of ecotourism in Vietnam.

“Quite clearly, employment is no substitute for sustainable access to resources. The ‘hire the natives’ approach to compensation also tends to create a small salaried class of locals at the same time that exclusionary policies are negatively impacting the economic situation of the remainder of the community and for relations between the park and the local community” (West/Brechin 1991, 394, in Pleumarom, A 1997:7).

In 1997 an interactive conference - Ecotourism at a Crossroads: Charting the Way Forward - was held by the Kenya Wildlife Service, The Ecotourism Society of Kenya and The Ecotourism Society (US). The conference’s primary purpose was to use Kenya as a case study for other nations to examine, as Kenya’s tourism industry is almost at a crisis point and requires urgent action. Participants - 300 in all - were from government (38%), private sector (35%), NGOs (185) and local communities (9%). One of the recommendations that came out of the conference was the need for a Community Ecotourism Association to represent communities seeking to create ecotourism projects; assist them with any land use and tourism revenue distribution problems, as well as with questions of business, legal, and market plans for ecotourism (Elper-Wood, M. 1998).

9.0 Economic values, revenues and management systems

The magnitude of benefits countries receive from nature tourism/ecotourism depends in large part on the scale of the tourism, the size of the country, and the complexity of the country’s economy. The same can be said at the regional and local level (Boo, E. 1990).

Too much reliance on tourism renders an area susceptible to seasonal, economic fluctuations and changes in tourist tastes. It is best for tourism to be one of several activities, and to fit in with traditional activities eg: to compliment agriculture rather than competing with it or causing its decline (Boo, E. 1990).

Care also needs to be taken to not place excessive emphasis on the economic (tourism) value of parks as this can lead to decision makers believing that parks exist primarily for economic profit. If tourism then fails to meet economic expectations, other more damaging economic activities could be taken up (Sayer 1981 in Boo, E.
"What will happen when forests, wildlife and other natural assets are increasingly valued in monetary terms? For instance, the visitor-attraction worth of each lion at Kenya's Amboseli Park has been estimated at US$27,000 per year and each elephant herd at US$610,000 (Lindberg 1991:6). To stress the profit-making potential of ecotourism, will the next step be to calculate the visitor attraction worth of a Maasai, a Karen or an Igorot?” (Pleumarom, A., 1997:6)

or a H'mong, Tay, Dao?!

In Vietnam, as in other countries, a hindrance to developing sustainable ecotourism is the problem of ‘general revenue’. That is, park tourism revenue becomes general revenue for the central government, and/or provincial government, and there is considerable uncertainly about how much will be returned to the park as its budget allocation each year.

This system can hinder conservation and also ecotourism:

- it makes the protected areas highly susceptible to government budget cuts during economic downturns;
- it does little to encourage local park personnel to develop and participate in ecotourism or improve training in tourism;
- it does little to encourage the park to provide or improve educational information for tourists;
- it does little to promote conservation and strengthen commitment to and pride in the park (Boo, E. 1990).

Development of ecotourism requires improved internal and financial management incentives. It requires a dedicated portion of park revenue to be controlled by park management to provide an incentive for efficient administration (with some still going to central government so that national support for the parks will be maintained) (Ziffer, K. 1989).

With such a system in place ecotourists will be satisfied as they generally like to know, or even demand to know, how the money they pay is spent on conservation and development projects. If they know it is not simply going to general revenue they are more likely to make voluntary contributions.

It cannot be assumed that protected areas will be able to generate sufficient tourist revenues to be self sufficient. In many cases tourism should not be considered as a path towards self-sufficiency but as a means to defray the costs of operations. Ecotourism will not be appropriate for all protected areas in Vietnam, nor for all parts of a particular protected area (Ziffer, K. 1989:24).

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Nepal and the Annapurna Area:
the environmental impact of uncontrolled tourism to natural areas

Tourism is one of the main sources of foreign exchange income for Nepal. Each year, over 36,000 trekkers and 36,000 porters visit the Annapurna region which supports 40,000 local inhabitants.

About 60 per cent of these trekkers come during four months of the year. They are concentrated in few places, resulting in devastating impacts on both local cultural and natural environments.

Forest is cleared each year to construct hotels, lodges and furniture and to provide fuel for cooking, hot showers and campfires. 400,000 hectares of forest are cleared each year. This is a deforestation rate of three per cent per year. One hectare of cleared forests loses 30-75 tons of soil annually. This has led to devastating landslides and floods.

86 per cent of Nepal’s energy comes from forests. In the Annapurna virtually everybody depends on fuelwood for cooking as there are no alternative sources of energy. The total daily wood consumption by and on behalf of each trekker equals the amount used by a Nepalese family of five for a week.

Tree lines have been raised and entire ridges previously cloaked in rhododendron (one of the
In our recent visit to Ba Be National Park, we were upset to hear that the Park does not charge an entrance fee, rather this is collected by the local district authorities, with none of the revenue being given to the Park. It has also been said that both the Park and the district authorities are charging entrance fees for international visitors. Is this not bad publicity?

There appear to be tensions between the Park and district and provincial authorities. These tensions seem to be related to some extent to disagreement over the development of tourism in the Park and lack of clarity on the responsibilities for tourism in the Park.

The Park seems almost ‘anti-tourism’, or rather scared of it. This is not surprising if the Park feels powerless to exert any control over the development and growth of tourism, particularly if it is mass tourism.

The Park has the potential for small, controlled, low impact trekking ecotourism that includes overnight stays in villages within the park. The villages can hence benefit from tourism to the park by charging overnight and meal fees, as well as through the sale of agricultural produce (fruits, home cultivated NTFPs such as mushrooms and orchids and honey) and crafts. Residents from the villages can also be trained in language and guiding skills and employed by the park to lead the trekking tours. The present system of issuing permits for overnight stays needs radical change if local villages are to be allowed to benefit from ecotourism.

However, despite the potential, if the government’s aim is to increase mass tourism (albeit nature-based tourism) to the area, and the Park has no control over tourism within its boundaries, any ecotourism initiative started could be overrun, in a short period of time.

For example, local authorities have begun to promote the Tay new rice festival as a means to bring in more tourists. Last year approximately 10,000 persons visited over a two day period. Naturally the lake is the major feature of the park, and over 100 diesel powered boats appeared to serve the crowds of tourists. The Park is very concerned with the use of diesel engines by locals, which are causing both water and noise pollution.
this use compatible with an ecotourism experience and conservation of the park?

Lack of co-operation and unclear management responsibilities will be detrimental in the long run to conservation of the area and the development of ecotourism.

10. Small and local is beautiful??

Ecotourism is concerned with small scale, locally owned, built, managed facilities. Ecotourism has three important benefits for developing countries:

1. facilities and infrastructure are simpler and less expensive than those demanded by conventional mass tourism;
2. being locally owned and operated ecotourism projects are not caught up in the need to conform to corporate Western multinational tourism concerns, and therefore can have a much higher input of local products, materials and labour. This means greater multiplier effects in the local economy, and also reduces import leakages and the remittances from expatriate labour which result from large-scale, foreign owned operations;
3. profits accrue locally instead of flowing back to the parent country (Cater, E. 1994 in Cater, E. & Lowman, G:70)

BUT investing in ecotourism in developing countries is lucrative. In the face of foreign investors, try to think small and local. If foreign money is required, find the right partner, whether a company or an NGO, who has a more philanthropic bent, who understands the philosophy of ecotourism and has experience in ecotourism.

Vietnam is currently concerned with attracting foreign investment in tourism, in drawing up master plans for areas with large scale tourism and recreation projects to the sum of millions of USD dollars. Such scales and priorities are not appropriate for ecotourism.

The benefits of ecotourism to Vietnam can be lost due to:

- the international organisation of ecotourism (tours agents and other middlemen in host countries take their percentages);
- foreign investment in ecotourism (revenue is returned to the investor’s country);
- inflationary pressures at a local level due to foreign involvement (demand for produce, materials, imported goods etc);
- loss of sovereignty with foreign ‘take-over’, and
- lack of participation of locals (in employment, training, management and operation etc). Locals may also be excluded from the natural attraction, their ‘backyard’, by price or other means.

A World Resources Institute report noted that Zimbabwe retains only an estimated 10% of nature tourism expenditures, while the Annapurna region in Nepal retains less than 10% (Ziffer, K. 1989:27). In Belize, 65% of the Belize Tourism Industry Association (a US-Aid initiative) are expatriates (Cater, E. 1994 in Cater, E. & Lowman, G:73).

It is somewhat disturbing to hear that tourism developments (involving foreign investment) of Dan Kia resort near Da Lat, the Victoria Hotel in Sa Pa, the Dong Mo Cultural Village in Ha Tay are ecotourism developments.

11. Conclusion and recommendations

There is no example of tourist use that is completely without impact. Ecotourism does leave a mark on protected areas. It is a compromise that allows tourism but set limits, controls, strict management systems, monitoring feedback mechanisms etc. It is a compromise between the primary role of protected areas - protection and preservation of the environment - and providing local communities with development opportunities that can at the same time enhance conservation goals, if carried out properly.

Ecotourism can effect and influence mainstream mass tourism, and indeed it can help make the rest of the tourism industry adopt more sustainable principles and act more responsibly and sustainably. This phenomenon is observable around the world.
However, I would argue that now Vietnam needs to be concerned with trying to make the entire tourism industry sustainable, not focus on ecotourism to achieve sustainable tourism development. In relying on, and waiting for ecotourism to reform the rest of the industry irreparable damage may be done and reforms, if they occur at all, will come slowly and may come too late. Ecotourism and sustainable tourism principles need to be adopted together in a two-pronged approach.

**Figure 6: Key factors required for successful ecotourism**

- Aim for strategic, holistic and detailed planning;
- Careful and integrated management:
  a. forging strong inter ministerial co-operation between the ministries of planning and investment, science technology and environment, tourism, education and training, agriculture and rural development, and
  b. being committed to management that facilitates and ensures input from all stakeholders: tour operators, protected area managers, government, NGOs, local communities etc;
- Establish a national Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Task force to develop a National Ecotourism or Nature Tourism Strategy;
- Create an environment conducive to the establishment of a private sector Ecotourism Association, independent Ecotourism Commission and Community Ecotourism Association;
- Intervene in the market eg: fees to protected areas, limits on numbers, regulations and Codes of Conduct for the industry (developed with the industry);
- Consider each natural area individually (eco and env impacts of tourism, what the area has to offer, local community needs and interaction with the environment, local infrastructure etc);
- Focus on the local and regional level - it is easier for nature tourism/ecotourism to be developed successfully at these levels;
- Start small and go slow;
- Believe that small is beautiful and quality is paramount;
- Invest in awareness raising, education and training for tourists, tour operators, local guides, protected area managers, local communities, local authorities;
- Aim to maximise local benefits for conservation and economic development;
- Aim to maximise local participation and involvement at all levels;
- Aim to maximise use of local products, materials;
- Aim to focus on recycling, waste management, alternative technologies and fuels. Manuals have been produced that provide practical information on such topics, we have a few and will be getting more;
- Constantly monitor and evaluate and develop a feedback mechanism for modifying growth and minimising impacts and setting limits.

**APPENDIX I**

**Crinion’s Green Stars for Accreditation of Ecotourism Operators**

- having a business plan that outlines environmental ethic and practice
- using environmentally friendly products and engaging in recycling practices
- providing good quality pre and post information to the intending visitor
- containing high local/indigenous participation/expertise
- providing high integrity interesting/entertaining educational/interpretive information
- providing high level of staff training about the natural and cultural environment
* providing high net benefit for the local community
* visitor experiences are of relatively undisturbed natural environment
* having management plan (including capacity limits or limits to acceptable change)
* involving personalised/guided small group interaction
* using low/medium cost/low impact accommodation and infrastructure
* using facilities that are ecologically designed and operated
* monitoring and response mechanisms are in place up-front
* contributing revenue to, or is part of conservation programme.

One way to preserve the 'eco brand', in the interest of ensuring the consumers expectations are met, is that before any operator can promote under the accredited 'ecotourism brand' the operation should achieve at least a 7 star rating. The consumer can then be more confident that the experience will meet expectations. The higher the star rating the higher the expectations of a genuine ecotourism experience.

(Crinion 1993:10)

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1. The Urgency of the Issue.

Ecotourism emerges as a phenomenon with an increasing tendency to draw the attention of many people, because it is a form of nature tourism facilitating nature conservation. Though it is possible for ecotourism to have negative impacts, it addresses a range of options for maintaining natural values and improving host communities.

Apart from its significance in nature conservation, ecotourism development based upon the exploitation of natural resources has brought huge economic benefits to socio-economic development in general and tourism development in particular.

Though ecotourism is defined as a type of specialist tourism, and has strong potential in Vietnam's tourism industry, the exploitation of ecotourism has up till now been confined to a basic level without any scientific studies to identify the basis for the effective exploitation of this huge potential.

To effectively exploit the potential ecotourism resources and contribute actively to the development of tourism in Vietnam, the scientific study of the development of ecotourism in Vietnam is both very important and necessary. This is not only theoretically important in the Vietnamese context, but also significantly practical in planning ecotourism in protected areas; developing ecotourism routes throughout the country in line with the characteristics of the natural resources, economy and social affairs; and in helping to minimise the potential negative impacts of ecotourism on nature and culture. This is the price that many countries in the region and the world have to pay in return to the development of this attractive form of tourism.

2. Study Goals and Process.

2.1 Study Goals:

- To define the scientific basis for the development of ecotourism in Vietnam.

Based upon the characteristics of the resources and conditions concerned, to define the ecotourism zones throughout the country.

2.2 Study Process:

The study process is illustrated in Diagram 1, and comprises the following basic steps:

* Defining the goals and content of the study:

The goals, contents and limit of the research will be adjusted to suit the feasible conditions and based on the results of an initial seminar.
* Collecting data and conducting preliminary analysis:

Data needs to be collected and analysed for the following contents:

- Status of ecotourism.
- Potential for ecotourism.
- Other conditions relating to the development of ecotourism.

* Field trips to supplement the data:

After the collection and preliminary analysis, the data will be validated (for edition and supplementation) through field trips to areas with complex natural and socio-economic conditions, where data with low reliability has been collected.

After edition and supplementation, the data will be entered into a database.

* Analysing information:

From the database, the necessary information will be analysed by experts using Geography Information Systems (GIS). This process will result in models of management structure and ecotourism zoning which will be used as the basis for orientating the development of ecotourism in Vietnam.

A draft report of the project will be created based upon the study results in this period.

* Organising seminars:

Seminars will be held to canvass opinions and comments from experts in various fields on the final draft report.

This is an important component in the process to secure a rigorous scientific and practical basis for project implementation.

* The final report:

Based upon the results of the seminar plus the comments from experts, the draft report will be adjusted, added and improved and the final, official report of the project will be submitted to the Scientific Council for acceptance.

Diagram 1: Study Process.

3.1 Concept:

Ecotourism is a form of nature tourism which provides a high level of education on ecology and the environment, has a positive impact upon the protection of environment and culture, and brings about financial benefits for host communities and contributes to conservation activities/efforts.

Ecotourism is nature based tourism, that includes visiting and learning about the culture of the host communities (Diagram 2).

Diagram 2: Concept and position of ecotourism.
Other types of nature based tourism like relaxation, sightseeing, adventure...mainly bring people to nature, and typically offer little or no education and awareness raising for the tourists on nature, environment and local communities. However, if the principles of ecotourism - such as raising the awareness of tourists of their responsibility to conserve the values of nature and local community culture, and creation of jobs and interests for local people - are incorporated into the activities of the above-mentioned types of tourism, they can be transformed into forms of ecotourism.

Ecotourism can be described by different terms:

- Nature tourism,
- Nature based tourism,
- Environmental tourism,
- Specialist tourism,
- Green tourism,
- Adventure tourism,
- Indigenous tourism,
- Responsible tourism,
- Sensitised tourism,
3.2 The basic principles of ecotourism:

* **Education to raise awareness of natural environments and to generate participation in conservation**

This is one of the basic principles of ecotourism resulting in the clear difference between ecotourism and other types of tourism. By enhancing knowledge of tourists, their behaviour will become more appropriate and result in involvement in conservation activities and in promotion of the values of ecological resources and local culture.

* **Environmental protection and maintenance of ecological systems**

This is one of the basic principles to be observed, because:

- This is the goal of ecotourism.
- The survival of ecotourism is linked to environmental protection and representative ecological systems maintenance.

* **Defending and promoting cultural identities**

This is one of the important principles of ecotourism, because human values are integral to the environmental and ecological values and systems of a particular area.

* **Creating more jobs and bringing benefits for local communities**

This is both the principle and goal of ecotourism. Little attention is given to this matter in other forms of nature tourism and a majority of profits belong to companies. On the contrary, a considerable proportion of profits raised from ecotourism will be spent on improving the living environment of local communities.

Besides, ecotourism always aims at mobilising to the full the participation of local people; as tour guides, providers of accommodation for visitors, suppliers of food and souvenirs...through the creation of jobs and interests for local communities, conserving natural values, promoting local cultures, due to the awareness of local people of the close relationship between conservation and their lives. It is the people who are the real masters and firm defenders of the values of nature and culture in ecotourism destinations.

3.3 The basic requirements for ecotourism:

The first condition for possible organisation of ecotourism is the survival of representative ecological systems with high bio-diversity.

This explains why the activities of ecotourism only develop in protected areas, especially in national parks where forests with high bio-diversity and wild life still exist. However, this does not rule out the fact that some kinds of ecotourism exist and develop in some rural areas and at rural farms.

The second condition relates to the basic principles of ecotourism in two points:

- To ensure the education and increased awareness of ecological tourists, tour guides should have a knowledge of ecology and local culture in addition to their command of foreign languages;
- Ecotourism, requires disciplined tour operators. In comparison with traditional tour operators, those involved in ecotourism should have the co-operation of the managers of the protected areas and local communities with the purpose of long term protection of natural and cultural values in the areas, and improvement and
enhancement of understanding between local people and tourists.

*The third condition* is to minimise the impacts of ecotourism on nature and environment. As result, ecotourism should follow the requirements of *"carrying capacity"*, which is understood to have 4 components: physical, biological, psychological and social.

**Physical component:** *"carrying capacity"* is understood as the maximum number of tourists whom an area can accommodate.

**Biological component:** the biological capacity is the number of visitors exceeding the acceptable capacity of the environment, which results in biological impacts.

**Psychological component:** carrying capacity is understood as the limit of visitors beyond which the tourists feel that their activities are affected by the presence of other visitors. In other words, the satisfaction of tourists is less than what is possible due to exceeding saturation levels.

**Social component:** socio-cultural capacity is the limit where negative effects of tourism on the local socio-economic and cultural life start to appear.

The general formula to calculate the carrying capacity of a tourism destination can be as follows:

$\text{CPI} = \frac{\text{AR}}{a}$

In which:

- CPI: Constant carrying capacity
- AR: Size of area.
- a: Required area per person

$\text{CPD} = \text{CPI} \times \text{TR} = \frac{\text{TR}}{a}$

In which:

- CPD: Daily capacity
- TR: Turnover rate of users per day
In which:

CPY: Yearly capacity

PR: Number of using days in a year (including night use: 1/365 x OR)

OR: Occupancy rate

* The above-mentioned formula can be applied to different activities with different spatial/area requirements.

In case tourism activities are already present, the area required to meet the current tourist demand can be calculated as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{AR} &= \frac{\text{TD} \times a \times \text{PR}}{\text{TR}} \\
\text{TD} &= \text{Tourism demand}
\end{align*}
\]

In which:

TD: Tourism demand

4- Potential and Current Development of Ecotourism.

4.1 Potential for ecotourism:

* The system of protected areas (special use forests)

The forests of Vietnam are not only economically valuable natural resources, but also play an important role in maintaining the ecological balance. The forests are very important resources for ecotourism in Vietnam.

Special use forest is a term used from the early 1980’s, replacing the former term “Restricted Forest”. Special use forest, protected forest and production forest constitute the complete set of forests in Vietnam.

Special use forests in Vietnam are classified into national parks, nature reserves, forests of social culture and environmental sites.

- **National parks**: natural land and sea areas set up to protect one or many ecological systems in perpetuity. One of the goals of national parks is to develop ecotourism.

- **Nature reserves**: protected forests having scientific values, maintaining the genetic resources of animals and plants. They can be open to scientific research, but not to tourists or other cultural needs.

- **Historical and cultural sites**: protected forests with a heritage of culture and history, and beautiful landscapes
catering for tourism, recreation and leisure.

The system of special use forests in Vietnam was established from 1962. The first protected area was Cuc Phuong National Park. Since then, the system developed in 3 stages:

1962-1975:
Study, identification and recommendation for the protected areas in the North. However, only one official special use forest existed during this period; Cuc Phuong National Park.

1975-1986:
Saw the greatest development of the system in Vietnam. In the period, more than 70 forests throughout the country were established.

1986-Now:
The special use forests have been continuously surveyed and approved.

To date, the system of protected areas in Vietnam comprises 105 areas with a total area of 2,092,527 ha, in which there are 10 national parks, 61 natural reserves and 34 historical and cultural sites.

