Biodiversity Action Plan
Review Workshop
Why tourism is an important factor in biodiversity conservation

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INTRODUCTION

Earlier this year, at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Bratislava, a submission was made by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety which contained a proposal for a decision to be taken by the Conference of the Parties to develop “Global Guidelines on Biological Diversity and Sustainable Tourism”.

This was the first time that tourism formally entered the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) agenda. It provoked considerable debate amongst governments and NGO observers due largely to the proposal’s lack of consideration of indigenous peoples and community based solutions to tourism/biodiversity problems. The issue of tourism was deferred to the next meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice in May 1999.

Why introduce tourism into the CBD? Proponents believe the CBD is a promising vehicle for introducing global tourism guidelines and making the tourism industry act in a more environmentally responsible manner because:

- it has 175 signatories;
- it explicitly tackles the question of sustainable use of biodiversity (of which tourism is one use);
- it has the legal onus on signatories to comply with negotiated articles and provisions;
- it is one of the few processes of such wide government endorsement, scope and legal force to involve indigenous peoples (Johnston, A., 1998).

With respect to the latter, a small explanation is required. Article 8(j) of the CBD requires governments to protect and promote indigenous knowledge systems for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. This indigenous knowledge can, and arguably should, form an essential part of an ecotourism experience. Many indigenous peoples live within or near Protected Areas (PA’s) and hence any conservation initiative - ecotourism should be considered as such - needs to include them.

However, in the majority of cases where indigenous peoples have been involved in tourism to date, they have been exploited (as tourism attractions) and have received little benefit. In light of this, the growth and popularity of ecotourism or tourism to PA’s is of concern because of the potential impact on biodiversity as well as the threat posed to indigenous cultures and their traditional resources.

The hope is that by including tourism in the CBD and setting environmental standards and controls for the tourism industry to comply with (supply side management rather than demand side), ecotourism can be made into a genuine tool for conservation by among other things, involving local and indigenous communities.

Put another way, the success of efforts to conserve and protect biodiversity is dependent on the involvement of local indigenous peoples, while the success of ecotourism as a positive force for conservation and socio-economic development is also dependent on the involvement of local indigenous peoples.

Some of the following sections are based on extracts from the draft proposal. You can see this at the following website:

1.0 The significance of tourism

- Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world (about 4% pa);
- It accounts for 10% of the world’s real net output;
- For many developing countries and island states, tourism is the largest economic sector on which they depend to support development in many other sectors;
- International tourism has increased 25 fold between 1950 and 1997 (to 617 million tourists);
- If current trends continue, international tourism will double every 20 years;
- BUT let’s not forget about the composition of international tourism – still dominated by Europe and North America – but experiencing considerable growth in the number of tourists originating from Asia (and Asian tourists travelling within their region);
- Further, let’s not forget about domestic tourism – more and more people are travelling within their own country. The potential domestic market in the countries of Asia is considerable, given their large populations. Vietnam is no exception;
- Tourism patterns are becoming more diversified, new activities are gaining popularity, for example, an increasing demand for recreation in natural areas, such as climbing, kayaking, diving, hang-gliding, snow-boarding…often in sensitive and fragile areas;
- Nature oriented tourism has been growing more than any other sector, and ecotourism, a segment of this market, has been growing at between 10 and 30% pa;
- As a consequence tourism has reached remote and up to now untouched natural areas;
- A growth in the number of large-scale tourist facilities and artificial recreation worlds, such as holiday parks, marinas, golf courses, resorts, water and entertainment worlds, cultural parks…often in or near attractive landscapes or sensitive ecosystems;
- Growing emphasis on ‘ecotourism’ and ‘community based sustainable tourism’ – growing recognition that supply side, ie: community based, models for tourism development offer high potential for biodiversity conservation.

2.0 Tourism’s dependency on biological diversity

Biological diversity is a major foundation for many tourist activities.

Tourism is dependent on a clean environment. More and more tourists are seeking un-spoilt natural environments and spectacular natural scenery.

