



## **Northern Vietnam's coastal fishing villages and their potential for attracting tourists**

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### **Abstract**

*This study analyzes and evaluates certain characteristics and tourism potential of coastal fishing villages in Northern Vietnam. Using both secondary and primary data collected through representative surveys across some of the fishing villages, the findings reveal that while natural resources constitute a key attraction for visitors, the limited availability and quality of tourism services diminish the overall appeal of these destinations. To address this problem, management authorities, local governments, and community stakeholders should focus on enhancing the tourism attributes of these destinations, preserving local culture, developing traditional seafood cuisine, promoting destination branding, and fostering a hospitable environment for visitors.*

**Keywords:** coastal fishing village, potential, attraction, tourists, Northern Vietnam.

**JEL classification:** L83, Q26, R58, Z32, Z38.

## 1. Introduction

As a coastal nation, Vietnam is endowed with significant potential for developing marine tourism as a driver of socio-economic growth. Coastal fishing villages are regarded as attractive destinations in various travel itineraries and cultural repositories of coastal communities. Leveraging the cultural values of fishing villages to create tourism products not only enhances local tourism offerings but also contributes to the preservation and promotion of maritime heritage.

In the coastal fishing villages along Northern Vietnam, the daily labor, lifestyles, and sea-related beliefs of residents have shaped distinctive features in both architecture and culture. These characteristics contribute to attraction for domestic and foreign tourists. However, many fishing villages are increasingly at risk of partial or complete disappearance due to rapid urbanization and climate change. Currently, coastal localities appear to focus primarily on investing in infrastructure and lodging facilities for tourism, whereas fishing villages remain largely unplanned and self-organized in their operations. The socio-cultural values of fishing villages have not been adequately prioritized in terms of investment or preservation, nor have they been effectively integrated into the networks of tourism businesses both within and beyond the local area.

This paper focuses on analyzing and evaluating the characteristics of coastal fishing villages in Northern Vietnam and their potential to attract tourists for experiential activities. Based on the findings, the paper proposes several implications for the development of fishing villages and the enhancement of their tourism appeal in the region.

## 2. Research methodology

### 2.1. *Tourism attracting destination attributes of coastal fishing villages*

A coastal village is a settlement where the inhabitants primarily rely on marine fishing and are skilled in operating boats and handling fishing gear (Vu, 2018). A tourism destination refers to a country, territory, or locality that possesses attractive tourism resources, appropriate tourism infrastructure, tourism products and supporting services, as well as the ability to attract, serve, and meet the needs of tourists during their stay.

A tourism destination inherently consists of multiple characteristics, which are attributes of the destination and possess a specific capacity to attract tourists (Tasci *et al.*, 2007;

Vengesayi, 2003). Mayo and Jarvis (1981) argue that a destination's attractiveness is the ability of a destination to provide benefits to tourists. The attractiveness of a destination reflects the perceptions, beliefs, and opinions that individuals hold regarding the destination's ability to satisfy tourists in relation to their specific travel needs (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Destination attractiveness is evaluated not only based on its physical attributes but also in consideration of other non-physical attributes (Owusu-Frimpong *et al.*, 2013). Different destinations possess different levels of attractiveness to tourists.

The attributes contributing to a destination's tourist attractiveness have been discussed in numerous studies. For instance, Gearing *et al.* (1974) identified five groups of attributes: natural factors, social factors, historical factors, recreational and shopping facilities, and infrastructure, cuisine, and accommodation. Hu and Ritchie (1993) proposed 16 specific attributes, including natural landscape, climate and weather, historical attraction, cultural attraction, accommodation, cuisine, residents' lifestyle, accessibility, festivals and events, sports activities, shopping, entertainment, attitudes toward tourists, transportation, language barriers, and local pricing. Vengesayi (2003) categorized five groups - culture, nature, events, tourism activities, and recreational activities - as core components of destination attractiveness. Kozak *et al.* (2009) highlighted four main groups: service quality, infrastructure, facilities and activities, and natural and cultural factors that influence the tourist attractiveness of the destination.

In Vietnam, Ha and Ha (2018) adopted the model developed by Kozak *et al.* (2009) to examine the attractiveness of Con Dao for domestic tourists. In contrast, Bui and Mai (2012) employed Hu and Ritchie (1993) model, incorporating destination safety as an additional factor.

In this study, the author proposes 15 attributes based on the analytical frameworks of 16 attributes by Hu and Ritchie (1993) and 17 attributes by Bui and Mai (2012), by excluding irrelevant attributes and adding characteristics specific to Northern coastal fishing villages. These attributes include:

- (1) Natural landscape and pristine features
- (2) Marine ecosystem
- (3) Climate and weather

- (4) Historical attraction
- (5) Events and festivals
- (6) Local residents' lifestyle
- (7) Attitudes toward tourists
- (8) Information and promotion about the fishing village
- (9) Diversity of products and shopping services
- (10) Pricing
- (11) Accommodation facilities
- (12) Seafood cuisine
- (13) Transportation and accessibility
- (14) Security and safety
- (15) Environmental sanitation.

The importance of each attribute in attracting tourists may be perceived differently by different visitors. Therefore, this study combines analyses of both the importance and attractiveness of fishing villages to more convincingly identify the specific attributes that need improvement to enhance their appeal to tourists.