Of the more than 2 million ha of protected areas, there is about 1 million ha of natural forest with valuable natural and genetic resources and bio-diversity.

* The bio-diversity areas in Vietnam.

Based upon the elements of topography, climate, living environment, geographical location, adaptation of different species, vegetation zones and different classes of animals, Vietnam can be divided into the 7 following biological units:

- The bio-zone of the North East

The bio-zone of the North East, an area of 54,660 km², contains many famous resorts like Ha Long Bay, Ba Be lake, Nui Coc Lake, vegetation complexes, representative animals. Through survey it has been estimated to contain 3,500 plant species. The number is expected to increase to 4,500 species. There are 109 different species of animals, 179 species of birds, 178 species of amphibians, 146 species of fresh water fish, and 263 species of invertebrates.

In this bio-zone there 3 national parks with a total area of 75,423 ha, 10 nature reserves with a total area of 142,599 ha, 10 cultural and environmental sites with a total area of 28,608 ha. Especially, Cat Ba and Ba Be National Parks contain exotic landscapes to attract ecological tourists.

- The bio-zone of the North West - Hoang Lien Son

In the bio-zone of the North West and Hoang Lien Son mountains, there are 10 nature reserves with a total area of 539,692 ha, and 3 cultural historical sites and environmental areas with a total area of 4,247 ha. The number of protected areas is still few, but they contain representative ecological systems at different altitudes: Phansipang peak, Muong Nhe Nature Reserve (Lai Chau), Suoi Cop (Laos border), Xuan Nha, Hang Kia, Pa Co, Islands in Song Da River, Thuong Tien.

- The bio-zone of the Red River Delta

This area contains ecological systems of mangrove and primary forest. There are 2 national parks: Cuc Phuong and Ba Vi with a total area of 29,557 ha, 2 nature reserves with a total area of 20,180 ha, and 2 cultural and environmental areas totalling 10,021 ha. Though the number of protected areas is not big, those that exist are important and significant, because Cuc Phuong National Park was the first set up in Vietnam (1962), and Xuan Thuy (Nam Ha) was the first protected wetland established in our country and is among the worldwide system of protected wetlands.
- The bio-zone of northern central Vietnam or the northern Truong Son

This area is a narrow strip stretching 400 kms from the river valley of Song Ca to Hai Van pass with some ridges extending to the sea like the passes of Hai Van and Deo Ngang.

Due to a complicated topography, this area is regarded as one with high bio-diversity where Lophara hatinhensis, 3 new animals (Pseudoryx nghelinhensis, Megamuntincus vuquangensis and Trachypithccus francoisi hatinhensis) and many species of fresh water fish in Lam River were discovered some decades ago. However, no indepth research has been conducted yet and to date only 115 species of animals, 416 species of birds, 87 species of amphibians, 119 species of fresh water fish and 467 species of invertebrates have been reported. Of these, there are 26 species of animals, 25 species of birds, 16 species of amphibians and 9 species of fish are endangered and endemic. To protect these endemic and endangered species, 2 national parks have been established with a total area of 38,664 ha, 6 nature reserves with a total area of 243,710 ha, and 5 cultural and historical sites with a total area of 3,268 ha. One of the valuable tourist sites is Phong Nha-Ke Bang Nature Reserve with the marvellous Phong Nha cave extending dozens of kilometres.

- The bio-zone of southern central Vietnam and the central highlands

This is the region lying at the Indochinese intersection bordering on Laos (to the West) and Cambodia (to the South West) which is the receiving point for vegetation and animals from south-west Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, India...and from the northern part of southern China via the Truong Son mountains. The result is an area of high bio-diversity. There 3,600 plant species belonging to 1,200 genera and 23 families, of which many endemic. There are 119 species of animals, 375 species of birds, 172 species of amphibians, 70 species of fresh water fish...of them, there are 38 animal species and 32 plant species threatened and on the verge of extinction.

In this region, there is only one national park of 58,000 ha, 9 nature reserves with a total area of 288,437 ha and 3 cultural and environmental areas of 44,795 ha.

In the bio-zone of southern central Vietnam and the central highlands, there is a diversity of endangered species of fauna and flora which are valuable not only at a national level but also international level.

- The bio-zone of the South-east, or southern Indochina

This is the transition area between the central highlands of South Central Vietnam and and the Mekong Delta. To date, there have been 3,000 species of plants reported (it is estimated that the number will reach 4,000), 73 species of animals, 318 species of birds, 124 species of amphibians, 253 species of fresh water fish and 173 species of invertebrates.

In this bio-zone, there are 2 national parks with a total area of 50,345 ha, 6 nature reserves totalling 56,778 ha, and 3 cultural and environmental sites totalling 6,435 ha.

In the region, there are endangered animals such as the Rhinoceros Sondaicus, which is on the verge of extinction, and the Presbytiscristata ape.

- The Bio-zone of the Mekong Delta

In this region, there are many mangrove eco-systems, Melialenca forest, many bird havens, especially in the Melialence areas where Grus Antigone, previously few in number, are now increasing thanks to good conservation activities. This is an extremely valuable genetic pool internationally.

* Representative eco-systems.

+ Coral eco-system

In tropical climates, coral eco-systems develop along the coast, around islands and off-shore.

The coral eco-system in Vietnam consists of as many species of coral as in other areas of the western Pacific Ocean. Along the northern coast, 95 species, 35 genera, and 13 families have been named. Along the southern coast, there are 255 species, 69 genera. The number of different kinds of coral in Vietnam is thus fairly large, because there are only 75 species of coral in the most abundant coral areas of the world.
Based upon studies of the coral reefs in Vietnamese territorial waters since 1960, some areas with conditions for the development of coral reef ecotourism can be identified as follows:

- Cat Ba island (Hai Phong)
- Con Dao (Ba Ria-Vung Tau)
- Van Phong-Dai Lanh Bay (Khanh Hoa)
- The island chain off central Vietnam.
- Phu Quoc island.

**The ecological system of sandy coasts**

Vietnam has 3,200 kms of coastline with about 60,000 ha of sandy land. In the sandy ecological system in Vietnam, the red sand area is 77,000 ha, concentrated in the provinces in central Vietnam. Bình Thuan and Ninh Thuan Provinces have greater potential for tourism.

The biggest red sand dune lies in north west Phan Thiet Province. It is 50 kms long, 20 kms wide and 200 masl. The northern and western sides of this sand dune have been eroded, resulting in large furrows which are 600-1,000 m across, 20-60 m deep with sloping sides and flat bottoms. Red sand dunes are affected by wind, and shifting sand dunes are accordingly formed.

The shifting sand dunes in Phan Thiet are unique tourism attractions. In addition to tourists visiting the shifting sand dunes and studying the red sand, there is potential for the development of sand sports: sand skiing, auto racing and ball games on sand....

**Ecological system of wetlands**

Representative wetland ecosystems of the world can be found in our country.

The largest wetland area is in the Mekong delta. In the central zone, there are lagoons along the coasts. Artificial reservoirs are actually important wetland areas. In the North, there are many lakes and mangroves in the valley of the Red River Delta. Totally, wetlands are estimated to cover between 7 and 10 million ha.

The variety of coastal wetlands creates a diversity of ecological systems and natural resources. Each group of coastal wetlands consist of several ecological systems whose names coincide with the name of the wetland.

The wetlands along the coast of Vietnam are potential destinations for ecotourism. So far, the huge potential has yet to be fully exploited through establishment of protected areas, including national parks and reserves, areas of special products, and national or international coastal bird sanctuaries.

Xuan Thuy nature reserve and the Mekong Delta have high potential for the development of tourism, especially ecotourism.

**The ecological system of typical dry forests**

The ecological system of Dipterocarpa forests- representative of dry forest eco-systems - is also representative of tropical South East Asia.

The ecological system of Dipterocarpa forest has great potential for ecotourism. In this eco-system, there is a bio-diverse collection of 464 species of trees coming from 94 families.

There are many animals in the eco-system of Dipterocarpa forests with 62 species of animals coming from 26 families-11 orders; 196 species of birds- 46 families-18 orders; 46 species of reptiles-12 families- 3 orders; and 15 species of frogs- 4 families- 1 order; 15 species of fresh water fish and thousands of species of insects and soil organisms.

In the system of Dipterocarpa forests in Yok Don and in the areas surrounding the nature reserve, there are
some kinds of endangered and protected animals and plants: Cows such as Bos gaurus, Bos javanicus and Bos sauveli; buffaloes (Bubalus bubalis); deer such as Carvus eldi and Cervus percinus; tiger (Panthera tigris); monkeys such as Presbytis cristatus and Pygathrix nemaeus; elephant (Elephas Maximua); Otter (Lutra lutre); cat (Arctictis binturong); dog (Canis - being the first meat eating animal discovered in Vietnam); horse bear (Scelenarts thibetanus); peacock (Pava muticus); chicken such as Lophura diamdi and Polyelectron germani; crocodile (Crocodileus). .

Of the total 10 endemic animals in Indochina, there are 5 kinds in Dipterocarpa forests.

* The ecological system of mangrove forest

The mangrove ecological system is a collection of different vegetation, animals and mangrove forest. The eco-system in this area is highly productive, but it very sensitive to the effects caused by people and nature.

The mangrove forests are abundant in the South, especially in Ca Mau peninsular. Before 1945, the forests covered 400,000 ha of which 250,000 ha were in the South, including 150,000 ha in Minh Hai province which were mainly old forests with 20-30m high trees. By 1990, the total mangrove area had shrunk to 73,300 ha.

In the mangrove forests of Vietnam, there is found a variety of animals and plants as found in other countries in South East Asia.

- Botanical features: There are more than 70 named species in which 34 species of 15 families are representative of mangrove/wetland forest, whereas there are only typically 31-32 species of mangrove plants in Indonesia or Malaysia.

- Animals: There are 258 species of fish of 78 families found off Vietnam’s coast. There are 169 species of boneless fish (51 families); 69 species of crab (8 families), 101 species of shrimps (11 families); 368 species of birds in which there are 73 migratory species including some large species such as herons, pelicans, ducks...

The brackish water flooded forests are the residence and food world of more than 200 kinds of birds.

In the South west, are the bird havens: Cu Lao Dat (Ben Tre), Vinh Loi, Tan Hung, Ngoc Hien...The bird haven of Tan Khanh (Cai Nuoc district ) is approximately 130 ha and considered the largest natural bird haven in South East Asia.

The eco-system of mangrove forests is attractive to many scientists. Consequently, the eco-system is an attractive place for tourism and research. Currently there are tours to the mangrove forests and bird havens, and tours to study the features of ecosystem of the mangrove forests...this is the precursor to the development of ecotourism in mangrove forests along the coasts of Vietnam.

4.2 The developmental status of ecotourism in Vietnam.

* Planning the development of ecotourism:

Ecotourism is a new form of tourism in terms of both definition and techniques, in both Vietnam and foreign countries. In the recent past, Vietnam has concentrated on planning a strategy for the overall development of tourism and investing in tourism infrastructure. Basic study and planning of areas with potential for ecotourism development are only in the initial stage. Some tourism organisations have organised some eco-tourism like routes. However, the activities are still spontaneous, small, and its products and customers are not well identified. Particularly, market research and technologies supporting this type of tourism are still absent. There is a lack of attention given to professional training for eco-tourism.

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, the huge potential for an international eco-tourism market in Vietnam as well as a local ecotourism market have not yet been exploited effectively.

* Organising different forms and markets of ecotourism:

In our country, only some ecotourism activities can be organised relying upon the exploitation of resources, as
follows:

- Tourism or scientific study in some nature reserves, mainly in national parks;
- Adventure and scientific study on Phansipang mountain (Laos)
- Sightseeing to gardens and river areas in the Mekong Delta.
- Trans-Vietnam journey by bikes and motorbikes for the sake of learning about the nature and people of Vietnam.

However, the above-mentioned types of tourism are actually nature based tourism partly resembling ecotourism with some elements of ecotourism: both discovering and protecting nature in the true sense of "Responsible Travel".

Due to weaknesses/lack of research and planning for the development of this form of tourism, the formation of general or specific programmes on ecotourism has been adversely affected.

* Organising the exploitation of the ecotourism market

The ecotourism market in our country and throughout the world is rapidly developing and becoming a fashionable form of tourism. Due to many reasons as mentioned above, market studies and technical measures to develop ecotourism are very limited. Over the last couple of years, the emergence of ecotourism and nature tourism ventures is hardly noticeable.

The development of ecotourism in Vietnam is just in its infancy and does not yet achieve the diversity, variety and position it should occupy in tourism growth in the region and the world.

There are some basic limitations to the development of ecotourism in Vietnam:

- Ecotourism is new in concept, organisation, investment planning and exploitation;
- There is not yet a legal environment and proper mechanism for ecotourism;
- The number of people managing national parks, nature reserves are insufficient and inadequately trained. Management is not unified: about half the national parks and nature reserves are placed under the control of central administration (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development), whereas the rest are managed by the provincial authorities. Consequently, there is hardly any unified management in compliance with the national general management policies.
- There is not yet necessary evaluation of the potential of ecotourism and tourism planning in nature reserves.
- There is not yet joint Ministry circulars between the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, to secure the effective exploitation of the ecological potential for the sake of tourism.
- Investment in improving infrastructure is still poor.
- There are no experienced and professional tour guides with knowledge about environment, ecological systems to organise ecotours.

5- Orientation for the Development of Ecotourism in Vietnam.

5.1 Zoning ecotourism areas

Based upon the allocation of different ecological systems with endemic species, and upon the socio-economic conditions, infrastructure...the ecotourism division in Vietnam can be undertaken as follows (Diagram).
* The mountainous and coastal areas in the North East

The zone for ecotourism in the North East mainly comprises Lang Son, Cao Bang, Bac Kan, Bac Thai provinces. The representative ecological systems with tourism values in general and ecotourism values in particular, are the areas comprising ecosystems of limestone mountains and wetlands, typically represented by the protected areas of Bac Son and Huu Lien (Lang Son); cultural and historical sites of Pac Po, Trung Khanh (Cao Bang); the national park of Ba Be (Bac Kan) and Nui Coc Lake (Bac Thai).

The ecotourism zone in the coastal area in the North East mainly encompasses Quang Nam and Hai Phong Provinces with the ecosystems of limestone mountains, mangroves and coral reefs. Ha Long Bay with Cat Ba National Park is an attractive area particularly for tourism and for ecotourism.

Bio-diversity in this ecotourism zone is fairly high with about 3,500 species of plant, 109 species of animals, 179 species of birds of which many are endangered like Trachypithecus Avunculus and T.Fracoisi polyocephalus apes...

Places with especially high potential for ecotourism in the region include Cat Ba and Ba Be National Parks.

The forms of ecotourism feasibly organised are:
- Study tour to specific ecological systems.
- Adventure tourism.
- Sea diving.

* The mountains in North West Hoang Lien Son

The zone for ecotourism in the region mainly comprises the western parts of Lao Cai and Lai Chau Provinces with the ecological systems of the high mountains of Sa Pa-Phansipang which is home to many temperate zone species. In the nature reserve of Muong Nhe, there are 38 species of endangered animals in need of protection like elephants (Elephasmaximus), cows (Bosganrus), bears (Helarctos malayanus ), tigers (Panthera tigirs), red wolves (Cuon alpinus)...

The forms of tourism possibly organised here are:
- Study tour to the ecological systems of high mountains.
- Adventure tourism.

* The Red River Delta

The zone covers the Provinces of Ha Tay, Vinh Phuc, Ha Nam, Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, and Thanh Hoa. The ecological system is like that of southern China and is a mix of indigenous characteristics and those of Malaysia-Indonesia. In addition, there is a fairly representative ecological system of wetlands which include 3 national parks: Tam Dao, Ba Vi, Cuc Phuong. The wetland area of Xuan Thuy is the first protected wetland in Vietnam.

Though the bio-diversity in the zone is not high and the number of endangered and endemic animals and plants is limited, the potential for tourism development is fairly favourable, because almost all of the potential destinations lie near Hanoi - one of the most important tourism centres of the country with a relatively well developed infrastructure and facilities

Based upon the features of natural ecological systems and conditions relating to ecotourism, the activities will mainly consist of study tours to the specific ecological systems in combination with sightseeing and cultural exploration.

* The northern part of central Vietnam

This region comprises the south west part of Nghe An and Ha Tinh Provinces, western Quang Binh, south
eastern Thua Thien Hue and western Da Nang and Quang Nam Provinces.

The area has high bio-diversity and many primary forests. It is in here that 3 new kinds of animals have been discovered recently: Sao La deer (Pseudoryx nghelinensis), Ha Tinh ape (Trachypithecus francoisi hatinhensis), and Great deer (Megamuntincus vuquangensis). In addition, there are 26 species of animals, 25 species of birds, 16 species of reptiles and 9 endemic species of fish.

In addition to the bio-diversity value, there is the nature reserve of Phong Nha-Ke Bang with Phong Nha cave ranked among the greatest in the world. Thus, the potential for ecotourism in the region is large.

Based upon the local conditions, the priority for tourism development should be focused on the area of Bach Ma-Son Tra - Cu Lao Cham peninsular.

The forms of ecotourism possibly organised in the region are:

- Study tours to different ecological systems.
- Adventure tourism.
- Sea diving.

*The southern central zone and central highlands*

The zone encompasses the western central highlands, part of northern Lam Dong Province and down to Khanh Hoa Province.

The representative ecological systems in this area comprise of Dipterocarpa forest, typically in Yok Don; wetlands in Ho Lac; the high mountains in Ngoc Linh and Bidoup-Nui Ba, and the coral reefs of Nha Trang.

One can say that there is a great concentration of representative ecological systems in the region, and is recognised internationally as an area of high bio-diversity. This is the only place in Vietnam and in South East Asia which is home to 4 species of grey cows including Bos sauveli and Novovibos spiralis, many species of animals, birds, reptiles, fish. In addition there are many endemic and locally and internationally endangered plants.

In addition, within national parks and nature reserves, especially in the central highlands, the residents still maintain their traditional lifestyle and customs that attract tourists. These are favourable conditions for the development of ecotourism in the region.

The forms of ecotourism possibly organised in the region can be:

- Study tour to different ecological systems.
- Adventure tourism.
- Sea diving.

*The South east*

This extends from the central highlands - the southern part of the central zone - to the Mekong Delta and encompasses the national parks of Cat Tien (Lam Dong-Binh Duong-Dong Nai) and Con Dao (Ba Ria-Vung Tau), the nature reserves of Bien Lac-Nui Ong (Binh Thuan), Binh Chau-Phuoc Buu (Ba Ria-Vung Tau) and Mui Ne, Phu Quy island (Binh Thuan).

The bio-diversity of the region is considered high with many representative ecological systems, particularly the system of coastal shifting sand dunes in Binh Thuan, which has high values for tourism.

This is also home to a species of one horn rhinoceros which survives in a handful of small herds in Cat Loc.

The forms of ecotourism possibly organised here are:
- Study tour to typical ecological systems.
- Sea diving.

**The Mekong Delta**

With two representative ecological systems of wetlands and mangroves, the ecotourism zone lies mainly in provinces along the Mekong River: Bac Lieu, Ca Mau and Kien Giang. The mangrove forests in Ca Mau and the Tram Chim (Dong Thap) which is home to the protected crane Grus antigone, are valuable for ecotourism.

In addition to these, fruit gardens, especially those along the rivers of Tien and Hau, and the nature reserve of Phu Quoc are attractive tourism destinations.

The unique tourism activities in the Mekong Delta in general, and with respect to ecotourism in particular, are water based.

### 5.2 Organising ecotourism routes

The basis for forming ecotourism routes is:

- Zones of valuable ecotourism destinations;
- The system of national tourism centres which have been defined in the Tourism Master Plan of Vietnam between 1995-2010;
- The system of regional and sub-regional tourism centres already defined.

The ecotourism routes include:

**+ Hanoi - Ha Tay - Ha Nam - Nam Dinh - Thai Binh - Hai Phong - Quang Ninh**

This ecotourism route is alongside National Highways No1 and 10 that runs through different ecotourism zones of the Red River Delta and the north east coast. The ecotourism destinations of this route include the National Parks of Ba Vi, Cuc Phuong and Cat Ba, the cultural and historical site of Huong Son, the protected area of Xuan Thuy (RAMSAR site) and the world heritage site of Halong Bay.

**+ Hanoi - Vinh Phuc - Bac Kan - Cao Bang - Lang Son**

This ecotourism route is organised along national routes No 3 and No 4A running through the ecotourism destinations of the mountainous areas in the East North including national parks of Tam Dao and Ba Be and the nature reserves of Pia Oak and Huu Lien.

**+ Hanoi - Yen Bai - Lao Cai - Lai Chau - Son La**

Actually this is the national ecotourism route along national routes No 4A and No 6 which passes through a subsection of the North West tourism region as defined in the Tourism Master Plan.

The main ecotourism destinations on the route are the nature reserves of Phansipang linked to Sa Pa - Hoang Lien Son, and Muong Nhe.

**+ Hanoi - Vinh - Ha Tinh - Quang Binh**

Actually this ecotourism route starts in Vinh city (the tourism centre of the southern subsection of the North tourism region). The main ecotourism destinations on the route are the nature reserves of Pu Mat, Vu Quang, Ke Go and Phong Nha-Ke Bang.