In addition to traditional tourist destinations, such as coasts, lakes and mountains, more and more unusual and particularly attractive natural areas have been developed for tourism eg: high mountains and glaciers, steppes and deserts, natural watercourses or coral reefs. Even remote and barely accessible areas such as tropical rain forests, the Arctic and the Antarctic are being opened up to adventure-loving tourists.

Sometimes these areas are ecologically sensitive and have been designated protected areas for precisely this reason. Consequently, tourist activities increasingly encounter conservation efforts. The one needs to be reconciled with the other.

3.0 The problems tourism poses for biological diversity

Current trends in international and domestic tourism raise a number of problems for biological diversity. The increasing number of visitors as well as the intensity of tourist activities may have negative impacts, both direct and indirect, on the natural environment…Tourism can exacerbate existing problems, create new ones:

- land conversion, clearing, appropriation for hotel, resort, entertainment/recreation areas, golf courses, roads, airports – results in loss of wildlife habitat, disruption of breeding and feeding patterns, local extinctions, wildlife mortality…;
- in-filling of wetlands, destruction of mangroves – loss of habitat etc;
- deforestation due to fuel-wood consumption to meet needs of tourists and tourist development – loss of habitat etc;
- forest destruction due to increase in incidence of forest fires in touristed areas (cigarettes!);
- air pollution due to transportation – internationally tourism accounts for 60% or more of air travel and
hence accounts for an important share of the world’s atmospheric pollution from this source. Locally, vehicular pollution in some tourist destinations occurs in concentrations that kills/stunts vegetation;

- introduction of exotic species by tourists and modes of transport;
- wildlife mortality (roads, pollution);
- disturbance to breeding and feeding patterns by tourists (eg: loggerhead turtles, whales);
- geo-morphological restructuring eg: to construct golf courses and marinas – changes to local water catchments;
- contamination of water courses and sources by pesticides/fertilizers run off from golf courses – flora and fauna illness and mortality;
- construction on sensitive sand dunes resulting in erosion, changes in beach profile, loss of dune habitat;
- uncontrolled sewage/waste disposal and contamination of water sources, courses, sea – death and illness of aquatic flora and fauna;
- dumping of rubbish by tour boats, which also release oil, utilise noisy and polluting engines, damage coral reefs with anchors;
- collection and damage to coral by reef walking tourists, souvenir sellers, in severe instances leading to unprotected coasts and shore erosion;
- collection of natural ‘souvenirs’ from reefs, caves, forests, and consumption of wild animals;
- erosion, landslides eg: due to clearing in mountain areas for ski resorts – disruption of animal feeding and breeding patterns and destruction of habitat;
- water shortages due to water source and groundwater withdrawals for golf courses, resorts, swimming pools, leading to local scarcity and salt water intrusion (tourists use up to 6-10 times the water of a local) – disruption of breeding and feeding patterns, death of vegetation;
- development of large recreation/entertainment complexes and associated infrastructure in or near national parks – habitat destruction, noise and pollution impacts;
- development of guesthouses, karaoke rooms, golf courses etc within national parks – habitat destruction, noise and pollution impacts;
- litter accumulation – mortality of wildlife (eg: swallowing plastic bags)…

And so the list continues.

Worthy of special attention is the demand for and consumption of floral and faunal products to service the tourism industry (for example, the consumption of fuelwood and the collection of orchids in Sa Pa), and the demand by tourists for ‘exotic’ ‘souvenirs’ or ‘wild meat’ (in some cultures consumption of rare, exotic and expensive animals is a sign of status and importance, or associated with ‘health enhancing’ properties).

The threats to biodiversity already posed by the collection and consumption of orchids, coral, forest fauna animals such as bear, boar, deer, snake, civet, wild cat, tiger…, marine fauna such as seahorses, turtle shell, birds…etc is being exacerbated by tourism. In Vietnam this is obvious in the tourist destinations of Tam Dao, Ha Long, Nha Trang, Sa Pa… It is however very difficult to separate out the impacts of tourism in this respect from the overall increase in trade in wildlife/fauna.

Where tourism development proceeds without, or overshadows, planning, or is carried out without awareness of the value of biological diversity and the potential impacts on biodiversity, tourism can lead to an overuse of natural resources. In protected areas it can also lead to conflict with conservation objectives.

A related issue of concern is the insufficient degree of participation of the local population in the planning and implementation of tourist activities and in the distribution of the revenue/profits of tourism. Tourism can create conflicts, antagonism and work against conservation if local peoples are not involved and reap economic benefits. For example, local Masai tribes in Africa, prevented from using their traditional lands due to the establishment of a national park, and excluded from benefits flowing from tourists who visit to view wildlife, have in desperation, resorted to setting fire to the national park. More about local participation later on.

4.0 The potential of tourism to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity

Tourism has the potential to be a positive force for conservation… Nature oriented tourism can promote conservation of biodiversity and its sustainable use, thus contributing to regional and local development.

Where nature is the foundation of tourist activities there is an incentive to conserve it. Further, experience has shown that it was the use of the natural environment by tourists that presented the opportunity to conserve endangered species of animals and their habitats.
Nature oriented tourism can increase public awareness of the value of biodiversity.

Tourism offers a source of income that may be used for the conservation of biological diversity. Eg: fees that tourists pay to access protected areas. However it is important that fees are charged and the fee level corresponds to the attractiveness or sensitivity of the natural area in question, and that the fees collected are allocated to conservation in the area. Further, the local population must receive a share of the income.

Local people will not be a force for conservation unless they benefit. Tourism to protected and other areas offers the means by which they can benefit. HOWEVER the way that the tourism industry is organised means that tourism is usually controlled by outsiders, or local elites or local government and tour operators, so that few economic benefits reach local communities. Thus tourism to date in protected areas has largely been unsuccessful as a cause for conservation.

For tourism to be a positive force for conservation, there have to be systems and controls in place, political commitment, local empowerment... tourism needs to be planned at the appropriate level, with local communities. The management of tourism means that tourist activities may need to be regulated in order to ensure that they comply with the requirements of conservation, and that control mechanisms are put in place to enforce the decisions concerning environmentally friendly tourist activity.

Tour operators must act in an ecologically responsible way, and tourists must be informed and motivated to act in an environmentally friendly manner. This leads to the question:

5.0 What about ‘ecotourism’ – is it a true force for conservation of biodiversity??

One definition

Eco-tourism is distinguished from other forms of educational or nature based tourism by a high degree of environmental and ecological education, delivered in the field by qualified interpreters. Eco-tourism contains a significant portion of human wilderness interaction that, coupled with the education provided, tend to transform tourists into strong advocates for environmental protection. Eco-tourism practice minimises the environmental and cultural impacts of visitors, ensures that financial benefits flow to host communities and places a special emphasis on financial contribution to conservation efforts. (Allen, K.,1993).

Diversity exists in nature based tourism, with some travel of a general and un-discerning consumptive character, and other travel of a more conservation conscious, learning oriented, informed and hence responsible character. Ecotourism lies at this end of the ‘nature based tourism spectrum’.

Ecotourism is a way to: provide an alternative economic value of forests (replace timber production); educate tourists about environment and hence increase awareness of environment and biodiversity issues; provide alternative and additional income to local communities, hence providing them with an economic incentive for conservation and at the same time increasing their environmental awareness; generate revenue for protected areas... The educational aspect of ecotourism is vital – education is an investment in the future...It is a long term goal with results slow to appear.

Ecotourism is subject to considerable debate in international fora, between critics and proponents – the former including many who have become disillusioned by the ‘abuse’ of the term and the inability for the ideal of ecotourism to be achieved... Around the world there are many cases where socio-cultural and environmental concerns (‘green’ and ‘eco’ brands) are promoted by tour operators simply as a gimmick to increase profits and attract a clean image.

It is unfortunate that ‘ecotourism’ is often not ‘genuine’ and hence is also a threat to biodiversity.

This is partly a lack of understanding of what genuine ecotourism should be all about.... Simply visiting a natural area is not ecotourism. Mass tourism to natural areas is not ecotourism. Mass tourism to protected areas threatens biodiversity...