**+ Hue - Da Nang - Kon Tum - Gia Lai - Dac Lac - Lam Dong - Nha Trang**
This route is organised partly along National Highway No 1A and largely along the national route No 14 connecting the provinces in the central highlands. This is an interesting ecotourism route with special significance to the development of ecotourism in Vietnam.

The important tourism destinations on the route comprise the National Parks of Bach Ma and Yok Don, the nature reserves of Ngoc Linh, Kon Kai King, Ho Lac, Bidong, Nui Ba and the islands in Nha Trang bay.

**+ Ho Chi Minh City - Vung Tau - Phan Thiet - Binh Duong**

This is a tourism route linking the valuable ecotourism destinations in the South east with the national parks of Cat Tien and Con Dao, and the nature reserves of Binh Chau-Phuoc Buu, Ho Lac-Nui-Ong. Especially, there is a system of shifting sand dunes in Mui Ne (Phan Thiet).

In addition, a sandy coastal route can be organised from Ho Chi Minh city to Con Dao and Phu Quy for study tours to the National Park of Con Dao. The coral system in Con Dao and Phu Quy are regarded as the most typical in our country.

**+ Ho Chi Minh City - Dong Thap - Tien Giang - Ben Tre - Tra Vinh - Ca Mau - Kien Giang - Phu Quoc**

This ecotourism route allows the exploitation of ecotourism potential in the Mekong Delta with the two representative ecological systems of wetlands and mangroves. The important tourism destinations on the route comprise the nature reserves of Tam Nong, Dat Mui and Phu Quoc. The ecotourism destinations of fruit gardens such as on the islands of Thoison (Tien Giang) - a land of rivers - will enhance the attraction of the route.

### 5.3 Management structure and organisation

The protected areas of Vietnam are now divided into 3 categories: national parks, nature reserves, and cultural, historical and environmental sites. There are 3 different systems of management relating to use rights and ownership of natural resources.

- 10 national parks are mainly managed by the central administration. Some are administered by provincial authorities, but their management boards are directly under one line authority with the ultimate goal of nature conservation.
- 61 nature reserves are controlled by provincial, municipal authorities with the combined goals of nature conservation and economic development through the implementation of projects under the control and management of an Executive Board.
- 34 cultural, historical and environmental sites are run by management boards under the Ministry of Culture and Information.

To secure the effective exploitation of ecotourism potential based upon the above-mentioned features, the model of management for ecotourism activities in protected areas of Vietnam should be oriented as follows:
Management is conducted under the unified instructions of the Management Board of National Parks within the general control of the line ministry. The tourism authorities only participate in the capacity of a state management authority in charge of tourism.

There are separate financial regulations for tourism activities in national parks under the agreement of 3 Ministries: Finance, Agriculture and Rural Development, and National Administration of Tourism, with the principles of non-subsidisation and self-accounting, and the goals of balancing socio-economic interests between tourism exploitation, nature conservation and local community development.

The role of the Council for Promotion of Tourism and Nature Reserve Development is especially important and appropriate for such areas which have many owners of land, a variety of natural resources, and different economic sectors: agriculture; forestry, aquatic products, irrigation, tourism, and the dual goals of ecological resource protection and exploitation for economic benefits.

The Council for Promotion of Tourism and Nature Reserve Development would have the following responsibilities and functions:

- To advise local authorities on policies, management mechanisms, planning, investment, land lease for tourism development within the protected areas;
- To help the Management Board achieve unified management in implementing tourism projects in the protected areas in accordance with planning;
- To harmonise economic relations between private tourism enterprises, private enterprises with use rights over natural resources, and local communities;
- To participate in the appraisal of tourism projects proposed for nature reserves.

For cultural, historical and environmental sites:
A majority of the cultural, historic and environmental sites are managed by the Heritage Management Board under the Ministry of Culture and Information. However, the surrounding areas with ecological resources with potential for tourism exploitation are under other authorities. Given this situation, two categories of sites are proposed:

**First type:** The cultural, historical and environmental sites with surrounding areas with little or no ownership of their natural resources, should be organised into national parks.

**Second type:** The cultural, historical and environmental sites with surrounding areas with many owners of their natural resources and which have the potential for tourism development should be organised in the same manner as nature reserves - under the Council for Promotion of Tourism and Nature Reserve Development or the Tourism Exploitation Board under the provincial People’s Committees.

6- Some basic measures to develop ecotourism

* Policies and mechanisms:
  - There should be compatible policies to encourage the exploitation of ecotourism potential, especially in national parks and nature reserves. This should be reflected through joint circulars of the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Finance and National Administration of Tourism.
  - There should be a favourable environment created with concrete mechanisms to encourage all economic sectors to invest in ecotourism. This is of special significance, because it takes a long time to obtain the interest rate of return from this type of project and the risks are high.

* Market:
  - Investment should be made in specific studies on ecotourism that define the "demand" for this type of tourism. Good studies will make the foundation for sustainable, effective socio-economic development.
  - There should be appropriate investment in promotion of ecotourism to facilitate the creation of a market for this attractive tourism.

* Planning:

Based upon the comprehensive evaluation of studies on ecotourism, attention should be paid to concrete planning for the development of ecotourism in national parks and nature reserves as the prerequisite for investment projects and to secure sustainable development in the areas.

During the process of concrete planning and establishing feasibility studies, there should be close co-operation between experts in tourism planning and those in other relevant fields, the Management Board of national parks and nature reserves, local authorities and communities.

Co-operation with international experts in the field plays an important role in ensuring the feasibility of projects.

* Training:

  - As ecotourism is still new to Vietnam’s tourism industry, the contingent of managers, businessmen and tourism staff lack experience, theory and practice. Therefore basic training for managers and tourism staff is especially important.

This problem can be solved through a national project with international support that trains a team of first class experts, who will become trainers for succeeding staff.

  - It is of considerable urgency to train the team of managers directly controlling national parks and nature reserves in the field of ecotourism so that they can co-operate effectively with other organisers of ecotourism.
  - A special training programme for tour guides in ecotourism should be established. Attention should be given to training for local competent people who can become ecotourism guides in their localities.
  - Encouragement and conditions should be made for young staff to receive basic training in countries
with highly developed ecotourism like the USA, Australia, New Zealand...

- The concepts of ecotourism should be incorporated as soon as possible into training curricula at different levels.

* Developing infrastructure for ecotourism:

Due to the fact that ecotourism usually takes place in remote and isolated areas. Ecotourism areas are thus difficult to access. This adversely affects the exploitation of ecotourism potential. Therefore, investment in infrastructure in such areas is significant for socio-economic reasons as well for securing the sustainable development of ecotourism.

* Social affairs:

- To raise the awareness of the public of the significance of ecotourism development in the sustainable development of nature and environment through social education and propaganda programmes.
- To encourage local communities to participate in the management activities of protected areas, including ecotourism, to secure sustainable development.

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**Ecotourism: A guide for planning and managers**

8- Managing tourism in natural world heritage sites

ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM
- A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

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Development is a common necessity (and is inevitable) of every country at all times. Population growth can put the environment and ecosystem under great pressure as people have to exploit the natural resources in order to satisfy their increasing social and cultural needs. The socio-economic activities of mankind, therefore, is the main attribution to the changes in their living environment that are taking place in Vietnam and elsewhere. These development activities on the one hand help improve the quality of people's living environment, and they can on the other hand create a series of problems such as scarcity and exhaustion of natural resources as well as environmental pollution and degradation all over the world. Thus, development has been the driving force for life and also the law of evolution which has been taking place continuously ever since life came into being in our planet. The question being raised is that what kind of development we should have in order to obtain a happy life materially and spiritually for the present as well as future generations. After 20 years of research since the 1972 UN Conference on Environment in Stockholm, the answer is that we have to "develop in a sustainable manner". The Earth Summit in Rio De Janeiro unanimously decided to make "sustainable development" as the goal for the whole mankind in the 21 century.

So, what is "sustainable development"? According to the definition of the World Council on Environment and Development (WCED), "Sustainable development is the development that satisfies the present needs, but does not harm the possibility of future generations to meet their own requirements".

Today, tourism has become one of the rapidly-growing industries, and an important component of the economic structure of many countries. Its development has produced various positive impact on the socio-economic areas, improving the quality of life for many the people in many parts of the world. The major positive aspect is that tourism has brought about enormous economic benefits to all countries. It is also considered as the bridge for friendship, mutual understanding and peace among nations. However, the rapid growth of tourism has caused and continue to create negative impacts to natural resources and environment, such as the degradation and exhaustion of natural resources, pollution to the natural environment, and destruction of landscapes and people's traditional cultures. The bad habits and over-exploitation in relations to the tourism growth may result in serious consequences. The 1994 Osaka Declaration gave a warning and urged that in the process of tourism planning and development, thorough review of all political, economic, cultural and social benefits should be considered while making full assessments of all tourism impacts on natural resources, environment, socio-cultural values, etc. Environment protection is closely related to the sustainable development of any industry; this is especially true to the tourism industry since environment is essential and vital for its development. Against this backdrop, the idea of "sustainable tourism development" has come into being. Although there is no official definition but it is generally recognised that sustainable tourism development could have such features as: 1) having potential for long term development; 2) not wasting of natural resources; 3) protecting natural, social and cultural diversity; 4) could be integrated in the regional planning; 5) encouraging community participation in the tourism business; and 6) having needs for continued research and frequent monitoring. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) are important tools for the implementation of sustainable tourism policies.

"Sustainable tourism" has similar meaning to that of nature-based tourism or ecotourism. However, sustainable tourism development is more inclined to the protection of natural environment, that attracts the interests of local population and community, and very much relates to their culture, traditions, lifestyles, social and economic systems. In fact, this form of tourism does no harm to the environment while brings about benefits to the local community without destroying their traditional jobs, cultures and social stability.

"Ecotourism" is a relatively new concept and now is drawing the attentions of different type of people. The authority and people living within the protected areas together with the rural development experts are
interested in conducting research on the economic potentials of ecotourism. The sociologists are interested in studying all the values of communities in this area while the environmentalists wish to find out whether ecotourism is an essential tool for maintaining biodiversity. In addition, government officials tend to regard ecotourism as a new source to earn foreign currency and tourism operating agencies are to formulate ecotourism policies, and private enterprises are considering to invest in this industry.

Potential for developing ecotourism in Viet Nam

Situated in Southeast Asia, a region of dynamic economic development, Vietnam enjoys a favourable geographical positions, good economic potentials, and high international status that could facilitate tourism activities and contribute to get the country integrate fully into the main-stream of regional and international development.

The potentials of ecotourism in Viet Nam are rich and diversified as it offers interesting characteristics. Foreigners as well as local people are attracted by its undiscovered primitive and unique features.

The interesting features are as follows:

- Our country has a coastline of over 3,200 km with numerous beautiful beaches from the North to the South, many of which are operational around the year. Besides theses beaches are places where we could organise sight-seeing tours to the coastal ecosystems such as coral reefs, sand dunes, lagoons, swamps, mangrove forests, etc.;
- We have a large area of about 50,000 square km (approximately 15% of the country’s total area) of carbonated stones, mainly limestone, located mostly in the Northern part of the country and stretching down to Thua Thien Hue province (Northeast, Northwest and North of the Central regions), while in the South it can be found in Kien Giang. In these limestone area, many famous sceneries have been found such as Ha Long Bay, Bai Tu Long Bay, Huong Tich Cavern, Phong Nha Cave, etc.;
- Forest coverage, covering 4/5 of the country’s total area are found to have different types. In this tropical climate, they offer many interesting areas with unique landscapes for eco-tourism attracting foreign and local visitors, particularly national parks, nature reserves with many rare fauna and flora species;
- There are some 400 discovered mineral and hot springs of various types which are scattered almost equally all over the country. They have different values and especially offer great potentials for ecotourism. Today we have a number of facilities in operation which can be formed into group such as the Tam Hop - Quang Hanh Group (Quang Ninh Province), My An Group (Hue), Vinh Hao Goup (Binh Thuan province), My Khue Group (Ha Noi), and Dong Nghe (Da Nang), etc.;
- Viet Nam has 54 ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has its own unique features with regard to the customs, traditions, lifestyles, historical relics, cultures, architectures, arts, festivals, etc. These are the potential sources for information, attracting many foreign as well as local visitors.
- Viet Nam has a heroic history in its struggles against foreign invasions for national defence. The places where the eternal historical struggles for national sovereignty and territorial defence took place have been the areas of interests to many researchers and young visitors from different foreign countries.

Most of the above-mentioned potentials seem to have regional linkages, thus creating favourable conditions for people to exploit the potentials of ecotourism.

The role of ecotourism in the economic and social development of Vietnam

The most important advantage of ecotourism is to exploit given natural potentials in a specific area, without having to invest large-scale infrastructure as other forms of tourism. Ecotourism could be organised in a more flexible manner, not subject to the number but to the demands of tourists. Given the objects of ecotourism are diverse and not homogeneous, they have different levels of knowledge and thus satisfying all their demands is not a simple work.

Our tourism industry has come into being not long ago. It has attained some initial achievements. While our economy is not yet strong and our budget still limited, to invest in ecotourism is a step in the right direction to go in line with the trends of the world. The rationale for this is:

- Our country has many potentials for developing ecotourism;
- Ecotourism is the important form of sustainable tourism which we need to develop;
• Resources invested in ecotourism is less than those of other tourism forms;
• Ecotourism can bring practical benefits to local communities, generate jobs and consume products locally in remote areas.
• Ecotourism could be organised in different forms and different tour operators and communities could participate;

In spite of the above-mentioned advantages, we could see some disadvantages as follows:

- Lack of understanding and awareness on ecotourism as well as sustainable tourism by many people, especially those living in the areas that have ecotourism potentials;

- We have not been able to develop a Master Plan for Ecotourism Development. Given the difficulty of this task, there is a need to mobilise the expertise of many specialists to make the plan feasible.

- Pilot projects should be carried out in order to gain experience needed in this area.

Ecotourism is now attracting a great number of tourists from developed countries. Our country needs develop this form of tourism as it is a big trend of our time. The improvement of people’s material life will give rise to their demands for better understanding of their nation, people and origin. Ecotourism will help meet these demands first of all from our own people. At present, though ecotourism is not officially organised but there are various groups of foreign back-packer tourists who organised their tours by themselves on risky mountainous areas for sight-seeing or visiting remote villages of ethnic minorities. Obviously, there has been demand for ecotourism. We need to early arrange and formulate ecotourism development projects in order to meet the current demand of local and foreign visitors.

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SOME OPINIONS ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND CONSERVATION OF TRADITIONAL CULTURAL VALUES THROUGH AN ON-SITE STUDY IN SAPA

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Mankind's strong desire has always been to discover new land, find new landscapes and enjoy their beauty. As a result of this desire, many natural wonders have been discovered and unearthed.

In modern society, especially in developed countries where people's living standards are high, traveling tends to be an essential part of life.

People's wealth is not only gauged by their material possessions but also by how many places that they have visited and how their life has been enriched by their traveling experiences. So, many people in many countries have tried to save their money to satisfy their traveling needs.

As a result of these needs, more and more varied tourist forms have developed, such as: ecotourism, specialist tourism, sight-seeing tourism, convalescence tourism, weekend tourism and mountain climbing tourism.

In whichever form, tourism has brought relaxation and inspiration to the people, balancing the material and spiritual state of those who are caught up in the stress and monotony of an industrial lifestyle.

However, the development of the tourism triggers many social and economic effects in local communities, on infrastructure, on ecological systems, on life style as well as traditional cultural values.

The economic benefits of the ‘smoke free’ industry are clear. However, for many years we have only paid attention to speeding up the development of the tourism industry, focusing on the upgrade of hotels and restaurants, developing a travel industry and attracting more visitors. This, actually, has brought huge profits.

However, it is about time to think of the industry in a broader and more in-depth manner. Recently, negative effects of the industry have begun to be taken into account, such as ecological destruction (waste and environment pollution...), increased social vices (prostitution, drug addiction...) and changes in traditional cultural values. All these factors threaten the sustainable development of the industry.

The science of human-ecology has the aim of studying the interactions between human beings and environment. With human beings as a component of nature and "nature as an in-organic body of human beings", as Mark stated, human-ecology has helped mankind understand its responsibilities towards respecting and protecting nature and treating it humanely.

Mankind should live life in harmony with nature, instead of dominating it for its benefit, regardless of the objective rules of nature. This is a very important factor which assures the ecological sustainability and the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Of course, sustainable tourism depends not only on ecological considerations but also many other factors.

From the point of view of a cultural researcher, I would like to address only one aspect, that is, the relationship between a sustainable tourism industry and the country's traditional cultural values, using as an example research conducted in Sa Pa, which has recently come to be considered a tourism "hot spot".

Sa Pa is a small mountainous district in the north of Lao Cai province. Tourists have become familiar with this location only recently, although the spot has been mentioned in poems as a magic place with a subtle beauty
dipped into the fog for centuries.

Actually, nature has endowed Sa Pa with the ideal natural conditions for tourism development. Located at 1,500 metres above sea level and at the latitude 22o N, Sa Pa has a varied climate and vegetation. With an average temperature of 18-20 degrees centigrade during the tourist (summer) season, which ranges from April to October, plus many rivers and lakes and its attractive vegetation, Sa Pa attracts many tourists.

Moreover, the racial variety of the people living in Sa Pa is another factor luring visitors. Statistics of the Sa Pa People's Committee shows that, excluding a few Kinh people, some 53 per cent of Sa Pa's population is H'Mong, 24 per cent is Dao with the remaining percentage made up of Tay, Giay and Xa Pho. Each ethnic minority has painted Sa Pa with their own lively cultural characteristics.

Traditional labour practices and cultural activities of Sa Pa's ethnic minorities are very unusual and interesting to visitors. Thus, tourists regularly visit villages in Cat Cat, Ta Phin, Lao Chai and Ta Van in order to see the day-to-day activities of the ethnic minorities there.

Sa Pa was first discovered by the French in 1918. The town was constructed in 1932 with many hotels, a church, and luxury villas to cater to the holiday and convalescent/health needs of the colonialists.

However, for many reasons, the town was forgotten for many years until the ‘90s. Every year since the beginning of the '90s the number of visitors coming to Sa Pa has increased remarkably.

According to figures released by the General Department of Tourism there were 9,300 arrivals in Sa Pa in 1995, with the figure climbing to 7,282 in the first 6 months of 1996, of which 3,282 were foreigners. While the average stay of a visitor was 1.6 days in 1995, the figure was 4.1 days for the first 6 months of 1996.

Visitors come to Sa Pa for many reasons; for sight seeing, convalescence, scientific research in many fields of study including geology, topography, ecology, ethnology, archeology, sociology and so on.

The dramatic increase in the number of visitors has fueled the development of physical infrastructure for tourism, such as the construction of hotels. The number of hotels and restaurants in Sa Pa was 8 in 1993, 14 in1994, 20 in 1995, and 41 in 1996, with the number of rooms totaling 370. Total revenue from tourism in the first half of 1996 doubled the figure for the whole of 1995 ( VND 1.7 billion).

It is clear that the tourism industry, on one hand, has brought certain economic benefits to this mountainous district, creating favourable conditions for the development of living standards, both physically and spiritually, of the residents.

On the other hand, the development of tourism has had a negative effect on Sa Pa's ecological system and social life. Firstly, the ecology of Sa Pa has changed rapidly.

Apart from increased numbers of visitors, people from other regions of Vietnam have rushed to settle in the town and set up business, the majority being Kinh. The in-migration combined with a high birth rate has put great pressure on the population of Sa Pa.

The consumption of forestry products has increased, including wood for residential house construction, fire wood for use in hotels, trade in precious wood and rare animals as well as their meat. The forest has been seriously denuded. The area covered by forest was large but it has been declining dramatically and now only 19,000 hectares remain. Possibly as a result of changing climatic conditions, snow falls have not been recorded in the last two years.

Waste collection and processing is insufficient for the high population density and the sudden increase in tourist numbers. The rising amount of waste, both water and rubbish, is not only polluting the environment, but also ruining the areas' scenic qualities.

According to the Electricity-Water-Environment Division, which was set up in September 1995 under the authority of the District People's Committee, 55 per cent of waste is discharged by markets, while the remainder originates from the household sector.

The amount of waste produced so far this year is two times higher than the same period in 1997. A dumping site is located right at the upper end of a stream running along the road to Lao Chai, two kilometres south east
of the town.

In the rainy season, waste has been taken downstream, polluting all nine surrounding communes. This contamination is considered one of the causes of epidemics in poultry and animals bred within villages downstream.

The poor drainage and discharged water situation is almost critical. The District is planning to build a dumping site at O Quy Ho, three kilometres away from town. The site is expected to meet the hygiene standards set by District authorities, in terms of distance to underground and surface water sources.

We can say that the development of tourism in years to come will be badly affected unless proper attention is paid to protecting the ecology and environment.

It is the effects of tourism on the social and cultural life of Sa Pa residents that is cause for special concern. Since the early 1990s, particularly since 1993 when Sa Pa was suddenly discovered by the tourism industry, Sa Pa has been caught up in a whirlwind of tourism-related economic activities.