Example 1: of the eco-tourism experiences being lauded in the Vietnamese media, the majority appear to fit more in the realm of ‘nature’ or ‘countryside’ tours or ‘cultural’ tours. The term eco-tourism is being used lightly, and interchangeably with nature tourism. In doing so there is a failure to acknowledge that eco-tourism is a
subset of nature tourism which falls at the ‘purest’ end of the broad spectrum of nature tourism experiences.

Example 2: at the moment eco-(tourism) in Vietnam is being promoted largely by the ‘mass market’ tour companies. Do they have a full understanding of the ethics and underlying codes of conduct and behaviours (environmental, social, cultural and other) that are key components of eco-tourism activities? From our preliminary observations, in measuring up their actions against the strict codes of ecotourism, they cannot be called ecotour operators in any sense.

We are currently undertaking a nation-wide survey of tour operators – state and private – to ascertain their knowledge and awareness of the negative impacts of tourism on environment and culture, and their practices/behaviour on the ground. From this we will be able to see who is trying to apply sustainable tourism principles, or ecotourism principles.

A distinction must therefore be drawn between traditional tour operators and principled eco-tourism operators: the former frequently show no commitment to conservation or natural area management, merely offering clients an opportunity to experience exotic places and people before they change or disappear; principled eco-tourism operators, on the other hand, have begun to form partnerships with protected area managers and local people, with the intention of contributing to the long-term protection of wildlands and local development, and in the hope of improving mutual understanding between residents and visitors.

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 eco-tourism being a force for the environment or simply being another threat. (Figgis, P., 1993).

Even natural area managers and environmental/developmental organisations keen to find solutions to problems through ecotourism have insufficient understanding of some of these issues and the potential implications for management that adopting ecotourism can entail. They lack practical guidelines on how ecotourism can be ‘developed’ (a contradiction in terms!).

6.0 Other issues in planning, management and control of the tourism industry in Vietnam, with implications for biodiversity:

Tourism is a polluting and exploitative industry, it is not a ‘soft’ activity, it is not inherently conservatory (even though its sustainability relies on the preservation of the natural resource base and local culture!). As such it is justified to regulate tourism as is done for any other polluting industry.

The tourism industry in Vietnam has to date been characterised by rapid, short-term ventures and short-term horizons. It has also been characterised by an overwhelming state sector emphasis on large projects, particularly large hotels. At the same time the private sector has been constructing hotels, developing tour operations and other services in an uncontrolled and unregulated fashion.

The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism continues to be concerned with the lack of infrastructure and with the need to improve accommodation, transportation and access, including to remote natural areas. Though improvement of communication and transportation is a necessary development priority, and provision of quality accommodation is needed, VNAT (and MPI) are not considering the consequences of enabling larger numbers of visitors to protected and sensitive areas, nor the general environmental impacts of infrastructure development. And infrastructure ‘improvements’, including accommodations, have to date often been environmentally and visually insensitive and damaging.

Improving access to PA’s should not be a priority for the industry, at least not until a strong supply side management and coping system is put in place to plan, manage, control tourism. At present few PA’s in Vietnam have this ability.

Further, there is in Vietnam the belief that more ‘attractions’ need to be developed to attract international tourists. Thus recreational parks, golf courses, theme and amusement parks, cultural villages etc are now receiving more attention, within and outside urban areas (and within or in the vicinity of protected areas). Aside from golf, these developments would appear to cater more to the Vietnamese tourist than the international, though possibly the Asian tourist market is a viable target.
A philosophy of construction will ultimately damage Vietnam’s natural areas. The environmental impact of golf courses, let alone socio-economic impacts on local communities, is well documented in other countries.

Tourism developments of certain types and sizes are subject to EIA (eg hotel developments over 100 rooms; golf courses, entertainment parks) however the NEA and MOSTE appear to consider tourism a somewhat minor area of concern or responsibility. There is a need to undertake Strategic EIA and to consider the cumulative impacts of piecemeal tourism ie: many small impacts add up to large problem, environmentally, visually, scenically. Smaller developments should also be required to comply with environmental and design standards and regulations.