Besides upgrading infrastructure, hotels and restaurants in order to respond to the increasing demands of visitors, the tourism industry has created many new jobs for locals as well as residents from outside the Province.

Taking tourist guides as an example, apart from the tourist guides from Hanoi-based large tourism companies, and some local Kinh, a handful of ethnic minority people are employed in this activity.

Minority people are usually asked directly by tourists to become guides, without going through any middle-men. Of the eight hotels interviewed, only the Green Bamboo Hotel confirmed that it frequently hired H'mong people to guide tourists, while the Auberge Hotel did sometimes, upon demand.

However, the earnings of ethnic minority tourist guides is usually low. Some H'mong youths stated that for leading tourists on a week long trek to the Hoang Lien Son Mountain, and acting as porters, they are paid only VND100,000.

Some H'mong and Dao men do seek jobs in restaurants, hotels and construction sites in town. Residents in communes nearby the town, such as Cat Cat, Ta Phin, Lao Chai and so on, home to beauty spots frequented by tourists, can supplement their income from renting their houses to tourists.

To satisfy tourists' demands for unusual products, a number of products are made. For example, handicrafts made by ethnic minorities such as bags, hats, belts, clothes, Khen (H'mong pan-pipes), bracelets, necklaces, or forest products like medicinal herbs, orchids and so forth. Almost all ethnic minority households undertake traditional handicraft work along with cultivation.

In Sa Pa, the Black H'mong grow flax to weave cloth, and dye and sew their own garments, whereas the Dao often buy cloth to embroider, making their products more attractive than H'mong-made goods thanks to colourful decorations. As a result, a major part of the market is occupied by Dao-made goods.

However, the economic benefits are low in comparison to the time- and labour- intensiveness of the activity. For example, it takes from two to three days to embroider a hat or a bag which can then be sold VND15,000-20,000, excluding the costs of cloth and thread. Moreover, the tourism economy has considerably influenced cultural products as well as changed the manner in which ethnic minorities undertake economic activities.

In order to increase sales and save labour, minority people have reduced the traditional decorations in handicrafts. The complexity and subtlety of curves and colours have been reduced significantly. In addition, both Dao and H'mong people have become familiar with trading in cultural products, and have learnt the art of lying and overcharging.

In Sa Pa market, both Dao and H'mong people report that they sell self-made products. However, when visiting their homes, it is often found that only a few villagers produce goods themselves, the rest buy products from other hamlets for resale. For example, Dao households in Ta Phin often buy bracelets and necklaces from Ban Khoang to resell. Obviously, commercialisation is reaching out to all parts of Sa Pa.

On another issue, we would like to mention the impact of tourism on the "Sapa Love Market", a name which
raises much protest from minority people. It has been adopted by lowlanders to describe one ethnic minority cultural activity.

In fact, the "Love Market" is a kind of fair which offers remote minority villagers the opportunity to gather to barter food and consumer goods - an old remnant of the self-sufficient economy. Therefore, it is foremost a market place which plays an important role in the material life of minority residents.

Furthermore, the fair also plays a key role in their social and spiritual life. Being one of the few weekly fairs in the region, it draws people from a wide area. It is the time that minority people leave their terrace-fields to meet each other.

Due to very long distances, they often arrive in Sa Pa town the night before. This offers an opportunity to meet each other. The fair is a regular rendezvous for friends, for men and women to relax and socialise after a hard-working week.

Thus, according to local residents, cultural activities used to be very exciting at the market; people played pipes and pan-pipes; organised cock-fights and horse-races; gathered and chatted nearby pans of thang co (a traditional highlanders' soup); and singers performed as a means to attract a partner. Through activities performed at the marketplace, ethnic groups displayed their exclusive cultural characteristics. And Sa Pa market was actually a cultural stage.

Nevertheless, when tourism developed, the presence of visitors and their rude interference (expressed through curious looks and ready cameras) have badly affected this cultural activity. We now cannot see the original traditional mass gathering. Dao girls in colourful costumes are still bashful behind others' backs, and H'mong youths still show their special aptitude at playing the pan-pipes. But they only agree to perform or allow to be photographed when they are paid.

As a matter of fact, both Vietnamese and foreign visitors to the "Love Market" feel that commercial aspects have come to dominate the cultural domain. On the other hand, visitors' curiosity may lead to the destruction to the peacefulness of such a highland area.

Visitors following or focusing cameras and flash lights on Dao couples surely removes their freedom to sing and talk of love in privacy. This then forces many couples to escape from the "Love Market", looking for other secret and safe places for talk in the surrounding mountains and valleys.

Such activity is considered inappropriate to the ethical and cultural traditions of the ethnic minorities. Other couples do not look forward to attending the night market as they used to. Additionally, since the new market was built, it has provided only poor accommodation, forcing market participants to wander about throughout the night.

If the current situation is not paid any attention, it is feared that the "Love Market" - the cultural market with all romantic features - will probably become a memory in minds of both locals and visitors. Also, Sa Pa's market may become a simple shopping centre as others. Thus, as soon as economic benefits are placed higher than cultural interests, will tourists still consider Sa Pa an attraction.

Finally but by no means less important is the impact that tourism has had on the routine and spiritual lives of ethnic children.

As a habit, crowds of girls aged between 8 and 14 leave home for the town and stay there for the weekends. The girls have little purpose in the market, wandering about during the daytime and sleeping under the shelters of on-site luxury restaurants at night.

Among the 13 H'mong girls encountered, three girls stayed in Sa Pa town for five days a week, one stayed for a day and eight others for two days.

It was obvious that most of the girls preferred selling goods at the market for money to attending school. Of the 13, 36.4 per cent were regularly involved in retail activity, 9.1 per cent sometimes, and the remainder (45.5 per cent) never worked as street vendors. The latter group appear to be attracted to the town out of curiosity and for normal sight seeing.

What has taken these girls away from their homes, the excitement and luxury of the town or the mushrooming tourism operations? 50 per cent of ethnic girls said they wish to travel around with tourists, 16.7 per cent wish
to have meals with tourists and 12.5 per cent are fond of cosmetics. Many of the girls speak very little Vietnamese but are proficient in broken English which they use when asking foreign visitors for presents, taking photos and spending time with foreign tourists.

What will happen to the young generation if they are not educated to be useful masters of their own land? There is the possibility that prostitution will invade the peaceful and idyllic lives of the ethnic minorities. Would the charming Sa Pa remain as a marvelous venue for tourists in such a case?

Based on research conducted at Sa Pa, we make the following conclusions:

1. The relationship between tourism in general and ecotourism in particular with culture is an objective one, because, tourism and culture are interrelated. By definition, tourism is a kind of cultural activity. The tourism product (scenic resources, historical relics and so on), is part of a local culture. Furthermore, the pivotal goal of tourism is to identify, assess and enhance existing cultural values. Through these tourism activities, people are encouraged to live in more harmony with each other and to work more effectively.

Based on this relationship, it is important to reaffirm and maintain the cultural nature of tourism operations - human ecotourism.

2. The most important condition to ensure the sustainability of tourism is the degree of sustainability of the tourism product. The technique of “Spectacularising” tradition is used to attract tourists.

Spectacularising elements of the tourism product must take place within the host community’s natural and social conditions, especially the features of ethnic cultural and traditional practices.

For instance, it is a custom in many localities in Vietnam to organise communal festivities. Obviously “the village drum, the villagers play, the village land god, the villagers worship”. These activities excite local residents and those from nearby, but tourists need something more spectacular, for example, buffalo fighting in Do Son, buffalo sacrifices in the Central Highlands and “Love Market” in Sa Pa and Bac Ha.

Influenced and formed by different living environments, as well as different psychological makeups, every ethnic minority possesses its own cultural legacy, which is a contribution to the nation’s variety of traditional cultural values. Therefore, such a multi-ethnic country as Vietnam has a unified but diversified culture. This is also the most essential basis for potential tourism operations.

During tours there are cultural exchanges between regions in the country as well as between nations. Interaction is inevitable. If the “spectacular” attractions and the cultural identification are lost, the sustainability of the tourism product will be threatened and the goal of sustainable tourism will be destroyed.

3. With respect to cultural exchange between different regions and nations through tourism operations, it is a certain to involve consideration of which regions and nations are considered more "progressive" or "backward" than others.

Either a nation with a developed economy or a region with high living standards are regarded as "progressive". In contrast, a nation with an underdeveloped economy or a region with a low standard of living will be said to be "backward".

There used to be a motto: "Vietnam is to catch up with advanced countries", and "The highland will be as developed as the plain".

The "progressive" is always willing to assist the "backward" out of poverty. Nevertheless, feeling inferior, the "backward" will attempt of its own accord to get rid of what it thinks is obsolete in a bid to reach the "progressive".

This remains true for material - based aspects, involving economic benefits and living conditions. But it has implications for the cultural domain as well. As soon as underdeveloped ethnic minorities are encouraged to abandon their invaluable cultural peculiarities and to mingle with the culture of the majorities, the attractiveness of the ethnic cultural environment and its tourism product will fade.
Massive migration of the Kinh people to the highland, for example, is posing a dangerous threat to the maintenance of the ethnic cultures. When tourism operations develop in the highlands, profits earners are mostly the Kinh who represent a small percentage of the local population, rather than the ethnic people who are the real masters of the highlands.

We suppose that in the cultural domain, especially spiritual culture, there are neither highly-developed nor under-developed cultures. But it is assumed that there exist differences and peculiarities between different cultures. I believe that all of the people sitting here still remember UNESCO's announcement with respect to cultural contact in tourism when selecting 1995 as the International Year of Generosity: "Generosity is a positive attitude, which does not imply a sign of benevolence or inferiority. Generosity is to respect the diversity of various cultures. Generosity accepts that there do not exist a culture, a nation or a religion taking a monopoly on intellects and truth...."

Addressing some of the relationships between sustainability of tourism operations and the revitalisation of traditional cultural values, it does not mean that we are against the great effectiveness of the tourism industry.

And, we would like to reiterate in important thing: the efforts to maintain traditional cultural values and the sustainability of the tourism product is the major requirement to create sustainability in Vietnam's tourism industry in the future.
INITIAL RESULTS OF STUDY ON
ECOTOURISM IN VIETNAM

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I - Overview:

Today tourism is regarded as a "non-smoke" industry and has been developing rapidly within all five economic sectors in the country. Tourism has come to occupy an important position in the country's economy. In recent years, domestic and international tourists have tended to participate in all kinds of tours: Pagoda, religion, cultural, historical tours....But ecotourism, for the tropical humid zone, requires the urgent consideration of Vietnam Tourism so that Vietnam Tourism can fully utilise and develop ecotourism in our country.

Many tourists have recognized that ecotourism has begun to flourish in Vietnam and will become a key industry for our country, possibly the most attractive field, bringing many interests, improving health, knowledge about nature and nations' natural resources. Through ecotourism the friendship, patriotism and love for motherland will be consolidated, while at the same time many diverse services, facilities, infrastructure will develop.

II - Zones with potential for ecotourism development.

Ecotourism in Vietnam initially may be based on protected natural areas and nature reserves as well as historical cultural vestiges as follows:

1. Tropical humid forest Ecotourism zone:

These are zones characterised by the Malay-Indonesian system, which appears in Nam Cat Tien (Dong Nai), coastal Lac Nui Ong, Kalon-Mho river (Binh Thuan), Bu Gia Map zone, Tay Cat Tien (Binh Phuoc), Lo Go - Sa Mat (Tay Ninh), North and north-eastern Phu Quoc Island (Kien Giang), Binh Chau-Phuoc Bien (Ba Ria-Vung Tau) ...All these areas area characterised by a evergreen tropical forest system of considerable ecological diversity, which is attractive to tourists.

2. Viet Bac ecotourism zone.

This zone has the characteristics of Hoa Nam ecological system, special areas may include: Xuan Son (Phu Tho), Tam Quy (Thanh Hoa), accompanied by a mixed ecological system of native and Malay-Indonesia which is scattered in some points such as Pu Huong, Pu Mat (Nghe An). The North zones are characterised by subtropical forests: Ba Vi (Ha Tay), Muong Nhe (Lai Chau), Tam Dao (Phu Tho-Thai Nguyen), Pia oac (Cao Bang).

This is an intermediate area, containing sites of considerable interest and preserved in their original state: Vu Quan (Ha Tinh), Bach Ma (Hue-Da Nang), Ba Na - Nui Chua (Quang Ngai) v.v.... These are well known places for excursions. However the infrastructure needs to be upgraded.

In the south, especially in Tay Nguyen, ecotourism occurs in the form of climbing, green tourism, closely combined with hunting in areas such as Chu Yang Sin, Nam Nung (Dac Lac), Kon Kai Kinh, Kong Cha Rang, Kong Ha Nung (Gia Lai), Nui Ba Lang - Biang, Thuong Da (Lam Dong).

Remarkably, in Tay Nguyen as well as in Tay Bac and Nam Trung Bo there are also specific zones of dry and sparse forests suitable for tourism. Generally the number of tourists reaches a maximum at the beginning of dry season, when the rainfall per month is at 100 mm. Notable tourism sites of this kind are Yok - Don (Dac lac), Suoi Trai (Phu Yen), Kho forest (Ninh Thuan) and Nam Dom zone (Son La).

4. Ecotourism in limestone mountains.

Where the Karst process has been strong, underground cave systems have been created from 3 - 528m below the surface, with a total length of 90,000m. This environment is home to particular water-living animals that are not adapted to sunlight for example fish which will be blinded when exposed to the sun and their life subsequently shortened. On the surface of these mountains many kinds of animals roam and climb on the attractive, rugged peaks, such as mountain goats (Capricornis sumatraensis) and monkeys...

In brief, in limestone mountainous areas, ecotourism is diverse, rich and attractive as in Xuan Nha, Sop Cop, Son La town (Son La province), Huu Lien, Bac Son (Lang Son), Ba Be (Bac Can), Phong Nha, Ke Bang (Quang Binh), Phong Quang (Ha Giang), Pac Po (Cao Bang), Pa Co Hang Kia (Hoa Binh), Ben En (Thanh Hoa). Notable near Ha Noi is Cuc Phuong (located at the intersection of Ninh Binh, Ha Tay and Thanh Hoa Provinces).

5. Ecotourism on islands and peninsula.

Transitional ecological systems where land meets the sea, are attractive ecological zones, both natural and cultural. There are natural zones, tropical wonders of our country, of which Ha Long bay is the most beautiful symbol of not only Quang Ninh, Vietnam, but also of the world. The next ones are Cat Ba, Cat Hai (Hai phong), Son Tra peninsula (Da Nang), Cu Lao Cham (Cham island) (Quang Nam), Hon Me (Thanh Hoa), Con Dao (Ba Ria-Vung Tau), Tien Hai (Thai Binh), Mui Nam Can, Vo Doi-U Minh and San Chim (Bird Sanctuary), Ca Mau... These are ecotourism zones offering hunting tourism, landscape visiting and attractive ecological diversity - which have both the scientific and practical role in natural research, especially with regards to the tropical humid zone in Vietnam.

For the development of climbing tourism, there are high mountains such as Fang Xi Pan (Lao Cai), Ngoc Linh (Kon tum - Quang Nam), Chu Yang Sin Lam Dong - Dac Lac).

The types of ecotourism we have mentioned above are related to National Parks and protected areas - which are the main basis for the development of ecotourism, based on diversity and richness of attractive wonders as well as kinds of forests and ecological diversity. They are all preserved fairly well and are under the control of the Government. The challenge is to begin to develop their potential with the aim of rational use and to develop tourism, at the same time taking charge of protection of the environment, ecology, humidity and temperature balance in these areas.

III - Proposals for establishment and protection of protected natural areas serving ecotourism.

Above we have presented more than 100 zones containing potential for ecotourism development, that will contribute to raising the natural tourism value of Vietnam. We have some recommendations on how to overcome problems so that ecotourism tourism in our country can be developed faster.
• We should confirm the important position of the forest and ecological diversity in relation to the ecological environment - they are inexhaustible natural resources for development of ecotourism. Because of the important role of forests in land protection and regulating and balancing heat and humidity; regulating water resources preventing disasters; generating beautiful landscapes serving cultural, tourism and rest services; it requires strategic planning, allocation for development of ecotourism, appropriate investment, gradual modernisation suitable for the tourism of the 21st century.

• To affirm and appreciate the role and important function of ecotourism in socio-economic development, the ecological environment needs to be protected from deforestation, and the hunting of rare and precious animals halted, to make national parks and natural protected areas more effective protection centers for ecological diversity and primary tropical forest.

• Forest areas need to be established and delineated with maximum coverage rate to protect forest ecological systems and ecological diversity. It is necessary to connect environment protection, tropical forest ecological systems based on administrative, socio-economic and professional measures.

In considering the forest and environment as the natural resources of ecotourism development, we do well to remind ourselves and follow the counsel of President Ho Chi Minh: "Forest is gold, if we know to protect it, it is too valuable."

Preliminary evaluation of Vietnam ecotourism areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecotourism Areas</th>
<th>Area (ha)</th>
<th>Natural characteristics</th>
<th>Preliminary evaluation (seasonality)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Malaysia - Indonesia ecotourism areas (Western and Southern Cat Tien, Binh Chau - Phuoc Bieu, Kalon-Song Mao, Phu Quoc, Bu Gia Map ..etc)</td>
<td>10.000 - 35.000</td>
<td>Large leafed tropical forests. Warm climate</td>
<td>Good for developing ecotourism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Viet Bac ecotourism areas (Tam Quy, Xuan Son)</td>
<td>350 - 4500</td>
<td>Many primates in primary forests</td>
<td>Good for tourism in Spring and Autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Indonesia Malaysia autochthonal ecotourism areas (Pu Huong, Pu Mat)</td>
<td>50.000 - 90.000</td>
<td>Many elephants, wild cattle, Sao la, evergreen close canopy forest</td>
<td>Except rainy season, tourism is very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Northern Vietnam ecotourism areas (Muong Nhe, Pia Oac, Ba Vi, Tam Dao)</td>
<td>70.000 - 300.000</td>
<td>Evergreen close canopy forest; many orders of wild animal: primates; ptauristidae (flying squirrels); galliformes and ursidae</td>
<td>Tourism four seasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Central Vietnam ecotourism areas (Vu Quang, Ba Na, Nui Chua, Bach Ma)</td>
<td>20.000 - 50.000</td>
<td>Sub tropical forest, in mountains there are many precious species of fauna and flora: parashorea, barian king wood; orders of animals and primates: phasianidae and peacocks</td>
<td>May be developed for tourism except in the wet season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Dry forest ecotourism area. (Trai stream, Nam Dom, Phan Rang, Yok din dry forest)</td>
<td>15.000 - 60.000</td>
<td>Dipterocarpa forest, barian kingwood, Sao la, elephants, tigers, crocodiles</td>
<td>May be visited in all seasons except the wet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Ecotourism areas of islands and peninsula (Con Dao, Cat Ba, Ha Long Bay, Ba Mun, Hon Me, Son tra island, Cu</td>
<td>500 - 15.000</td>
<td>Chukrasia tabularis, Nageia fleuryi, Pterocarpus pedatus and Trachypithecus</td>
<td>Visiting in four seasons, (except during typhoon time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Visitors</td>
<td>Attractions</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ecotourism areas of mangrove forest (Xuan Thuy, Vo Don, Tram Chim, Tien Hai, Nam Can, San Chim etc...)</td>
<td>500 - 12,000</td>
<td>Mangrove forest, Grusantigone sharpii and other families of varanidea and boidae, pythons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ecotourism areas of high mountains (Fan Si Pan, Ngoc Linh, Chu Yang Sin etc...)</td>
<td>25,000 - 50,000</td>
<td>Forest in high mountains rare animals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: General document from Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, supplemented and corrected.
THE ROLE OF "BIODIVERSITY" IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN VIETNAM

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Introduction

At present, tourism in general, and ecotourism in particular, has been developing steadily all over the world, especially in European, African, Asian countries, in some South-east Asia, China, Japan and Australia.

It is known that interrelationships between humans and nature is becoming stronger and closer, especially in the era of rapid industrialisation and rapid population growth. As a result of urbanisation, people have been exposed to polluted air caused by industry, waste and rubbish, have been forced to live in cramped conditions in towns and cities...This is a pressing issue of community's health. On the other hand, standards of living in many countries of the world is improving. Apart from normal life, people want a a broader view of the world and seek to understand the mysteries of the ecological world, as well as the cultures from different continents. So traveling is an essential need in spiritual life of human beings. Tourism types include human-cultural tourism; tourism in combination with scientific research on nature, culture, history; travel for convalescence, and ecotourism.

Ecotourism is quite new for Vietnam, and it does not have a firm definition. However, in recent times the attraction of ecotourism has grown amongst tourists, because it includes excursions to explore nature, enjoy the scenic landscape and wilderness. Ecotourism goes with nature tourism, which contributes to promoting efforts to conserve and maintain biodiversity, and conserve the living environment for communities in a sustainable way. Ecotourism helps human beings come closer to nature, know more about the essence of nature, and understand the rich diversity of habitats, as well as the interrelationships between habitats and living environments.

Thus, ecotourism is not merely leisure type tourism, it has become a part of ecological, environmental science, being implemented in different ecological systems, and different representative territories. So ecotourism always goes with maintaining and protecting the living resources of the Earth.

I. Systematic and practical basis for the development of ecotourism in Vietnam.

Located at the edge of the South-East Asia, at the crossroads of South-East Asia Vietnam has a large surface area and is endowed with good climatic conditions, and diverse natural resources with representative ecosystems. Any one, who has traveled through the country by river, sea or land from North to South through the central plains and mountains, cannot avoid being surprised and proud of the beauty of nature and unique landscapes. The attraction is not only monotonous views, but the diversity of local conditions and ecosystems, each with its own unique features.

Actually, 3/4 of Vietnam’s territory is composed of hills and mountains, that stretch almost the entire length of the country from North to South. There are mountain ranges which look like towers, their vertical slopes creating valleys which are difficult to access, for example Hoang Lien Son range with a length of 180 km, width of 30 km with the 3,143m peak of Phan Si Pang. The range divides Northern Vietnam into two different natural geographical areas - North-Eastern and North-Western, each with its own typical ecosystems. The North-West mountains are home to the beautiful Ban flower and high peaks and deep abysses where the Da river meanders tortuously. The North-Eastern bow-shaped mountains run down to the South-China sea and
experience a piercing north-easterly monsoon climate, expansive rolling hills and forested valleys, with forests that change colour in autumn.

The Truong Son Range runs from North to South ending at Nam Bo plain in the expansive and fertile Mekong delta. The Range divides Central Vietnam into two areas quite different in aspect, ecology and climate; the East side runs down to the sea and is exposed to the north-easterly monsoon, while the West side inclines towards the Cuu Long valley and is exposed to the South-eastern monsoon. The differences between the two parts can be seen at the Hai Van pass (parallel 16). To the south, the terrain is rather flat with the 2,588m peak of Ngoc Linh and where the climate and landscape is quite different from neighbouring areas.

Diverse terrain structure has created a variety of ecosystems: Marine; coastal sand dunes; islands; limestone with famous caves; midland; high mountain; mangrove; humid evergreen forest; pine and industrial planted forests. Each ecosystem has its own features. Nature has experienced millions of years forming the unique strip of peninsula, a territory rich, beautiful and copious and possessing harmony between mountains and deltas with interlacing rivers, and canals and the ocean.

Vietnam has a history of more than 4000 years, and has a diverse culture of 54 ethnic minority groups. Thus it is not only the cradle of human beings but is also the cradle of many habitats and fauna and flora resources. In the 1940s, the natural resources of Vietnam were copious and diverse, with around 11,000 plant species covering half the territory (43.8%). Formerly, the land surface was covered in an evergreen coat of carpets of green grass, forest and bushes. Vietnam also possesses a variety of tree species from South-East Asia, and is one of three important sources of trees in the world. This is due to the favourable humid climate, which is the basis for development of agriculture, forestry, seafood farming, and sustainable ecotourism.

Past and present practice (and possible practice in the future), has seen the development of farming, animal and poultry raising, however the gathering of products from wild animal and plants continues to remain a necessary part of socio-economic development. Environmental conservation and balancing natural and human eco-systems is also necessary. Besides the fact that species of wild animals and plants commonly provide food for people in local mountainous and island areas, they also provide valuable things that cannot be obtained from domesticated animals and plants, such as: venom, gall, horns, antler, deer, ecological chemical substances...even animal and reptile leather, feathers. Jungle animals and plants are considered tourism attractions.

As we know, presently, in African, American, European, Asian countries...a network of national parks and protected areas have been established, not for the purposes of hunting animals or gathering forestry products, but to observe colourful nature. It should be recognised that the protection of biodiversity means the protection of wild and domesticated animals in order to preserve, sustainably, genetic pools, especially local genetic pools. For tropical ecosystems, conserving wild animals plays a long-term role, because the local or endemic species are adapted to the local environmental conditions. This is the basis for choosing species with high adaptation abilities for hybridisation. It is possible to raise and farm hybrid species on the family farm and make economic activities in rural areas more productive, like in the VAC system in Vietnam. It is also a site of interest for tourists to study the cultivation tradition in an area.

To correctly assess the role of forest bio-diversity in serving sustainable economic development strategies and ecotourism in each locality and the country as a whole, we must not ignore assessment of the present quantity and quality of habitats and populations, distributed in different biosystems within tropical forest biosystems.

II. Zones of high biodiversity - great potential for ECOTOURISM

1. The meaningful role of biodiversity in sustainable development.

Since the beginning of the renovation period and the implementation of its socio-economic development plans, the Vietnam Government has paid attention to establishment of protected areas. Between 1986 and 1990, 90 zones with a total area of 952,822 ha have been established. As of 1997, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has proposed to increase the total number of protected areas to 105, including 10 national parks, 61 nature reserves, and 34 cultural historical and environmental sites with a total area of 2,092.446 ha. These protected areas are conserving and maintaining biodiversity, including many representative endemic species of plants and animals of Vietnam and the world. The system of protected areas, containing an abundance of animal and plant genetic resources, is scattered around the country from 8°20' to 23° north, a length of 3,200km. The system of protected areas also contains a cultural diversity of 54 ethnic minorities, with local culture, religion, traditional occupations, urban and rural 'literature'.
The above resources play an extremely important part of environmental protection, and have potential as the foundation for tourism in general in Vietnam, and ecotourism in particular.

2. Some well known, original, tourism attractions.

2.1. First of all, come to Tay Bac, and stay for a long time to enjoy a cluster of original ecosystems including the forests of Chieng Sinh and Xuan Nha; Cop stream (Ma River), Son La; To Hap Huong forest in historical Dien Bien Phu (Lai Chau province). Look at the forests of attractive Ban flowers, somewhere in the forest you may see bears climbing trees seeking nectar, monkeys, silly deer and flying squirrels (petaurista petaurista) in the tall straight forests of To Hap Huong. Rising above Hoang Lien Son Range, is 3,143m high Phan Xi Pang, where the average annual temperature is not higher than 15.3°C. It is a temperate ecosystem with a variety of animals and plants. There, go to see pomu (*Fokienia hodginsii*), pine and orchid forests. At different elevations there are different interesting vegetation complexes, for example, between tropical forest at an elevation of 1,000m and *Pinaceae* forests at 2,730 - 3,000m there are species of stunted low trees covered by moss, that look very strange, and old pine trees above 2,000m.

2.2. Lets go to the North-East, where lies Ba Be national park, a fresh water lake. Nearly 300 ha, located in the centre of a limestone ecological system, and with highly valued pure water, it has been classified by IUCN as one of 20 famous fresh water lakes in the world. It possesses high biodiversity, with more than 420 floral species, and thousands of vertebrate and invertebrate species. In particular, the beautiful primate *Rhinopithecus avinculus* that is endemic to Ba Be area and Na Hang (Tuyen Quang), and lives in tropical evergreen monsoon forest. Leaving land ecosystems behind, lets travel to the well known bay of Ha Long dotted with thousands of islands.

2.3 Cat Ba National Park is about 30km from Hai Phong. Scattered forests, limestone mountains and sea; made up of 336 small and large islands, the Park also has a diversity of ecosystems with 28 species of animals, hundreds of species of birds, 20 species of amphibians and reptiles, as well as beautiful coral reefs. Cat Ba island is also home to primates, especially *Trachypithecus francoisi poliocephalus* which is endemic to the island and has become the symbol for Cat Ba National Park.

2.4 Tourist attractions in the Red River Delta include: the *Fagaceae* forests of Chi Linh and Pha Lai; Yen Tu peak; Tam Dao, Ba Vi, Cuc Phuong National parks, and Huong Son landscape with the famous Perfume pagoda. There is the famous primary forest of Cuc Phuong with one thousand year old Cho trees (*parashorea chinensis*); caves in Ninh Binh and Huong Tich; the scenic landscape and waterfalls of Tam Dao Mountains, home to the endemic fish species *Paramesotriton delouteli*.

2.5 It is very interesting to visit the protected areas in the North Truong Son Range such as: Pu Mat, Pu Hong (Nghe An), Vu Quang, Ke Go (Ha Tinh), Phong Nha, Ke Bang (Quang Binh) or the National Parks of Ben En (Thanh Hoa) and Bach Ma (Thua Thien Hue). These are famous places where new species of birds animals were discovered in the 1980’s and 90’s: Sao la (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*), Mang Lon (*megamuntiacus Vuquangensis*), Loi (*Lophara hatinhensis*) and many species of fish newly discovered in the Lam River. When talking about ecotourism you should not miss Phong Nha-Ke Bang caves - famous for their historical role in Vietnam’s Resistance against the Americans. Mother Suot - a Vietnamese heroine lived and worked tirelessly in this sandy area to assist the Vietnamese struggle. So the area becomes a human-ecotourism zone of the central part of Vietnam. Don’t hurry to leave, please stay to recall memories of a hot place in wartime but which is now very mellow in peacetime.

2.6 Passing over Hien Luong Bridge you can reach Quang Tri, Khe Sanh Duong Chin (Route 9) - Nam Lao, and the valleys of A luoi, and 30km long A Xoa. Here, you can see the ecological damage from Agent Orange. You can view the damage to the environment caused by defoliants 20 years ago, and see that the environment has not recovered. What can we do now to enjoy the green environment of the 1960’s? That is a quick look back to the past, now we look forward to the solutions to restore the ecosystem here in order to create harmony between the beauty of the ancient imperial city of Hue and the natural beauty of Nam Dong - Phong Dien, which is home to *Lophia edwardsi* - one kind of beautiful bird, belonging to the quail branch, which was found in mid 1996.

2.7 On the way to the South of Vietnam, passing over Hai Van pass, we reach a handful of attractions: Son Tra peninsula, Non Nuoc pagoda, Lao Cham island. We also come to the famous Tra My cinnamon forest and go through the yellow ‘lon bon’ forest, which belongs to Hien. East of Quang Nam is home to the Ca Tu minority who has maintained and protected a famous collection of antlers and skulls of small *Caninmuvitilus truongsonensis*. This is one of Vietnam’s newly discovered species - discovered in April 1997. It would be
interesting for you to have a chance to meet this small animal in the wild.

2.8 Entering Central Vietnam, Nha Trang is noted for its beautiful beach. Please come to see the group of islands of Hon Cau, Hon Nam, Dao Ca, Dao Khi, and especially, Chim Yen Hang island (renowned for *Collocalia brevirostris innominata* of Central Vietnam). The windy highlands of basalt soil are famous for the South East Asian forest ecosystem of *Diptercarpacea*, which is home to wild elephants. Buon Don with a small area near Seirepok river is home to seven ethnic minorities living in Buon Don. Buon Tri whose traditional occupation, generation after generation, is the taming of wild elephants. Here, we will enjoy observing the skills of the village elders of M.Nong, E De in catching and taming wild elephants.

This is also recognised as a place of high biodiversity, it is the only place in Vietnam, as well as in South-East Asia, where can be found all four species of grey cow (*Bos sauveli*) and twist antlers cow (*Novovibos spiralis*) and a variety of species of birds, animals, reptiles, fish, and rare plant species, that are endemic to Vietnam. Bordering Tay Nguyen, Cat Tien National Park (Dong Nai), area 35,000 ha, protects the *Rhinoceros sondaicus* which is found in small numbers in the area of Cat Loc. It is possible for your to see herds of *crocodylis*, Loc fish and flocks of birds numbering in the thousands. Leaving Dong Nai - Song Be, you come to Con Gio ecosystem that has been restored since 1976. It is easy to see populations of long tail monkeys (*Macaca fascicularis*), wild pig (*sus serofa*). Then to the bird havens of Bac Lieu, Tran Van Thoi, Ngoc Hien, with tens of thousands of birds, including about 50 species of water birds.

2.9 You should not miss visiting Phu Quoc Con Dao island. A famous historical place and home to the Con Dao tortoise. The World Wild Fund for Nature has been helping Con Dao National Park to breed, raise and then release the tortoise into the ocean. You will be lucky to visit Con Dao forest, where there are many species of birds and animals, of particular note is the endemic Con Dao squirrel (*Callosciurus finlaysoni*).

From the above presentation, we can conclude that the diversity of natural resources as well as Vietnam’s cultures offer great potential for the development of tourism in general and ecotourism in particular.

**Proposals**

To ensure sustainable ecotourism development we propose that management agencies co-operate with bodies studying the ecological environment and resource exploitation in order to plan projects for those areas with conditions conducive to the development of tourism. At the same time, it is very necessary to coordinate with management boards of national parks and protected areas as well as local authorities at all levels, especially with respect to the issue of sharing profits from ecotourism.
ECOTOURISM AND MANAGEMENT OF THE TOURISM ENVIRONMENT IN VIETNAM'S NATIONAL PARKS

Le Van Lanh

Secretary General of the Sub-Association of Vietnam's National Parks and Protected Areas

Introduction:

Tourism is one of the biggest industries on the globe. However, to date there had been few studies on the management of the tourism environment. Ecotourism has recorded the fastest growth amongst the various branches of the tourism industry. Yet, people's understanding of ecotourism remains very limited.

Up to now, Vietnam has established ten national parks with a total area of 252,209 hectares in a bid to preserve the country's forest ecology, genetic resources, historical relics and exotic unique landscapes, and for scientific study and environmental education purposes, as well as for servicing tourism and the recreational needs of the people. As ecotourism activities in national parks are currently at an early stage, it is necessary to outline a proper master plan and a suitable management system.

Briefing on ecotourism:

Definitions of ecotourism are various. However, there has been fairly unanimous agreement that ecotourism is a form of nature tourism which includes education and explanation of the natural environment. At the same time, it supports conservation activities and is managed in an ecologically sustainable manner. At an ecotourism site, visitors will visit, explore, judge and enjoy natural and cultural areas without causing any unacceptable damage to the ecology and culture of the resource.

Environmental organisations generally consider that tourism based on nature and sustainably managed, supporting conservation activities and including environmental education is likely to be termed ecotourism.

There are four main connections between tourism and environment as follows: components of the natural environment are the basis for attracting markets and are the tourism products; tourism management helps minimise or reduce the environmental impact of tourism; direct or indirect contributions of tourism - economically or materially - to conservation; tourist behavior towards the environment and environmental education given to the tourists by operators.

So there are some main environmental aspects incorporated into tourism business, in the areas of: products and markets, management, monetary matters and human beings.

Tourism environmental management in Vietnam's national parks:

Ecotourism is one of the managerial concerns of national parks. One of the various functions and benefits of parks is to provide leisure for and educate tourists. These activities, in return, bring considerable income to cover the management costs of parks. However, there have been many cases where tourism activities are out of the control of the park managers. In many cases, major infrastructure facilities have been overused, natural resources have been exhausted and the locals have been excluded from tourism activities and received no
Overburden and misuse of natural resources, the construction of hotels, inns, infrastructure, facilities and other tourism operations have impacted on the environment. The impacts are not only environmental but also social and cultural. In general, tourism impacts vary and depend on the amount and nature of the tourists and the characteristics of the tourism site. Any single tourist only has a small impact on the environment. Problems will only occur with a great number of tourists or where the natural resources are misused.

Consequently, although tourism can bring profits to parks it also challenges their management activities. As with most other issues, the negative impacts of tourism are only effectively managed if they are identified, clarified and assessed and management measures are subsequently developed.

The impacts of tourism upon parks can be divided into two types: indirect and direct impacts. While tourists trigger direct impacts, the construction of tourism infrastructure causes indirect impacts.

Direct impacts of tourism on the environment can categorised as follows:

- Impact on geomorphological features, minerals and fossils.
- Impacts on land.
- Impacts on water resources.
- Impacts on flora.
- Impacts on animal behaviour.
- Impacts on hygiene.
- Impacts on landscape.
- Impacts on cultural environment.

It should be noted that the ecological impacts of tourism activities rarely happen alone. Impacts often occur either simultaneously or cumulatively and can be predicted at a certain level. Sites with many entertainment activities will be the first to be affected adversely. Experiences here can be used to forecast changes or future occurrences at other places where increased usage density or misuse occur.

The management of national parks is one of the most urgent matters facing many countries. The number of visits to the world's parks are increasing. In some places, the number of visits is rocketing, even doubling or tripling within one year, although many of them do not meet tourism conditions and standards. The staff of these parks have not been trained to manage tourism. Moreover, faced with new managerial challenges, they lack sufficient funds and staff and are facing increasing pressure from development in surrounding areas.

All these factors are threatening the conservation of the parks. These dangers can be reduced once ecotourism develops in accordance with principles of conduct and a proper plan.

ECOTOURISM GUIDELINES

Guidelines for ecotourists (ethics based guidelines):

- Respecting local culture without bringing urban lifestyle to the destinations.
- Neither approaching too closely to wild animals nor feeding them.
- Not collecting protected and endangered animals and plants.
- Not buying protected and endangered animals or plants or products made from them.
- Carrying rubbish back home and trying not to pollute the land and water environment.
- Studying culture and nature of the destinations being visited before departure.
- Paying attention to the day-to-day life of residents and environmental issues at the destination during the visit.
- Learning to live with nature and become closer to nature, based on the experiences gained during the visit.

Ecotourism guidelines for tour operators and tourist guides:
• Planning the tour and upgrading the tour from a nature based on to an ecological one.
• Choosing tourism sites ready to receive ecotourism.
• Lending an ear to the opinions of tourism professionals, non-governmental conservation organisations as well as local communities during the planning process.
• Not receiving tourist groups of more than 20.
• Briefing tourists before departure.
• Employing tourist guides with knowledge and experience in ecotourism.
• Using local tourist guides who are familiar with the local culture and nature.
• Choosing accommodation managed by locals, and presenting environmentally-meaningful gifts and souvenir to the tourists.
• Encouraging tourists to interact with the locals.
• Collecting the opinions of both locals and tourists to apply to the development of subsequent tours.

Guidelines for lodge owners:

• Choose appropriate accommodation for ecotourists.
• Minimise impacts on the local environment and culture when planning the construction of accommodation facilities.
• Watch for impacts of the accommodation facilities on the surrounding environment, landscape, energy and river systems.
• Avoid providing unnecessary services and facilities.
• Inform/educate tourists about the local nature and culture.
• Exchange information with local naturalists, conservation groups and through education means like reception centres.
• Look for locally produced souvenirs and food items available for sale on the premises.
• Exchange ecotourism knowledge and information gained with the local community.
• Take part in education events and activities related to the conservation of nature and local culture.

Guidelines for managers of national and local protected natural areas:

• Be aware of the resilience of protected natural areas in order to establish the maximum number of tourists and prevent overburdening of the area.
• Limit behaviors which have negative effects on the environment; introducing activities which have the smallest effects on the nature.
• Develop a system where profits gained from ecotourism activities are used to protect protected natural areas.
• Build up environmental education facilities like reception centres and nature trails.
• Disseminate environmental education which includes information pertaining to the natural resource and host community culture.
• Provide tourism operators and tourist guides with research and training opportunities.
• Support environment education activities run by voluntary and private organisations.
• Link ecotourism with the management plan for the protected area and consider it as an important part of the plan.
• Observe the links between tourism and nature conservation and local communities.
• Set up an ecotoursim model within the national parks.

Ecotourism planning for national parks:

Ecotourism in national parks should be oriented/organised to get maximum long term benefits and minimise negative impacts. Planning needs a long term approach. In some areas the conservation requirements can prohibit some kinds of ecotourism or reduce the frequency of use of other forms of tourism. Social and environmental obstacles should be recognised before introducing ecotourism.

Planning requires comprehensive study, appraisal and the awareness of the natural areas and local community and culture related to the natural areas. The plan should include significant contributions by the locals. These contributions should be included at an early stage.

Each national park should be scrutinised individually, according to its own characteristics, such as: the integrity of the natural resource, the ecological resilience or carrying capacity and accessibility. For example: the biodiversity protection value of Ba Vi National Park is less than than of the Vu Quang Nature Reserve. However, Ba Vi park has higher potential for tourism because of its landscape, water fall, relic and proximity to
Bach Ma national park also has high tourism potential. It offers beautiful scenic views towards the cities of Hue and Da Nang and to the coast. It is very accessible due to the fact that the park is only 5 km away from National Highway No 1. Well managed and planned accommodation and services could well serve a great number of visitors without causing any harm to the forest and the wildlife. Bach Ma also has a high biodiversity value. Yet, most of the plant species there are also found in other protected areas.

If we consider comprehensively the national park system throughout the country, it would be wiser to develop tourism in Bach Ma, rather than Cat Tien. Not all of the national parks have ecotourism products.

Vietnam is developing a master plan on ecotourism with contributions from local people. The rules, investment policy and tourism policy of the State should be firmly established before tourism reaches fragile national parks.

The participation of the local community:

Ecotourists are pleased to pay an extra sum for conservation, so planners should assure that this sum will be used for conservation activities. The main thing is that the local people should be allowed to participate early in the planning process. In addition, competent agencies should cooperate with other organisations and local people in the process.

In order to get profits from ecotourism and participate in conservation, the locals should play an active role in tourism planning and provide services and accommodation for the ecotourists. Profits gained from ecotourism should be used for the conservation of the local natural resources and the protected areas. So, the locals should be aware of these interrelationships.