VNAT is both an administrative body and policy making body as well as having a commercial role (it is responsible for, or ‘owns’ Vietnamtourism and other tour companies). Thus it has definite conflicts of interest which certainly do not bode well for the environment. There is a need to separate the functions of VNAT and bring the private sector into the equation.

For example, one possibility is to follow the example of other countries in the region which have established national tourism boards or associations (which represent all tourism operators, largely private) with marketing and promotion responsibilities, separate from the national administration or ministry of tourism which is responsible for rules and regulations (and ultimately guiding the industry towards sustainability).

Consider the speed of tourism growth in Vietnam and the national goal of 3 million tourists for the year 2000 ie: next year. Once Vietnam reaches 3, will the next target be 5 million by 2020? 7, 9, 11…?!

In Nepal, tourism began in the late 1950s and has grown to be the country’s biggest industry, however growth has been much slower than Vietnam’s recent growth – last year Nepal received around 300,000 foreign visitors. All levels of the industry – which is dominated by the private sector - recognise the negative impacts of tourism. Educational materials are provided to tourists in the form of minimum impact codes (eg, even on the back of immigration forms), on signs at several locations along trails, at visitors interpretive centres. Further, a system of sharing tourism revenues between park and buffer zones has been established (Buffer Zone Management Rules) following the success of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project which was the first PA to keep 100% of tourism revenue to be distributed to local communities for development and conservation activities.

Vietnam needs to get away from concentrating on tourist numbers as targets (and indicators of success) and focus on the quality of environment, quality of the tourism experience and hence the real sustainability of the industry. Further, tourism must be considered as a development tool or option available to local communities, not merely a money earner for national coffers. The same thing can be said for tourism master plans – they set high targets and include large projects. For PA’s and sensitive natural areas, small is preferable, control and limits essential, involvement of local communities vital.

Thus, within the BAP, equal consideration needs to be made to small scale, small budget projects. Small projects can have considerable local benefits, particularly with respect to ecotourism and community based sustainable tourism initiatives, and should be acknowledged and included in the BAP.

The extent to which tourism poses a threat to Vietnam’s environment is generally not realised nor acknowledged. Though the growth in international visitors (1.7 million in 1997 including business and family visits) has slowed (6 percent growth in 1997 compared to 18 percent in 1996 and 33 percent in 1995), and the government is worried about the lack of return visitors (which may be related to the quality of the environment as well as the quality of service and other factors), it is the growth of domestic tourism that has just as important, or perhaps even greater implications, for the environment in Vietnam.

Domestic tourism rose 30.8 percent between 1996 and 1997 - from 6.9 to 8.5 million. The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism hopes to see between 10 and 11 million Vietnamese travelling in 1998. The implications of rapidly growing numbers of domestic tourists with new-found wealth can be better appreciated in the context of the following:

- A low level of environmental awareness and environmentally sensitive and responsible behaviour of the Vietnamese population in general;
- a lack of controls and regulations of the tourism industry and codes of practice within the industry;
- short term planning horizons and an emphasis on developing tourism for purely economic rather than developmental purposes;
- an emphasis on large rather than small projects;
- a preference towards state owned and foreign j/v’s rather than locally owned and community based
initiatives;
- conflicts and unclear delineation of responsibilities between national park managers and provincial or district authorities on the development of tourism within protected areas;
- the culture of consumption of wildlife by both Vietnamese and other nationalities (described in BAP as utilitarian), particularly in north Asia (who are coming to Vietnam as tourists in increasing numbers).

7.0 Economics of environment: tourism and biodiversity.

"In terms of economic value, all agricultural, forestry or marine products, which come from the biodiversity resources are estimated to bring about US$2 billion to the country's revenue every year."… (BAP, first page).

What about the tourism value of PA’s and natural areas in general? Tourism is one product of biodiversity that can be ‘harvested’ in a sustainable or unsustainable way. Putting it another way, biodiversity protection is also an investment in a sustainable tourism industry ie: not merely in terms of sustaining income, but in terms of environmental and social sustainability.

As with the Ancient and French quarters of Hanoi, Phong Nha, Ha Long, Ba Be etc are unique attractions of Vietnam…. How valuable are they to the tourism industry? How to place an economic value on them? What if they were destroyed, what would be the loss in monetary terms? Tourism can be used as a means to help place a value on, and hence emphasise the value of biodiversity (economic arguments always ring more strongly!).

HOWEVER, there are aspects of tourism to natural areas that are also immeasurable (for example, how do you value the benefits of relaxation, inner health, spirituality, communing with nature etc?) and therefore go uncounted in valuations. Further, there are very good arguments AGAINST placing economic values on the environment and biodiversity in order to justify conservation and protection of that biodiversity – in doing so everything is reduced to a commodity…which can be bought and sold. The intrinsic value of the environment must not be forgotten.

8.0 Opposing interests and priorities with respect to Protected Areas

PA management suffers from some basic political problems to do with lines of authority, responsibility and power, and the relationship between parks, district and provincial authorities. These need to be resolved if parks like Ba Be are not to be seriously degraded and lose their current natural (ecological, biological etc) and scenic features.

For example, there are problems of ‘cross-management’ ie: Parks are under FPD management while tourism development is the mandate of the Province, and District. There are ‘uncertainties’ about who is responsible for what within PA’s eg: who should build (and profit from) guesthouses? Who should improve infrastructure? Who should protect historical and cultural features? Who should charge entrance fees?

Provinces are commissioning Tourism Master Plans…ambitious multi-million dollar proposals that include tourism development in national parks, or which use national parks as the key attraction. To what extent are managers of PA’s involved in ‘negotiating’ or having input to these Tourism Master Plans or imposing limits on how far tourism can be developed within the boundaries of the PA?

If the local government aim’s to increase tourism (mass nature tourism) to its province, and PA’s have no input into Master Plans, nor control over tourism development, tourist numbers, tour operations within its borders… then any ecotourism or small scale ‘supply side’ tourism initiative it tries to implement could be overtaken or overrun by mass tourism, in a short period of time.

Genuine eco-tourism or tourism to PA’s faces considerable challenges, not least is the challenge to keep foremost a supply-oriented management perspective.

9.0 Conclusion
To conclude, tourism and sustainable tourism are not adequately addressed in the BAP. The above sections have highlighted the need for tourism to be considered as an economic sector with considerable implications for biodiversity conservation. As indicated by the proposal presented at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity earlier this year, the international community is working towards acknowledging the impact of tourism on the environment in general and biodiversity in particular.

In deciding to rewrite or revise or update the BAP, Vietnam has the chance to make progressive steps to keep abreast of international concern, and possibly to be a leader amongst the Parties in the consideration made to tourism and biodiversity issues in a national action plan.

**Recommendations**

There are projects that could be carried out in each of the three BAP Priority areas – Policy and Programmes; Management and Conservation Field Programmes; Complementary Actions.

**Policies and legal issues:**

- By-law regulations should be promulgated dealing with siting/location of tourism development, zoning and application of the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum within and near PA's. These would establish levels of acceptable use, degree of modification etc based on ‘supply side management’ principles. This zoning could go nationally as well ie: certain PA’s are already more ‘developed’ and modified than others and receive more tourists than others – should tourism be concentrated in these areas rather than in less developed and modified or more sensitive PA’s?
- Develop guidelines and incentives/disincentives to promote better waste/sewage/disposal and treatment and recycling (eg: eco-toilets) as well as the use of alternative ‘clean’ energies (solar, wind, micro-hydro).
- Impose stricter penalties for consumption/sale/collection of protected flora and fauna.
- Work with VNAT, MARD/FPD, MoSTE/NEA and tour operators, to establish a system of accreditation of tour operators according to environmental, cultural etc practice. Eg: a ‘green star’ system. This would establish environmental standards for tour operators and businesses, especially those working in or visiting national parks, and help discerning tourists chose those operators who are more ecologically sound.
- Convene a national workshop to consider the development of a national ecotourism strategy for Vietnam. IUCN is currently developing a proposal for such a national (interactive, facilitated) workshop, which would be:
  - an educational exercise (raise awareness of/clarify the basics of ecotourism);
  - an information dissemination and experience sharing exercise (learning from experiences with ecotourism and ecotourism policy within the region), and
  - an output generating/target oriented exercise (to consider the development of a national ecotourism/nature tourism strategy).
- Widen the scope of projects requiring EIA in order to include tourism projects on a variety of scales, sizes, levels of investment, location etc.