Ecotourism development in national parks should be in combination with the development of the community nearby. Development projects should combine the protection of the national parks, ecotourism and suitable development of the community nearby.

Conservation should be helped with funds. To be effective, tourism projects should have the participation of a large number of the locals. For example, a small tourism project will be much more effective if we hire some local people for tourist guides or forest keepers, instead of using professional tourist guides. The local people should be encouraged to invest in the planting of trees, management of nursery gardens or providing accommodation.

Unfortunately, ecotourism does not always fit with the ecological protection. If development targets and conservation goals are not complementary, it can lead to the degradation of natural resources, and reduce the potential and profits gained from ecotourism.

The most obvious reason is that we do not care about local needs nor do we value the contributions they can make. This is mirrored by the fact that they are not empowered to take part in the planning process. The local community should be encouraged to participate in ecotourism projects within national parks. They can join in the following activities:

- Planning ecotourism projects, such as: undertaking surveys, contributing opinions for the plan, suggesting implementation alternatives.
- Construction of infrastructure: roads, trail clearance, construction of reservoirs, hostels, inns and entertainment spots.
- Providing catering, hostel and gift sales services. These activities, in turn, will attract many people into livestock raising, tree planting and producing handicrafts.
- Guiding tourists. Training plans should be drawn up to develop local human resources. Hunters/poachers should be converted into tourist guides.
- Participating in visitor transportation, taking care of and repairing transportation means.

Ecotourism development projects should be put to tender. However, priorities should be given to investors and local organisations and agencies situated nearby the national parks.
The main problem here is what benefit the people can gain from ecotourism activities. Firstly, they will directly benefit from the above activities. Tourism projects should prioritise the local people; the more participation opportunities the better. Apart from using the profits gained from ecotourism to cover the costs of conservation activities, part of the profits should be also set aside for the development of some public facilities for the local community, such as: electricity, road, school, clinic, restoration, rebuilding, and preservation of local cultural activities.

**Conclusion:**

National park managers have much hope of what ecotourism can bring. They are also concerned about the challenges brought by ecotourism.

The impacts of ecotourism are very clear. The potential price we have to pay is environmental degradation, economic instability and inequality and other negative social and cultural changes. The potential benefits of ecotourism are in bringing financial resources to national parks, jobs for the locals living nearby the parks, promoting environmental education and raising the awareness of conservation.

To reduce the cost and increase potential benefits, ecotourism development should be based on principles of conduct, be well planned and have the participation of the local community in the management process.

Recognising the role of ecotourism in nature conservation, the Sub-Association of Vietnam's National Parks and Protected Areas and the Centre for Environment, Tourism and Development of the Vietnam Forestry Science and Technology Association have carried out some surveys, studies and research on ecotourism:

- In 1995 in cooperation with New Zealand's Tourism Resource Consultants it has formulated a trial plan for nature tourism and adventure tourism for four national parks: Cat Ba, Cuc Phuong, Bach Ma and Cat Tien. Reports were sent to the parks and related tourism operators.
- In 1996 organised a technical training course on planting fruit trees and ecotourism for foresters of the Cuc Phuong National Park and tourism activists at Khanh hamlet - a buffer zone of the park.
- In 1996, in cooperation with Japan's National Parks Association and ecotourism experts of the World Wild Fund, organised a training course on ecotourism at Bach Ma National Park. Participants included the park's foresters, tourist operators of six tourism companies and tourism managers of Thua Thien-Hue province.
- In 1996-7 in cooperation with Japan's National Parks Association undertook a survey and draw ecotourism maps for Tam Dao, Ba Vi, Cuc Phuong and Bach Ma National Parks.
- In coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development organised a seminar on the "Participation of local communities in the management of protected areas in Vietnam". The seminar was held in Ho Chi Minh city in December last year. Many reports on the rights and responsibilities of the people in ecotourism activities at national parks were presented.

The above initial activities have greatly contributed to the study, planning and development of ecotourism in Vietnam's national parks and protected areas.

The Sub-Association of Vietnam's National Parks and Protected Areas would like to cooperate with domestic and foreign agencies to continue to conduct studies, surveys and plans in order to develop sustainable ecotourism for national parks and protected areas. We hope this seminar will bring many new cooperative opportunities to all people concerned.
ECOTOURISM WITH THE CONSERVATION
AND DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL PARKS

Nguyen Ba Thu & Nguyen Huu Dzung,
Forest Protection Department

1. Ecotourism - a brief outline

In recent years, ecotourism has been rapidly developed and it has generated a considerable source of revenue for a number of national parks in the world. For example, the revenue that the Chitwan National Park of Nepal gained from ecotourism activities during the period between 1989-1990 has doubled the invested capitals for its development (Nepal and Weber 1993). In the meantime, ecotourism in a number of national parks in Thailand have also brought about the revenue up to 3-10 times as much as the costs for their management (Dixon and Sherman 1990).

There have been different conceptions about ecotourism. Before, ecotourism was often regarded as a form of tourism conducted in a natural area to study and enjoy the unique features of the landscape, the beauty of the natural wild-life fauna and flora, as well as the features of local culture and history. Recently, ecotourism has a more positive meaning. Apart from meeting the demands for recreation and scientific research, ecotourism has contributed also to the conservation of the bio-diversity, culture and sustainable development. According to the Ecotourism Society, ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people" (Lindberg and Hawkins 1993).

Benefits

Ecotourism, under proper management, will not damage culture or natural resources. As above-mentioned, ecotourism could bring about a considerable amount of revenue for the national parks. However, the essential goal of ecotourism is not the simple economic benefit but is to develop its potential roles in contributing to the conservation of the beauty of landscapes, the diversity of the ecosystem, the richness of the fauna and flora and the unique features of national cultures. On the one hand, ecotourism revenue could be used to support those activities directly related to conservation activities such as awareness campaign to encourage local people's participation in the conservation efforts, reforestation such as the buffer zone tree-planting, and clean water and sanitation projects designed to improve the local people's quality of life, etc. On the other hand, ecotourism could generate more employment and thus raise income for the local people. Local people can take part in such tourism services as preparing hotels for rent, acting as tourist guides, producing traditional hand-craft goods for sale as souvenirs to tourists, etc.

This would be of particular importance for developing countries as the pressures on population and employment within and adjacent to the national park areas are always very high. In fact, the existence of national parks depends largely on the improvement of the relationship between the park management and the local community. Many reports presented in recent conferences and seminars on national parks and protected areas argued that the local people would give support and actively participate in the conservation of national parks should they also get direct benefits from these national parks (McNeely and Miller 1984; McNeely 1992).

In addition, ecotourism can contribute to raising the local community education and public health through education on the environment, cultures, history and recreation. Though it is hard to be calculated in money terms, this benefit obviously has positive impacts on the environmental conservation efforts, and helps bring about a comprehensive education and training so that the local people can enjoy a better knowledge and health care. In short, ecotourism is a good means to raise the people's understanding about the environment, and through this process public support could be mobilised for the benefits of national parks.
Shortcomings

Ecotourism without proper management, however, could not bring about practical benefits for the conservation efforts while it could create additional pressures on the national parks. Bad management of ecotourism in national parks could destroy the beauty of the natural landscapes, create adverse impacts on the ecosystem already sensitive as well as the fauna and flora there. These problems have occurred in a number of national parks in the world and also in Vietnam. For example, tourism activities in the National Park of Sagarmatha in Nepal have aggravated the deforestation situation because of tourists’ demands for fuelwood and in general they have changed the traditional customs and lives of the local people (Weber 1991). Similarly, ecotourism in the Republic of Korea has also destroyed the natural resources and eroded their cultures (Woo 1991). In Vietnam, though still in its initial stage of development, ecotourism in nature reserves has created a number of negative impacts to the natural environment. Problems such as pollution resulting from tourists’ wastes, bird and animal hunting for tourists’ souvenirs could be seen in the Tam Dao National Park and the Huong Tich area.

Furthermore, ecotourism with the wrong conceptions would neither bring about direct benefits for the national parks nor to the local people who live within and adjacent to the area. It is the fact that the major proportion of revenues from national parks in the world would go to governments’ reserve banks or to tourism companies which are not much related to the conservation work (Machlis and Tichnell 1985; Cochrane 1996).

2. National Parks in Vietnam

At present, there are 10 national parks scattered almost equally in all typical ecological regions of Vietnam (see table below).

Table. National Parks in Vietnam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of N. Parks</th>
<th>Location (province)</th>
<th>Area (ha)</th>
<th>Year of Establishment</th>
<th>Special Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ba Be</td>
<td>Bac Can</td>
<td>23,340</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>forests and lakes on limestone mountains, snub-nosed langur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ba Vi</td>
<td>Ha Tay</td>
<td>7,377</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>semi-tropical forests, pine trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bach Ma</td>
<td>Thua Thien - Hue</td>
<td>22,030</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>central-region-type semi-tropical forests, crested argus, douc langur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben En</td>
<td>Thanh Hoa</td>
<td>16,634</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>low-region tropical evergreen forests, erythrglioeum-pordii, elephants, tigers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat Ba</td>
<td>Hai Phong</td>
<td>15,200</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>tropical forests on limestone mountains</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Functions and roles of national parks

The above-mentioned national parks are developed in order to serve the following objectives:

- to protect natural landscapes of national and international importance, to serve scientific study, educational and ecotourism purposes;
- to maintain in a sustainable manner the natural or quasi-natural status, typical cultural regions, biological populations, genetic resources to ensure diversity and sustainability;
- to maintain the natural landscapes, the habitats of the wild fauna and flora, and the historical relics of scientific and educational values; and
- to develop ecotourism.

3. Objective Demands for Ecotourism in National Parks

Recreation Demand

Vietnam has a high population density. At present, most of the country's land areas have been exploited in order to meet people's demands for agricultural, forest, infrastructures, roads and industrial area developments. Now only few natural areas with their wild nature rarely touched or impacted by human being are left and most of them have been designated as national parks and protected areas. In the countries already industrialised or being in the industrialised process, the number of people using their recreation vacations in local or foreign protected areas is now on the rise (Cochrane 1996). Therefore, ecotourism development in national parks is an objective demand. It could be regarded as the bridge linking the nature and human being. It provides conditions so that tourists could relax in a healthy manner in the vast open

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Park</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Area (ha)</th>
<th>Year of Establishment</th>
<th>Plant and Animal Species</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cat Tien</td>
<td>Dong Nai</td>
<td>37,900</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Podocarpus fleuryi, white-head langur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con Dao</td>
<td>Ba Ria Vung Tau</td>
<td>15,043</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>island forests, marine animals: Dugong, sea turtles (Caretta olivacea, Eretmochelys imbricata)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuc Phuong</td>
<td>Ninh Binh, Thanh Hoa, Hoa Binh</td>
<td>22,200</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>forests on limestone mountains Cucphuong langur, Podocarpus fleuryi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tam Dao</td>
<td>Vinh Phu, Tuyen Quang, Bac Thai</td>
<td>36,883</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>semi-tropical forests, snub-nosed langur, black langur, Forkienia hodginsii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yok Don</td>
<td>Dac Lac</td>
<td>58,200</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>semi-deciduous forests, elephants, bangteng, gaur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>254,807</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 1997
nature; they can learn and witness the direct roles and significance of the ecosystems towards people’s life, and enjoy the rich fauna and flora in the national parks. Thus, this will help raise people’s knowledge and understanding about the environment.

Environmental Awareness Demand

The lack of knowledge of the useful roles of forests and other ecosystems towards people’s life is an obstacle for the conservation activities which have not become the common concerns for the entire society and have thus achieved only limited results. To overcome this problem, it is necessary to launch programs to raise people’s awareness about the environment, enabling them to better understand the ecosystem roles in the maintenance of life, and through this process people will be more voluntarily and actively involved in the environmental protection. Ecotourism is a good means for communications since it can help people get access to and appreciate the direct roles of nature towards life.

National Park and Local Community’s Demands for Increased Employment and Income

Crowded population living within and adjacent to national parks is one of the common features of most of national parks in Vietnam. Most of them are poor people whose lives largely depend on "slash and burn" farming, collection and hunting of wild animal and plants and other forest products. This is the main cause for the deforestation and decreased quantities of fauna and flora in the national park. To overcome this situation, there is a need for synchronised measures while the key question is how to raise the living standard for the local people. Ecotourism development based on community participation will contribute to creating more employment and incomes for local people. Experience from the Cuc Phuong National Park shows that proper management of ecotourism can attract a certain proportion of local people to participate in the tourism industry and thus help them increase their income. At present, the Cuc Phuong National Park managers have co-operated with the local authorities and people to build three tourism villages of Khanh, La and Bien Dong (Thu, 1995). The fact that all these villages are located in the buffer zone of the national park has minimized the negative impacts of tourism activities on the park. These tourism villages are linked with the tourism network of the national park which has been developed by the park staff members. With the income from ecotourism, the Cuc Phuong National Park has helped the local people to improve their gardens’ value, carry out mini hydropower projects, improve rural road network, etc. In return, all these activities have created positive conditions for the management and protection of the national park.

4. Ecotourism Potential in National Parks

National parks in Vietnam have great potentials for ecotourism development thanks to the following favourable conditions:

- Most of the national parks are located close to the major transport high-ways, domestic and international airports, and major cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue and Da Nang. The diverse and flexible means of transportation generally make it easy and convenient for different kinds of tourists to get to and from the national parks;
- Each national park has its own unique features of ecosystem, fauna and flora, typically representing different ecosystem regions of Vietnam. They offer the habitats for many endemic, rare and valuable animals and plants such as Cuc Phuong langur, white-head langur (Trachypithecus phayrei), Vietnamese pheasant (Lophura hatinhensis), rhinoceros, tigers, water pine, podocarpus fleuryi, etc.
- Many national parks have beautiful natural landscapes which are famous within and outside the country such as the National Parks of Ba Be and Cat Ba. Within or close to many of these parks such as the National Parks of Cuc Phuong, Bach Ma and Con Dao, there are well-known national historic or cultural relics;
- The majority of population in Vietnam are young and have a relatively high level of education. These are the major forces that participate in the ecotourism activities. Moreover, in recent years, the reform policy (Doi Moi) has contributed to a higher level of income for the general population especially those living in the urban areas where there have been a high demand for nature-based tourism. The open-door policy and exchange of relations with foreign countries have also facilitated the flow of foreign tourists coming to visit Vietnam where national parks are regarded as the interesting destinations.
Constraints

Despite the above-mentioned advantages, ecotourism development in national parks is still limited. Now it has developed mainly at the National Parks of Cuc Phuong, Ba Vi and Tam Dao which have convenient transportation means, relatively good infrastructures. Yet, it is not possible to ascertain that ecotourism has been developed in the above-mentioned national parks in its true and proper meaning of ecotourism. In several areas, as the national park management people have not been able to manage all the activities within the park, there are still negative signs such as birds and animals are hunted for sale as souvenirs for tourists or wastes created by tourists have polluted a number of places within the park. The causes which prevent ecotourism from developing its full potentials include:

- **organisation and planning**: Vietnam has not developed a national strategy for ecotourism development. This situation leads to a uncontrolled situation where everyone can take part in this kind of business if they so wish. In the ecotourism development and management, the functions and roles of the authorities concerned, namely the tourist operators, the environmental and cultural conservationists, are often overlapped and not clearly defined, thus causing conflicts of interests.

- **natural conditions**: though being rich in biodiversity, national parks in Vietnam are characterised with the low number of individuals. Moreover, it is very difficult to observe the wildlife animals of the parks as most of them often operate at night. This may reduce the attractiveness of national parks to many tourists.

- **socio-economic aspects**: in general the population incomes are still low especially in the rural areas where 80% of the total population are living. For them, ecotourism perhaps is still a "luxury thing". For those who can afford to visit and have recreation time at the national parks, most of them have not been fully aware of the natural and environmental protection. Consequently, this leads to the pollution and sale of stuffed animals at some tourism places.

- **infrastructure**: there is still poor infrastructures for tourism services at most of the national parks. The roads to national parks are strenuous with flooding in the wet and dusts in the dry seasons. Moreover, there have been also problems with regard to accommodations, water supply and drainage systems, as well as sanitation and waste treatments, etc.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made with the aims of promoting the development of ecotourism in national parks to such a level that corresponds to their given potentials, so as to meet tourists’ demands, bring about the benefits for the local people, thus contributing to the natural and environmental conservation.

5.1. It is necessary to develop a strategy for ecotourism development with the attentions focused on ecotourism activities in national parks. Ecotourism development should be managed within the framework of the integrated conservation and development program. In this strategy, the criteria for ecotourism development to which we should pay attentions include the following:

- Ecotourism should not over-use natural resources; it has to reduce waste generation and give due attention to conservation efforts;
- Ecotourism should be organised in a rational manner and managed within a master plan for the conservation and development of national parks;
- Ecotourism has to guarantee long-term benefits for the local people who should be enabled to participate in all activities related to ecotourism development including the planning process;
- Ecotourism should be developed in harmony with the local culture;
- Ecotourism should have conditions to be developed continuously but not to do any harms to the ecological balance of the national parks or to the social relationship and local culture.

5.2. Close co-ordination is needed between different levels of authority, branches and other stakeholders that are involved in the ecotourism development and management such as tour operators, natural and cultural conservation agencies, from the central to the local agencies, etc. Given the special characteristics of ecotourism, the natural conservation agencies especially the management boards of national parks should play the key role in the planning, development and management of ecotourism activities within their parks.

5.3. Attention should be focused on the development of tourism units in the buffer zones or administrative
areas of national parks. This will facilitate the local people to participate in the tourism industry and will help limit the negative impacts on the ecosystems and the wild-life in the strictly protected areas.

5.4. The Government should give priority to ecotourism since it is not an ordinary type of business. It can play active roles in the local natural conservation and economic development. National parks should be entitled to withhold its revenues generated from ecotourism for the park's protection and management. Besides, the government should make investment in infrastructures conducive to ecotourism development including the establishment of an information centre with necessary audio-visual equipment in order to effectively provide tourists with information about national parks.
HUMAN-ECOLOGY PERSPECTIVES OF ECOTOURISM IN VIETNAM

Vo Tri Chung

Forest Research and Planning Institute

The book "Geographical tourism", co-authored by specialists, involving Nguyen Minh Tue, Vu Tuan Canh, Le Thong, Pham Xuan Hau, and Nguyen Kim Thong is considered the first basic scientific reference as well as an invaluable curriculum for high-education in Vietnam. The book, published in 1996, was one of a series of publications about Vietnam's tourism and culture. The notions, scientific arguments and specialised information systems of tourism development in Vietnam (including ecotourism) mentioned in the book should be studied and applied. Certainly, the practical applications will contribute to the improvement of the book (Geographical tourism) in which ecotourism plays a specific role.

In 1995, the "Pilot planning study of nature and adventure tourism opportunities in Vietnam", conducted in cooperation with New Zealand specialists could be seen as the pre-condition for the identification of Ecotourism in Vietnam. Following this project, when developing the Strategy for Vietnam’s Environment towards the year 2000, international organisations like UNDP, UNEP, WB, IUCN suggested that ecotourism would make great contributions to nature conservation, as well as the protection of Vietnam’s natural heritage sites and cultural relics.

Indeed, ecotourism-based values and demand are steadily increasing worldwide, and are having positive impacts on the global environment and sustainable development. Ecotourism is involved in the action plan "Man and Biosphere", which was initiated by the international community in 1970. Since its foundation, the "Man and Biosphere" action plan has made great contributions to the maintenance and development of the international community.

1. Background:

As soon as UNESCO and UNEP in cooperation with FAO introduced a series of "Natural Resources Research" in 1978, ecotourism was clearly identified, along with notions of natural leisure and nature-based profits.

The book "Geographical tourism", with notions, criteria and ongoing practical applications suggests that ecotourism should be incorporated in Vietnam's tourism development strategy in the long-run. It says that: "It is very significant to introduce scenic landscapes and natural environments to tourists. This will promote greater understanding of nature-based perspectives and the ecosystem among tourists, and hence encourage them to take up nature conservation activities. Social and environmental goals in tourism are interrelated".

In the process of development, mankind has continuously discovered and bounded their own territories. As a matter of fact, based on different natural features, human adaptation to the environment and its experiences existing with nature have definitely resulted in diversified human ecology types.

According to scientific archives, specific human ecology types are based on paddy, desert, pasture, highland, archipelago, and coastline perspectives ...Production practices and experiences, as well as social and cultural characteristics were also the principles by which to classify human ecology types with respect to Ethnic Groups, Topographical Zones and Landscape Sites. For example, human ecology of H'mong people in mountainous area, human ecology of Cham people in the coastlines, and human ecology of Gie and Trieng peoples in the forested highlands...

Ecotourism is described as an important element in Vietnam's sustainable tourism strategy. If human ecology factors are considered appropriately, ecotourism is not only alternative tourism; it promotes practical solutions for development and incorporates natural and social factors.

Sapa has so far been renowned for its moderate climate, high mountain ranges - especially Phang Xi Pang which is described as the roof of the Indochina, and the Love Market – which is said to be losing its peculiarities.
Nevertheless, tourists are little informed of the specific human ecology based on wet rice farming practices on terraced fields of the Red Dao Dai Ban and Black H'mong peoples. And, perhaps only a few know about Sapa's upstream forests and its folk songs in which the ending words of each sentence must be sung at a higher tune.

A study team from British Columbia University (Canada) was surprised to learn of such things when it carried out study tours on the host human ecology in cooperation with our Institute. We knew that they were so attracted by the peculiar human ecology type of Sapa that they were determined to formulate a pilot ecotourism project in Sapa.

I would like to present another example, i.e. human ecology of Mo Nong people, in order to further show the interrelatedness of ecotourism and human ecology. Mo Nong people living in Khop forest in the southern Central Highlands province of Daklak are known for their experience in taming wild elephants and for their elephant races at bumper harvest celebrations.

In the process of researching the human ecology in the Central Highlands, foreign experts suggested that tourism operations in the Central Highlands should not only be focused on such activities as elephant rides and dancing in Rong houses, but also incorporate discoveries of the legend of the Fire and Water Kings, and visits to To Tem in holy forests as the locals pray for better crops, fortunes and happiness.

In short, human ecology itself is playing an important part in identifying ecotourism development zones and contributing to the sustainability of ecotourism.

2. Fundamentals of human ecology:

Human ecology is a combination of various fundamentals – the natural habitat including topographical and biological features, and natural impacts. With regards to Macro Ecosystem Classification, there is a need to classify sub-natural habitats, their approach and application to ecotourism. At the same time, each ecotourism operation should involve a spectrum of specific planning and attached scientific explanations.

Human criteria have been created on the process of appearance, existence and development of mankind, with its experiences in living, farming, curing diseases, setting up communal relations, organising cultural activities, making up holy symbols, and manufacturing production tools.

For every people and nation, historical events of national development, national defence can be seen as a contribution to human peculiarities. The Vietnamese nowadays still take pride in the struggles and victory over the Chinese invaders on Bach Dang River thousands of years ago. The victory can be linked to the human ecology at the Yen Hung -Thuy Nguyen river mouths which are home to rich fishing villages in an ecological zone of mangroves subject to tides.

The archipelago in the Tonkin is not only well-known for Ha Long Bay - an attractive tourist resort, but also for its peculiar natural ecosystem and human ecology. The host natural ecosystem and human ecology involves a spectrum of social and natural values. Cat Ba island is said to contain the traces of primitive habitation. A long time ago, caves on these islands with its picturesque sites used to shelter the nearby fishing community. Other features here include traces of a specialised sea-port chain founded many centuries ago, including Ha Mai fishery port, Ngoc Vung port specialising in cereals transport, Cai Rong port specialising in ship building, the festival port of Quan Lan Bay, Tra Ban military port and Dong Chen market port...

Ecotourism programmes in the Tonkin Gulf should include Ha Long Bay, and human ecology resources of the north of our country, which is a valuable source of social and historical information. Likewise, Vietnam's archipelago lying on the Thailand Gulf including Phu Quoc and Kien Hai islands has its own peculiarities of human ecology.

The coastal estuaries of Hong and Thai Binh rivers not only feature mangrove forests and fishing villages, but also a significant coastal human ecology of the North of Vietnam, where residents possess invaluable experiences in dyke construction and land reclamation, as well as desalinization and removing alum from cultivated rice acreage by rotations of mangrove-cypress-reed-rice plantation. Additionally, when coming here, tourists can enjoy traditional festivals of the fishermen and various flocks of migratory birds in Spring. In the meantime, Hue - the Ancient Capital ? is characterised with its diversity of home gardens.

It is recommended that classification of ecotourism development zones needs to be based on the natural ecosystem division, with respect to topographical features and overlap of human ecology types.

3. Proposed ecotourism zones in framework of human ecology in Vietnam:
A. The natural ecosystem division:

A1. The macro ecosystem division focuses on three main regions, including the North, the Centre and the South. Distinguished by topography and geomorphology, each region can be zoned as follows: the coasts and islands, midlands and highlands. In the Central alone, for example, it is divided into sub-regions, including the Northern, the Southern and the Central Highlands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>The North</th>
<th>The Centre</th>
<th>The South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-regions</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topographical zones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waters, shores,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>archipelagoes, islands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coasts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red River Delta, Mekong Delta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands and Highlands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A2. Ecosystem classification, overlap and identity of regions and topographical zones:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-topographical zones</th>
<th>Strong bio-climate control</th>
<th>Seasonal climate</th>
<th>Hydro-geological features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Off-shore archipelagoes and islands</td>
<td>Either four distinct seasons or dry and rainy seasons</td>
<td>Prevailing wind, rain and storm</td>
<td>High-tide and storm-surge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-shore archipelagoes islands, and gulfs, either covered or uncoverred by forests</td>
<td>Either four distinct seasons or dry and rainy seasons</td>
<td>Prevailing wind, rain and storm</td>
<td>High-tide and storm-surge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Limestones, caves.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other mountains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The coastal estuaries:</td>
<td>Mobile alluvial soil and sand, appearance changing throughout seasons</td>
<td>Prevailing wind, rain and storm</td>
<td>High-tide and storm-surge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mud-flats, with or without forests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sand-dunes and sand-bars, with or without forests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A3. Classification of forest and wild fauna natural habitat

Classification of forest types and states and determination of precious and rare plants are made in accordance with the preservation list and in The Red Data Book of Vietnam, on the basis of biodiversity assessment and assortment criteria. The regional division of wild animals’ natural habitat as well as identification of precious and rare species are also made in accordance with the Red Book.

The classification and ranking system of National Parks, Natural Preservation Zones, Historical And Cultural Areas, being used as a reference in ecosystem classification, is an important linkage to ecotourism classification.

B. Classification system of human ecology:

B1. Classification of residential regions of Vietnamese ethnic groups is the basis of human ecology classification. Vietnam is home to 54 ethnic groups whose residential regions have been studied and identified and which can be found in different ethnological references and shown in the map of ethnic groups. Classification on the basis of ecohabitation is made by combining the maps of residential regions, geography and ecosystems.

B2. The main criteria to identify, sum up and classify human ecology types in conformity with the Indicator Key include:

- Water rice cultivation in plains;
- Off-shore, inshore, river, swamp and lake fishing;
- Water rice cultivation in terrace fields;
- Cultivation in terrace fields, intensive and rotational farming, shifting cultivation.
- Hunting, fruit picking in cliff or limestone mountains;
- Shifting, semi-intensive cultivation of drought resistant plants and animal breeding in highlands;
- Hunting and breeding in grasslands which are seasonally cleared and burnt;
- Home-gardening and perennial plant cultivation;
- Identified protected areas and community forests;
- Traditional handicraft villages with a long experience in plant cultivation, poultry breeding and producing mineral-based traditional handicrafts;
- Material and cultural characters relating to natural resources of residential regions such as: Rong houses built of local wood and grass; temples and communal houses built of wood, bricks and tiles provided by local handicraft villages; musical instruments made of stone or bamboo; traditional household tools and weapons; clothes; embroidered cloth; dyes;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coastal marshes, with or without forests</th>
<th>Distinct dry and rainy season, hot and humid</th>
<th>Prevailing wind, rain and storm</th>
<th>Annual storms and floods throughout the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-shore salt-marshes, flooded due to seasons, natural lakes, and artificial lakes</td>
<td>Artificial lakes change regional macro-climate</td>
<td>Prevailing wind, rain and storm</td>
<td>Annual storms and being flooded throughout the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Populous and rich deltas</td>
<td>Either distinct seasons or dry and rainy season.</td>
<td>Prevailing wind, rain and storm</td>
<td>Annual storms and being flooded throughout the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow-valley deltas in the Midlands, hills and vast highlands</td>
<td>Regional whirlwind, hail, frost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lime mountains, with or without forests</td>
<td>Cool and humid Hot and humid</td>
<td>Prevailing wind</td>
<td>Karst under-ground water Under-ground rivers and lakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-mountain ranges, with or without forests</td>
<td>Cold Cool and humid Hot and humid</td>
<td>Prevailing wind</td>
<td>Flooding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Spiritual culture, traditional cultural performances, festivals, traditional long poems, communal symbols, writings and curves. Communal laws, traditions and customs etc.;
- Medicines; medicinal herbs and species;
- Historical events which help enrich and diversify Human communal/national cultures.

Hereinafter are examples which prove the significance of the classification of ecosystem and human ecology in ecotourism.

The Van Kieu ethnic minority lives from cultivating terrace fields but maintains and worships the old jungle as a holy symbol of a saint who oversees the life of everyone. Van Kieu people consider the Ta lu (a special musical instrument made of the skin of an old gourd) as the symbol of the Mother who created humans. The voice of Ta lu is therefore called a lullaby. The Van Kieu drinks a unique wine, which can not be found elsewhere, made of the Doac plant taken from the forest of the northern area of central Vietnam.

The Thai ethnic minority lives nearby rivers, large streams and cultivate wet rice on terraced rice fields surrounding their villages. Thai people know how to protect the forest to maintain water sources which are used to run Pat (a kind of rotary wheel to irrigate fields and to pound rice). This ethnic group also knows how to weave and embroider cloth.

Chut people live in limestone mountains in Quang Binh province, home of Phong Nha cave ? a beauty spot of considerable tourism potential. This ethnic minority principally lives by harvesting natural resources and shifting cultivation in narrow terrace fields.

4. Ecotourism development in Vietnam

A. Specialist ecotourism activities should be worked out, implemented and developed in Vietnam. Ecotourism has been developed in various countries since the 1960s. A system of orthodox ecotourism theories has been researched, set up and taught at university and post-graduate levels. It has also been taught in specialised tourism schools and short term training courses held by international organisations. Ecotourism in countries like Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Canada, the United States, Malaysia, China and Japan, which are ranked top in terms of this speciality, has close relations with the preservation of nature, biodiversity, and natural and cultural heritage. Ecotourism in these countries is also included in national as well as global environmental strategies.

Vietnam is a tropical country affected by seasonal rains. Despite its not-too-large territory, Vietnam has suitable natural conditions for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. The country has a long history of communal civilisation and national construction. Vietnam is rich in natural resources as well as human culture. Vietnamese ecotourism is based on the characters and diversification of the two systems: Natural Ecology and Human Ecology. Actual values of these two precious systems cannot be denied. Official summaries and assessments should be made, and a system of scientific documents and specialist lectures on Vietnamese ecotourism should be set up. It is time to make official nation-wide and regional ecotourism masterplans. There need to be written norms of ecotourism for each region and route.

Ecotourism norms include academic concepts, knowledge, structure and contents, implementation methods, and effective requirements.

B. Ecotourism, not only in Vietnam but also in almost all developing countries, is a powerful motivation for, as well as the main element of, the development of sustainable tourism. Ecotourism can be both economically and environmentally effective/beneficial. Ecotourism development planning should agree with Vietnamese natural and socio-economic factors. The duration of each planning period should not be less than 20 years.

Ecotourism masterplans should be based on the classification of ecosystems and human ecology (mentioned in section 3). Technical tools, including software and hardware, should play a key role in planning in order to raise the credibility and the feasibility of the masterplans, making them conform with Vietnamese conditions. The tools are as follows:

- The GIS with tele-reconnaissance photos, specialist maps and related data;
- The ARC/INPO program in conjunction with the SPAN to assess dynamic ecological trends;
- The BIM program in the data system of biodiversity and natural preservation;
- The APM program to assess products and efficiency of utilisation of resources and land.
Ecotourism planning models and methods of New Zealand, Malaysia and Nepal are considered to match many Vietnamese conditions in terms of territorial size as well as natural and socio-economic factors.

C. Feasible projects, including inter-country ecotourism programs should be priorities and receive preferential treatment in Vietnam’s ecotourism masterplan. These projects will motivate and instigate the development of Vietnamese ecotourism.

International rivers, mountain ranges, seas and common cultural characters should be used as bases to set up inter-country projects helping nations exchange their marketing information and specialist experiences, and engage in healthy competition as well. Ecotourism routes across countries include:

- **International rivers**: Through these routes, natural knowledge and human histories are highlighted. The rivers include Mekong (linking China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam), Hong (China and Vietnam), Ky Cung-Bang Giang (Vietnam and China), Ma (Vietnam and Laos), etc.

- **International mountains**: Truong Son (linking Vietnam and Laos) and Hoang Lien Son (Vietnam and China), where systems of national parks and natural preservation areas are located.

- **International seas**: where marine parks, coral reefs, beauty spots and islands can be reached.

- **The South East Asian water-rice civilisation axis**: Linking Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

- **Buddhist pilgrimage**: Crossing India, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, China and Vietnam.

- **The Himalayan flora**: Covering Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, China and Vietnam.

Many Vietnamese regions are peculiar, with regards to human ecology, and constitute components of a national ecotourism system. The regions, which should be officially planned, developed, managed and used, are as follows:

- **Ha Long and Bai Tu Long bays**: with national parks and marine parks, historical vestiges and archipelago communal cultures.

- **Ba Be lake and Pia-Uac mountain**: with communal cultures of Tay and Nung ethnic minorities.

- **Huu-Lien Cai-Kinh, Bac Son culture**: North East limestone mountainous human ecology, ethnological relic.

- **Tay Con Lihn**: the region of rare and precious gymnosperms. This is also a human ecology region of Dao Dai Ban and Dao Ao Dai ? the two groups of the Dao ethnicity characterised by terrace field cultivation.

- **Chu Tangsin**: with a system of natural lakes and vestiges of ancient volcanoes in the south of the Central Highlands. This is the human ecology region of Meong and K’ho ethnicities, with typical Khop forest and rare species.

- **Zones of large and pinnate leaf trees within the Lang Biang highland**: home to the K’ho and Ma ethnicities’ human ecology region “Xa Nu” (a derivative strain of pine-tree).

- **Ca Mau**: with the typical mangrove forest and the specific culture of a forested riverine region.

- **Nam-Du Tho Chu**: with permanent green forests, a tropical climate and seasonal rains; islands in the Western Sea and communes at the marine boundary.

- **Con Son**: with permanent green forests, a tropical climate and seasonal rains; islands in the Eastern Sea; national parks and historical vestiges.

There are other locations, areas and bio-geographic routes throughout Vietnam. Vietnam’s ecotourism potential and attractiveness is considerable, which cannot be comprehensively shown in this report, but they need to be officially included in planning.

D. Ecotourism has close relations with management of territory, natural resources, communal inhabited regions, administration, local customs and habits. In Vietnam, “every person, household, commune, district and province is rushing to be involved in tourism”. For example, the ecotourism route to Huong Pagoda ? an attractive region featured by wet land, limestone mountains and human ecology ? has been badly influenced by this situation.
The ecotourism masterplan should be officially approved by the State, and supported by laws, regulations and policies. Tourism in general and ecotourism in particular should be considered as national resources which are used, developed, managed and preserved in conformity with national laws. Ecotourism activities should be based on knowledge and norms. Ecotourism conductors, regardless of their posts, must follow the norms introduced.

Ecotourism is actually an important component contributing to the development of sustainable tourism in Vietnam, promoting natural heritage preservation and environment protection as well as increasing ecotourism’s value. Human ecology knowledge is a necessary condition to enrich ecotourism.

In conclusion, I would like to express my admiration to a Vietnamese great scholar, Le Qui Don, whose works like Phu Bien Tap Luc, Van Dai Loai Ngu etc. contain idea and writings relating to ecotourism and human ecology issues in Vietnam.

Another person, Dr. Yersin, also had a good understanding of ecotourism. He found the Nha Trang-Lang Biang route crossing a splendid natural region as well as the “Xa Nu” human ecology of K’ho and Ma ethnic groups. The famous tourism area of Da Lat has subsequently been developed.
THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PROTECTED AREAS

by Nguyen Thi Son

Department of Geography
Hanoi National University

1. BACKGROUND:

Tourism has been experiencing rapid development and has become one of the top economic activities in the world. Tourism brings a lot of benefits for relevant localities. On the other hand, tourism has some impacts, in different forms and levels, on the natural, social and cultural environments of the visited areas. Especially, the negative impact of tourism on natural environments has been increasingly recognized (Mathieson and Wall, 1982).

It is no doubt that tourism and environment are closely linked, because tourism can only exist in a naturally as well as culturally and socially attractive environment. Lipman (1992:67) said: "Tourism is of vital concern in the conservation of those things which are attractive to visitors: fresh air, clean water, beautiful landscape and good maintenance of conservation value". However, the development of tourism may have negative impacts on the surrounding environment. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure and pay attention to the harmony of tourism and environment.

In order to facilitate the contribution of tourism to natural protection, there is a need for a sound plan and action. A special form of tourism- ecotourism or nature tourism- a form of tourism that builds the relationship between tourism development and nature conservation- has become a subject of concern in tourism research over the past several decades. Ecotourism has been encouraged in protected areas with a belief that it will become a more sustainable form of tourism. However, in order to achieve this objective, greater support is needed for tourism research and education at various levels, aspects and localities. The development of such a tourism form also needs effective planning, thus enabling appropriate steps in the development process.

2. WHAT IS ECOTOURISM:

Ecotourism is a new concept which emerged in the 1980s and has rapidly achieved popular support, because everyone realizes its potential and is aware of its ideal. Many definitions of ecotourism have been put forward with different names. The foremost theorist about ecotourism is Mr. Hector Ceballos- Lascurain who in 1987 described ecotourism as follows:

"Ecotourism is travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated areas with the specific object of studying, and enjoying the scenery, its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas". Excerpt from Boo, 1990: XIV There was subsequently much research on ecotourism (Boo, 1990; Rovinski, 1991; Whelan, 1991; Wearing, 1993. Western, 1993...). Buckley (1994) reviewed this research and worked out the following definition:

"Only tourism that is nature tourism being managed for sustainability, contributing to conservation and being environmentally educated is described as ecotourism and it is often seen as authentically synonymous with nature tourism" (page 661).

Almost all definitions of ecotourism say that ecotourism is a tool for conservation and has very small impact on environment. Basically, ecotourism can be seen as:
- Naturally attractive
- Ecologically sustainable
- Improving environmental conservation through education and guidance; and
- Bringing benefits for relevant areas and localities. (Chalker 1994:90)

In short, ecotourism may help maximize economic benefits and minimize environmental damage, and become a global phenomenon (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1993).

Many names have been put forward, similar to ecotourism, and Valentine (1991:4) has collected the following names:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature based tourism</th>
<th>Environmental pilgrimage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature tourism</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature oriented tourism</td>
<td>Wildlife tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentally friendly tourism</td>
<td>Green tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental study tour</td>
<td>Specific hobby tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable tourism</td>
<td>Appropriate tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized tourism</td>
<td>Responsible tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral tourism</td>
<td>Community based tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft tourism</td>
<td>Light and heavy tourism...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ecotourism is increasingly aimed at stimulating environmental protection and cultural sustainability, and attracting those who wish to be close to the environment, to improve their knowledge, understanding of and respect for the environment but theoretically cause no damage to the environment. As a result, ecotourism may bring benefits for local people and communities through activities and opportunities created by this form of tourism. In short, the main objective of ecotourism is sustainable development, i.e. meeting present demands while causing no harm to those of future generations. (Commonwealth Department of Tourism, 1993).

In order to facilitate and stimulate this form of tourism to reap advantages, apart from the major tasks that are inevitably carried out like planning and management of ecotourism development at an appropriate level, community education about ecotourism in protected areas is equally important, supporting a two-way positive relationship between ecotourism and environmental conservation, as well as between ecotourism and local communities.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECOTOURISM AND PROTECTED AREAS

Obviously, the interest in ecotourism emerges from the increasing need for study tours of the natural environment and the wish to protect the integrity of environment. Certainly, the basic resources of ecotourism are natural attractions, making a large number of tourists interested in them. However, if protected areas are over used they will likely be destroyed (Boo, 1993). Moreover, even beauty may reach its carrying capacity when tourists have to face other visitors or observe impacts on the areas they are visiting (Whelan, 91).

Budowski, who has studied the relationship between tourism and natural environment since 1976, and Gunn (1982) share this view, so do Craig- Smith and French (1994). According to them, there are 3 types of relationships between tourism development and environmental conservation:

- “Conflict” when tourism, especially of large number of people, damages environmental conservation.
- “Coexistence” when there are few connections between tourism and environmental conservation, or when both exist independently.
"Symbiosis" when both tourism development and environmental conservation benefit from their interrelationships and support each other's purposes and activities... (See diagram No. 3.1).

These interrelationships are crucial when tourism is partly or completely based on the value of environment and natural sinks. The question is, how to make ecotourism develop sustainably and effectively? It is obviously important to clearly recognize benefits and potential for ecotourism with suggestions on solutions (Nguyen Thi Son, 1997)

**Diagram 3.1. Interrelationships between tourism and environmental conservation**

A situation may be changed into B situation which may be changed to C situation or A situation may be directly changed into C situation. Source: Craig-Smith and French (1994:46)

The establishment of national parks and protected areas are aimed at facilitating the sustainable development of ecotourism. At the same time, ecotourism, unlike ordinary forms of tourism, plays an important role in integrating conservation with development. Because part of the profit from tourism may be used to support, facilitate environmental conservation and historical relics preservation and restoration (Cohen, 1978:28).