**Awareness building:**

- Undertake a major education campaign with MoET, VNAT, MOSTE and tour operators/guides targeting tourists ie: a national campaign targeting the domestic population (consider them all as a potential tourist).
  "Consider the fact that You are not the only Vietnamese traveller in your country - the impact you have should be multiplied several million-fold.... consider the impact of 76 million people on your favourite holiday destination..."
IUCN is currently working on a booklet on responsible travel in Vietnam for both domestic and international visitors ("You are not the only visitor to Vietnam — your impact on the environment is multiplied a million-fold by other people every year."). With the support of VNAT we hope to distribute this nationally.
- Give priority to the establishment of a system of environmental education interpretive centres ie: at each national park in Vietnam and the most vulnerable/sensitive nature reserves (or those receiving most tourists), through a joint MARD/VNAT/MoET initiative. To include:
  - the development of educational material to be distributed for free (at the same time increasing the
price of visitor entrance fees to part cover the cost of materials);  
- training of park staff in environmental interpretation, ecotourism principles;  
- training of local people as guides in environmental interpretation, environmentally friendly behaviour, language etc (see below, Capacity Building and Staff Training).

**Improve inter-sectoral coordination and integrated approaches:**

- Try to bring VNAT into the BAP process in some way. VNAT is another institution whose decisions and actions have considerable implications for biodiversity. This responds to the need to incorporate biodiversity concerns into sectoral programmes and plans. Similarly, try to get NEA to put tourism higher on its list of priorities.
- Lobby and assist VNAT with the establishment of an Environment Branch or Sustainable Tourism Branch within VNAT (that considers impacts of tourism on environment and culture and socio-economics). This branch would work closely with MoSTE/NEA, MPI, MARD/FPD…
- Similarly, could a STB or Ecotourism Branch be established in MARD/FPD?
- The above Branches and Ministries should establish contacts and form partnerships with local and international NGOs. NGO/Government links are very weak or virtually non-existent in Vietnam with respect to tourism, indicating the fact that tourism is not yet being considered as a development and conservation tool by tourism authorities. NGO/Government should work to initiate dialogue between local communities, local government, PA managers and tourism operators to discuss tourism and ecotourism in order to facilitate partnerships at the local level and bring local people fully into the tourism decision making process (one aspect of the collaborative management of Protected Areas).
- Facilitate discussions/meetings between National Park and protected area managers, local government, local communities, private sector tour operators to encourage collaboration in the development of local tourism initiatives such as ecotourism.
- Undertake to establish greater linkages between the departments in MPI responsible for tourism and environment ie: Trade and Services Department and Science, Education and Environment Department.
- Consider the value of farms producing NTFPs etc for biodiversity conservation purposes in reducing the impact of tourism on biodiversity ie: NTFP farms can be tourism attractions in themselves, and through the sale of their products they can alleviate pressure on collection of such products from the forest to sell to tourists.

**Capacity Building and Staff Training:**

- Undertake intensive in-country training in ecotourism for national park managers, local government departments, tour operators, and representatives from local communities. IUCN is currently working on a proposal for ecotourism training for national park managers and development of a Vietnam specific manual.
- Provide in-country training in sustainable tourism and ecotourism principles to representatives from MPI, MARD, NEA, MOSTE, MoET, VNAT, plus invest in Bachelor/Masters level courses overseas for key persons. (So that no-one mistakes the Dan Kial resort, Victoria Hotel or Dong Mo Cultural Village for ‘ecotourism’!)
- Work with local and international NGOs to help train local communities in community based sustainable tourism (ecotourism).