Through ecotourism, tourists may be educated with the importance of those natural ecological systems they are visiting and support for conservation may be actively encouraged.

While ecotourism brings in benefits for communities and actively contribute to the protection of natural environment and wildlife, it may, together with other activities, jeopardize the natural resources on which it is based if it is not properly developed. Negative impacts of tourism in general, including exceeded ecotourism, may be:

- Deforestation, fauna and floral degradation
- Causing soil adhesion and erosion
- Causing pollution in various forms and levels: sanitation, solid waste, water, etc.
- Affecting wildlife
- Destroying highly sensitive floral species, causing the introduction of foreign species
- Increasing the danger of forest fires
- Destroying coral resources and sea-bed floral species (island and sea areas) by boat’s speed, etc.

These negative impact will be in direct ratio with exceeded tourism. Therefore, one of the important
challenges for ecotourism is to have an "optimum annual number of visitors" (Cohen, 1978) and to limit their staying time as well as their use of natural resources. However, this is a difficult task because it is not easy to hold back the growing demand for tourism.

National parks and protected areas have been increasingly used for tourism development because of their natural beauty and ecological diversity. They are seen as the basis for the development of ecotourism and the means to bring in potential socio-economic benefits. However, this can only be realized with the premise: It is possible for ecotourism to exist with good prospects if protected areas exist and have good prospects (Wearing, 1993).

There are also many emerging issues in protected areas that have human inhabitants. Agricultural and forest exploiting activities have resulted in the destruction of natural habitat and ecological biodiversity. Together with these activities, if tourism development does not respect the values of natural areas, increases in the number of visitors above the areas' capacity, for economic purposes will be a mistake. In order to avoid this, Chapman and Armstrong (1994:19) have proposed that "Resources managers should actively approach tourism management rather than passively receive visitors".

Obviously, if we wish to sustainably develop ecotourism we should pay attention to integrating education and training programme into tourism. At the same time, it is necessary to have appropriate planning before encouraging ecotourism in a certain natural area to limit the bad impacts of tourism on environment as well as maintain the sustainability of tourism. Moreover, it is necessary to understand and assess the relationship between ecotourism and local communities for coordination and support for both development and conservation.

4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECOTOURISM AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES:

Firstly, apart from natural attractions, the role of local communities in drawing visitors cannot be ignored as they have significant socio-cultural factors, including:

- Local tradition
- History of the locality and historical-cultural heritage
- Architecture
- Local cuisine
- Handicrafts
- Art, music
- Religion, language
- "Lifestyle"
- Costume- custom- tradition

Among these factors, the first five tend to be seen as more important by visitors. While ecotourists are more interested in natural environment, we can't exclude their wish to study socio-cultural issues of the local community. In addition, it is the local community who meets visitor demands for food and accommodation, recreation facilities, necessary services, and even provides human resources to serve visitors including hospitality, etc..

Therefore, tourists visiting localities, even to see natural environment, still have relations with and impacts on local communities. These are socio-cultural impacts- influences on local communities as a result of the interaction with tourists.

Tourism’s positive impacts on relevant localities are varied:

- It contributes to changing the quality of life of the community, especially those who directly participate in this industry. This includes improvements of such social services as public health, houses, water supply and draining systems, power capacity, etc..
- It helps protect and restore cultural and historical heritage, thus enhancing local pride and community awareness.
- It helps increase the local identity, and help visitors discover new ideas, values and lifestyle.
- It facilitates cross cultural exchange and mutual understanding between different communities, nations and breaks down cultural and national separations through this interaction.
Ecotourism can bring economic benefits to local people.

According to Boo (1990), "Ecotourists have a tendency to spend more than other kinds of tourists. They are willing to accept and respect local customs, practices, traditions, and food". Therefore, the question here is to find a solution in which local people can enjoy the benefit brought about by ecotourism without suffering losses (Place, 1991). However, as Cochrane (1996) has said it is extremely hard to achieve both goals of ecotourism- preserving nature and improving the social welfare of local people at the same time.

Following is an assessment of tourism's adverse impacts on the cultural and social life of communities:

- Changes in the current social structure.
- Social tension and affecting the private life of local people.
- Declining cultural values caused by tourists' strange behaviour toward local people.
- Increasing social evils like gambling, illicit drug abuse, prostitution and robbery.

Examples of these negative phenomena can be seen clearly in many countries, particularly in developing countries such as Bali, Malaysia, Fiji, Indonesia, and Thailand.

The impact of tourism on changes in local people’s attitude toward tourists has been the theme of a number of tourism studies. Doxey (1975) showed four continuous steps of attitude change. These steps were applied by Craig-Smith and French (1994) as shown in table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 : Local people’s attitude toward tourists.**

| "Excitement" | During the first stage of development, tourists and investors are warmly welcomed. Tourism activities are not well planned and managed, however. |
| "Negligence" | The presence of tourists become normal. The relations between local people and tourists become formal (or commercial). Tours are well arranged with due attention given to market factors. |
| "Imitation" | The saturation point is approaching. Local people begin to express their concern over tourism activities. In a bid to solve the problem, strategists invest in improving infrastructure facilities without restricting tourism activities. |
| "Contrast" | Irritation and unpleasant feelings are expressed by local people. Tourists are blamed for all troubles. Planning serves as a solution, but also helps boost the growth of the locality to counteract its bad reputation. |

*Source: from Doxey (1975) by Craig-Smith and French.*

It is clear that the over exploitation of tourist attraction sites is to be blamed for local people’s negative attitude toward tourists. Therefore, the study and assessment of local people’s attitude toward tourism activities and tourists in the pre-development period is necessary. It can help give useful recommendations to community tourism education programmes. Ecotourism should offer exciting tours full of experiences to tourists, and bring benefits to improve living conditions for local people while ensuring sustainable development of their locality.

5. **THE NEED TO EDUCATE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE ABOUT ECOTOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Viet Nam has great potential for developing tourism. This potential was viewed by Prof. Vu Tu Lap and Taillair (1993 : 56) as "hard to find in other countries having an equivalent territorial area".
Together with other economic activities, tourism activities of various types have been causing environmental deterioration. Recent years have seen increasing studies dealing with environmental preservation. As a result, the number of national parks and natural reserves has been on the rise. The establishment of these reserve areas aim at protecting the environment, serving scientific research, and developing ecotourism.

Ecotourism activities have been encouraged in Viet Nam's natural reserves. However, many studies pointed to difficulties in using and at the same time preserving this natural potential (the studies conducted by De Lozanne, et al., 1993; Lenz, 1993; Nguyen Thanh, 1996a, 1996b; Hoang Long, 1996; Tran Huu Vinh, 1996, and others).

Difficulties include:

- Local people living in natural reserves conduct agricultural production, lodging, hunting and other activities, all of which are to be blamed for environmental degradation.
- Promotion of ecotourism and natural preservation activities will result in the restriction of natural resource-based economic activities by local people. Meanwhile they have not been introduced with substitution trades.
- Poor environmental awareness and awareness of the value of long-term environment protection by local people.
- Insufficient contingent of qualified staff working for the tourism sector.
- Shortage of information on tourism and natural preservation.
- Poor infrastructure facilities to serve tourism demands.
- Lack of capital and experts dealing with natural resource management, planning and exploitation.

These difficulties are hard to solve for most national parks and natural reserves located in remote areas where the development level is low. Apart from conducting a thorough assessment of ecotourism potential before boosting this type of tourism to a large scale, it is necessary to provide knowledge on ecotourism and environment protection to local people in order to overcome these difficulties. The move aims to ensure that natural preservation will not be forgotten in future development plans (Do Quang Trung, 1996).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS ON CONTENTS AND METHODS OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPING ECOTOURISM IN NATURAL RESERVES

Local people should be provided with knowledge on inter-relationships between ecotourism, the natural environment, and local communities' life. These inter-relationships should be made clear. Therefore, people entitled to be educated are various, consisting of all those involved in activities related to tourism development and natural preservation. Only this way will educational goals be achievable. Education programmes should emphasize knowledge on ecotourism and natural preservation in natural areas newly zoned off as tourist attraction sites. The knowledge will help promote the significance of ecotourism amongst local people and the natural environment, therefore preventing bad consequences.

It will be of highly beneficial if education programmes draw the attendance of representatives from local branches, authorities, community organizations, and agencies responsible for natural preservation. Therefore, the list of participants should include:

- Planners and investors
- Environment managers of natural reserves.
- Managers of tourism agencies.
- Tourist guides, hotel and restaurant staff.
- Local people.
- Tourists.

The aim of community education on ecotourism is to ensure sustainable development in natural reserves while boosting ecotourism activities. The issue should be considered widely, from different broad perspectives. The purpose of education must be taken from the objective of developing tourism while preserving the environment. Therefore, community education on the environment should aim at:

- Helping participants be aware of the potential and role of natural resources in economic development activities in general and ecotourism in particular, and the limit of valuable natural resources.
- Emphasizing the significance of environment protection for ecotourism development and sustainable
community development.
- Defining the role of community in environment preservation activities and supporting healthy and effective development of ecotourism, and
- Clarifying impacts possibly caused by flows of tourists on the environment, therefore mapping out solutions to restrict harmful impacts.

Strategies for ecotourism development should include environmental education for community members so that ecotourism activities reflect their original principles of causing no harmful effects on the environment and boosting natural environment preservation. Ecotourists should join efforts with local people in maintaining national territorial integrity.

With the above-said contents and targeted groups, the process of education should be carried out regularly and continuously with diversified forms.

1. Educating through social surveys

Educating people on the environment can be carried out while conducting social surveys for designing tourism development plans. Planners will perceive concerned issues more clearly while compiling questionnaires for social surveys. Local people in surveyed areas get a chance for being educated while answering survey questions. This form of education can be applied to all sorts of people. Results of surveys will reflect levels of perception and standpoints of community members and tourists, and serve as basis for the designing of a suitable education programme.

2. Educating through training courses for people working in tourism sector

Regular training and refresher courses should be organized regularly for tourism managers, tourist guides, hotel and restaurant staff. This is a long-term and strategic process. With their important role, managers should be trained to the level of strategists and planners. Meanwhile, tourist guides, hotel staff, and waiters and waitresses who are directly involved in tourism activities, having direct contacts with tourists, the environment and local communities, should be provided, apart from their tourism skills, with knowledge on local traditions and the role of the natural environment in ecotourism activities. This form of educating should be conducted in universities, and on-spot training courses lectured by local people.

3. Educating though legal regulations

Education and regulations are necessary but rarely obtain optimum efficiency. Therefore, concrete regulations should be promulgated to provide the legal basis for supervising environment related activities. It is necessary to promulgate regulations on wildlife protection, hunting, restricting the entry of large vehicles into natural reserves, and setting speed limit for ships cruising on protected territorial waters. There should be regulations on entrance, filming, photograph taking, camping, samples taking, smoking, waste throwing and others in protected areas. Australia has set an example of ecotourism sustainable development in Tasmania. The Law on National Parks and Wildlife (promulgated in 1970), the Law on Local Inhabitants' Heritage (1975), the Law on Forest Protection (1920) and Forest Protection Practices (1985) (Burgess, 1991) have been seriously implemented in Tasmania.

Business managers and authorities at all levels should be educated on the sense and responsibilities for the environment and communities while boosting tourism activities. Projects and development plans should be carefully examined before approval to ensure accommodation requirements of tourists and at the same time restrict harmful impacts on the natural environment and social life of local people.

4. Educating through books, press, information dissemination, sign and instruction boards ...

This is considered an important source of information that helps educate tourism staff, environment managers, local authorities, tourists and local people. Necessary information can be provided in books, newspapers, brochures or pamphlets, which introduce the natural environment, social and cultural values of localities and regions that should be preserved. Brochures and pamphlets should point to activities that can or cannot be done and provide guidance on tourist attraction sites.

Furthermore, this kind of information should be disseminated by the local information network to raise local people's awareness on ecotourism and natural preservation. For tourists, it will be useful and necessary to show them a video film on tourist destinations before their tour. In addition, instruction and sign boards will help remind both tourists and local people to raise their sense of nature preservation.
5. Educating through the formal education establishment

One of the promising ways to harmoniously combine the interest of tourism, the natural environment, and social culture is to promote education, training and information dissemination. Knowledge on history and geography of localities should be integrated into curricula of their respective local school networks in order to raise pupils' awareness on values and traditions of their hometown. Young people, equipped with necessary knowledge, will be active in preserving the environment and briefing tourists on their hometown values in an educational way. The move also aims to improve relations between tourists and local people and increase local people's hospitality.

6. Educating through local economic development policies

This mode of education will be very effective when the education objective is attached to economic interests, especially for local people. Policies like allotting land and forest land to farmer households or groups of farmer households for caring have proved their high efficiency in preventing unplanned logging, and in forest protection and rehabilitation. Encouraging local people to be involved in tourism activities helps increase their income. When taking part in tourism activities local people will also be active in maintaining the territorial integrity of the nation. Papers, delivered by Prof. Hoang Hoe, Director Le Van Lanh and D. James McNeil at a conference on "National Parks and Natural Reserves in Viet Nam" organized in Feb., 1995 in Ha Noi, dealt with the role of local people in preserving the environment and their involvement in planning and managing ecotourism projects.

Furthermore, job generation by promoting the production of handicraft products to sell to tourists as souvenirs is a measure to increase income for local people and at the same time boost the development of traditional trades of localities. Attention should also be paid to on-spot training courses. However, development orientations to attract ecotourists should be carefully managed and re-adjusted in a way that the market attraction, which can spoil the coherence of ecotourism attraction, will not become the most decisive one in making decisions.

Modes of education are varied and diversified. Community education and ecotourism focusing on natural preservation should receive close coordination from different branches and levels. Once the work is carried out effectively, it will make a substantial contribution to boosting ecotourism development while ensuring sustainable development of the environment.

CONCLUSION:

Ecotourism is an accepted concept for it boosts natural preservation and sustainable development (Miller, 1993). The development of ecotourism is based on the intrinsic attractive power of natural landscapes to tourists. Ecotourism is viewed to offer greater interest compared to other kinds of tourism in terms of environment protection and local community interest. The ultimate goal of ecotourism is to maintain sustainable development. To this end, education on the environment and ecotourism for those who are interested in natural values and those who are responsible for the environment is necessary (Pigram, 1997). In addition, ecotourism should be thoroughly planned to achieve the goal of maintaining the integrity of the natural environment and sustainable development.

Viet Nam's tourism sector is on the way towards integration into the region's development. Ecotourism will be a suitable mode that helps avoid negative phenomena occurring in neighbouring countries like Indonesia and Thailand. Natural reserves and local communities will serve as valuable factors for promoting ecotourism. In the initial stage of development, education and training programmes on tourism in general and ecotourism attached to natural preservation in particular should be designed and implemented broadly. This is one of the decisive factors contributing to directing the development of ecotourism for the benefit of both the environment and local communities.
Awareness of Ecological Tourism and Sustainable Development

IN HIGHER EDUCATION TOURISM curricula

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The past century has witnessed the explosion of a modern scientific and technological revolution, mainly in three fields: technology, telecommunications and informatics. At the same time that the informatic revolution spreads worldwide, human beings can predict changes and further development and progress in the scientific and technological fields. This is the post informatic era, or so called era of creation, which is recognised as an era of powerful and stimulating ideas. In this process, creativity and new ideas are much more important than statistics or figures.

In the creative era, being more or less powerful is related to the creativity of technology and management... In terms of business, this is an era where creativity is more important than market share competition. To reach this state, we have to rely on educational strategies at a national, local or individual level.

At any time, any nation wants to develop and progress, the most important thing is that education must be ranked number one among national priorities. Nowadays, in the period of rapid scientific-technological development, education plays an increasingly important role in all aspects of human development, contributing to the promotion of national development and resolving international issues.

Social targets in general and socio-economic targets in particular requires each member of the community or society or each individual to be responsible for education equality. This is the key to raising the productivity of modern technology, and the production speed and scale of each nation, community and individual. That is also the premise for raising living standards and is a motivating force for industrialisation in developing countries which provides opportunities to develop sustainably, avoiding the danger of remaining poor and backward.

Thus, human resources and its quality are key factors determining a rich people, strong country, equal and civilized society, and sustainable development. The development of human resources today, when considered against a background of rapidly changing society, high quality creativity and intelligent competition on a global scale, is a form of revolution because "Humans are the target and motivating force of socio-economic development."

For the poor, overpopulated nations, with high population growth rates and whose economies are primarily rural and agricultural, it is important for economic development to be based on a human resource strategy which is ranked the number one means of promoting the "internal development and external effects" of each individual or nation in order to realise the full potential of a country's resources. By this means it is possible to adapt most effectively against the background of the new scientific-technological revolution, resulting in wonderful achievements in natural, social and human science.

In Vietnam's current development situation, the country faces many challenges: the economy is behind that of other regional and international countries. According to the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, Vietnam was ranked, based on GDP/per capita, 153rd amongst 173 nations. If assessment criteria on human resources are included, Vietnam is still ranked 116th in the world and 9th out of 10 ASEAN nations.

Vietnam tourism is in the same situation. In recent years, thanks to the integration into the regional and world economies, Vietnam tourism has had certain achievements and has had considerable influence on the socio-economy of the country and has narrowed the economic gap between Vietnam and other nations in the region. The number of international visitors to Vietnam in 1997 reached over 80% of the number of international visitors to the Philippines, 38% of the total visiting Indonesia and 25% of the number to Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia.
Tourism development in past years and the tourism Master Plan to the year 2010 have outlined the features of tourism in Vietnam and have addressed the challenges still faced by the industry: tourism infrastructure and inappropriate investment in roads, bridges, transportation means, accommodation, information, staff, support services, sales and management skills...is low and of poor quality. Remarkably there still remains a one-sided attitude towards the economic (tourism) industry. Old-fashioned habits and points of view have greatly influenced the quality of tourism development. In the rural areas the views are even much more backward and erroneous.

As a matter of fact, Vietnam, like some other developing countries, has not succeeded in establishing and developing sustainable tourism.

Vietnam's tourism potential is abundant and rich, the country possesses many beautiful landscapes, attractive natural features, original vestiges, forests, sea, rivers, caves, and a multitude of ethnic minorities. It is also a point of meeting of different cultures... But these resources are being exhausted by unregulated exploitation. Meanwhile, conservation, rehabilitation and re-investment has not been paid attention. So these tourist sites have, day by day, been losing their attractiveness and been increasingly degraded; the environment is seriously violated by people and inappropriate transportation means; and, especially, there is a lack of qualified, experienced workers and staff, who should be trained in the necessary knowledge and skills for the development of sustainable tourism. Even in the big cities of Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi, the above mentioned issues are still great challenges to development.

To achieve sustainable tourism; to maintain successfully the ecological environment, and attractive landscapes, and to industrialise successfully, Vietnam's development strategy must clearly define sustainable development targets in order to make development in the material, human and educational spheres compatible. First of all, training and education to raise people's awareness and attitudes must be carried out. Based on this, training and education for raising knowledge and improving skills would be carried out for people and tourism staff to achieve the goal of sustainable development and a profitable economic tourism industry.

In order to contribute to the training of human resources for the development of tourism, the Center for Training and Education of the Hanoi Open University, in cooperation with the Institute for Tourism Development Research, established in 1993 the Tourism Department which provides a Bachelor training Program in Tourism Business Administration: 11.10.10 with two specialities: Tourism-Hotel Business Administration (4 years), and Tourism-Guiding (5 years).

The Tourism Department has been supported and assisted by the Canadian Government through the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), which has sent many experts and lecturers to Vietnam to work for long-term placements (2, 3, 4 years) in order to help the Department set out and complete a rational curriculum suited to Vietnam's environmental conditions, and at the same time, step by step, to approach an international level of education which provides future qualified staff. In the course students have been provided with the knowledge and working skills to offer high quality tourism products to satisfy the demand of both international and domestic tourists with respect to sustainable development.

Based on American scientist Nadler’s model of identifying demand for training in sustainable tourism education and human resources, and based on the capacity of the Tourism Faculty, curriculum on sustainable tourism and ecological protection has been developed with criteria for “Sustainable Tourism - ST ”.

- Introduction to general concepts of Marketing, Culture and Sustainable economic development, especially in non-metropolitan areas.
- The environment for Vietnam's economic development and challenges to development.
- Networking amongst stakeholders for sustainable tourism programs.
- Macro strategy for exploitation of tourism resources (both natural and human) in order to achieve appropriate sustainable development, creating the motivational force for economic development and environmental protection.
- Building new attractive diverse tour products, sites (centers); exploitation of tourism resources in the context of sustainable development.
- Training program: 45 theoretical and 45 in-the-field sessions, both in and outside the city. The first course of the Program is being held by 5 Canadian and Vietnamese lecturers.
- Being a new and interesting subject matter. Vietnam Television's Programme "Travelling through a small screen" has filmed the course and will broadcast nationally.
- The benefits of this Programme on sustainable tourism are to provide new awareness on sustainable protection of the environment, and up to date knowledge and skills in management of sustainable tourism development for the future.