**Management of PA’s and Buffer Zones:**

- With respect to the problem of revenue from tourism being lost to the central government: undertake a review of the current system of revenue/funding of national parks and PA’s. Work towards establishing a system that allows tourism revenue generated by PA’s to be re-invested in tourism, conservation, community development etc, such as in Nepal’s Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP).
- Undertake study (including field trips) of ACAP, and review the Nepal Buffer Zone Management Rules (1996) to ascertain whether either system can be applied to PA’s and their buffer zones in Vietnam (integrated projects that include tourism, environmental conservation, community participation, revenue generation and sharing, buffer zone management…).
- Clearly allocate responsibilities for tourism in PA’s to the authority in charge of PA’s.
- Begin a process of establishing ecotourism action strategies for PA’s that include Limits of Acceptable
Change, Regulations/ Codes for operators and tourists, limits on numbers, entrance fees, ROS zoning (wrt level of acceptable use, modification, behaviour etc)…ie: ‘supply side management’ of tourism.
- Undertake intensive ecotourism training for FPD, FIP, and PA management and staff.

**Scientific Research:**

**Investigate the tourism-economy-environment nexus:**

- Investigate the links between environment and economics ie: placing a value on environment and biodiversity, using tourism as the case study. Eg: a tourism case study of Ha Long Bay, Ba Be, Cuc Phuong, Phan Thiet, Sa Pa or other destination, “explaining the links between economic development activities and environmental protection”.
  
  Terms of reference for such a study could include:
  1. To show the potential economic benefits of tourism to the area (region, nation);
  2. To show the linkages between tourism and other sectors, both positive and negative. For example, to show the economic costs to the tourism industry with the development of other areas (such as coal/mining) via the damage that can occur to the natural environment/biodiversity, AND conversely, to show the impact tourism can have on biodiversity and hence industries such as fishing;
  3. To attempt to value the environmental/biodiversity costs of tourism development in monetary/economic terms;
  4. To consider the ecotourism potential of the area and how it could benefit biodiversity conservation and ameliorate the current impacts of tourism (ie: transform tourism from mass to eco);
  5. To show the economic costs to the tourism industry (via environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, destruction of scenery) due to unplanned and uncontrolled development of tourism (tourism kills tourism).

  The study will be valuable for Vietnam, as:
  - it will highlight the economic-environmental-biodiversity impacts of tourism in a country besotted with developing tourism with little consideration of the environmental impacts, OR the impacts of badly planned and controlled tourism on other sectors (eg: fishing, acqua-culture, agriculture), OR the impacts of tourism on itself (‘tourism kills tourism’, ‘tourism kills the goose that lays the golden egg’ scenario);
  - it will help educate environmentalists about economic thinking, and help economists and economic/tourism /investment planners understand why the environment falls within their domain and how they can and need to incorporate it into their decisions.

- Conduct research in key tourist areas on the impacts of tourism on the consumption of flora and fauna eg: increased consumption of wood, orchids, wild meat, coral…This could be undertaken in Sa Pa, Da Lat, Nha Trang, Tam Dao, Ha Long…
- Undertake a study of ‘carrying capacity’ in a series of PA’s or other natural area destinations. Consider all aspects of carrying capacity – psycho-social; environmental; physical…

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Key factors required for successful ecotourism ('wish list')</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Aim for strategic, holistic and detailed planning;</td>
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<td>- Careful and integrated management:</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. being committed to management that facilitates and ensures input from all stakeholders: tour operators, protected area managers, government, NGOs, local communities etc;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Establish a national Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Task force to develop a National Ecotourism or Nature Tourism Strategy;</td>
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<td>- Create an environment conducive to the establishment of an Ecotourism Association, and independent Ecotourism Commission (watchdog);</td>
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<td>- Intervene in the market eg: fees to protected areas, limits on numbers, regulations and Codes of Conduct for the industry (developed with the industry);</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 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);</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Focus on the local and regional level - it is easier for nature tourism/ecotourism to be developed</td>
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</table>
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)

Resource List

(come and visit IUCN’s Sustainable Tourism Resource Centre, we have more!)


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____________, 199?. ‘Golf and Tourism: a flourishing business with high environmental risks’.


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