A structured questionnaire was designed to assess tourists' perceptions of the importance and attractiveness of destination attributes in fishing villages. To ensure its validity, the questionnaire was pre-tested, reviewed by experts, and revised accordingly before the full-scale survey was conducted. Tourists' perceptions were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

## **2.2. Data**

This study is based on secondary data published by relevant agencies, organizations, and publishers, as well as on field surveys of selected fishing villages and direct assessments from tourists. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for unknown populations. With a margin of error of 0.1, the minimum required sample is 100; with a margin of 0.05, it is 397. The author selected a sample of 200 domestic tourists who had visited and experienced fishing villages in Quang Ninh, Hai Phong, and Nam Dinh.

Among them, 60 observations were collected in Cua Van village (Ha Long, Quang Ninh), 60 in Cai Beo village (Cat Ba, Hai Phong), and 80 in Thinh Long village (Hai Hau, Nam Dinh).

The field survey was conducted from April to June 2023. Tourists were randomly selected and interviewed in person during their visits and experiences at the fishing villages.

The survey sample exhibits the following characteristics: In terms of gender, 40.0% of respondents were male and 60.0% were female. Regarding geographical origin, the majority of surveyed tourists were from the Southern region (45.5%), followed by the Northern region (40.0%) and the Central region (14.5%). In terms of age, the dominant age group was 40-60 years old, accounting for 43.0%, followed by the 20-40 years old group (33.5%), and the remainder were over 60 years old. As for educational background, a large proportion of respondents (78.0%) held a college degree or higher. Regarding occupation, the majority of tourists were corporate employees (59.5%), followed by freelance workers (39.0%). With respect to the purpose of the trip, nearly all visitors came to the fishing village for tourism purposes, accounting for 88.5%.

The cleaned data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, including frequency and proportion statistics, mean values, and the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test.

### **3. Coastal fishing villages in Northern Vietnam and their tourist attraction potential**

#### ***3.1. Coastal fishing villages in Northern Vietnam***

Currently, there are no official statistics on the number of coastal fishing villages, especially in the Northern region of Vietnam. In the coastal areas of Northern Vietnam, fishing villages are located along the shoreline, where the local population primarily engages in fishing, aquaculture, and seafood processing. Coastal fishers possess extensive proficiency in maritime activities, high levels of craftsmanship, and considerable experience in aquaculture and seafood harvesting. Aquaculture and seafood harvesting activities are typically integrated with seafood processing, in which locally available marine resources are used to produce various food products for daily consumption - such as fish sauce, fermented fish, fish meal, frozen items, dried seafood, and steamed fish, among others. Therefore, it is possible to estimate the number of fishing villages based on the number of seafood processing villages.

**TABLE 1: The number of coastal fishing villages engaged in seafood processing in some Northern coastal provinces of Vietnam**

Province name	Coastal fishing villages associated with seafood processing		Other craft villages		Total
	Number	Share (%)	Number	Share (%)	
Quang Ninh	6	20.00	14	3.48	20
Hai Phong	4	13.33	32	7.96	36
Thai Binh	7	23.33	247	61.44	254
Former Ninh Binh	2	6.67	79	19.65	81
Nam Dinh	11	36.67	30	7.46	41
Total	30		402		432

*Source:* Author's statistics 2023.

The coastal fishing villages, especially the craft ones in Northern Vietnam, emerged and developed in close association with the nation's historical processes of nation-building and defense. Several renowned fishing villages include Cua Van, Vung Vieng, Cong Dam, and Ba Hang (Quang Ninh); Viet Hai and Cai Beo (Hai Phong); Thinh Long and Xuong Dien (Nam Dinh). These coastal fishing villages in Northern Vietnam possess several distinctive characteristics as follows.

*Firstly*, fishing villages emerged in close association with the livelihoods of rural communities (farming, cultivation, and aquatic resource exploitation), attracting a relatively large labor force and providing a significant, often primary source of household income. In coastal areas, where farming and cultivation are less favorable, activities related to fishing, aquaculture, and seafood processing are considered key economic sectors. Today, many fishing villages, such as Cua Van and Cai Beo, have integrated tourism to promote economic development and increase local income.

*Secondly*, although located along the coastline and largely uninterrupted by terrain, current fishing villages are often small in scale, scattered, and interspersed within urban and

residential areas. The spatial structure of coastal villages is typically open and harmoniously integrated with nature. Residents live both on coastal land and on the sea surface in sheltered bays and coves (living and conducting daily activities on fishing boats). On land, aside from the coastal road, most village roads lead directly to the sea. The level of interconnection among fishing villages in terms of seafood production, distribution, and the provision of related services remains low, posing particular challenges to economic development.

*Thirdly*, the products from fishing villages are relatively diverse and have a broad consumer market. These products are primarily consumed in the Red River Delta region. This has created favorable initial conditions for coastal fishing villages to develop their economies in recent years, significantly contributing to poverty reduction and income improvement for residents. In recent years, local villagers have invested in some machinery and supporting equipment; however, key processing stages are still performed using traditional methods, thereby preserving their “distinct characteristics” and creating notable differences among localities.

*Fourthly*, the livelihoods and economic activities of residents in fishing villages are highly diverse, including fishing, aquaculture, seafood processing, commerce, and tourism. In terms of fishing, based on the types of fishing gear, three primary methods can be identified: gillnet fishing, handline fishing, and scoop net fishing. These are essentially traditional fishing methods that have long existed and have been gradually refined by residents to improve efficiency. Besides being traded or sold, the harvested seafood is also processed by coastal villagers into preserved foods for long-term storage.

*Fifthly*, the socio-cultural life of residents in fishing villages is quite diverse. With an abundance of marine products, the local cuisine and methods of preparing seafood are relatively rich. Residents in fishing villages live both at sea and on land (some villages are entirely sea-based), resulting in distinct cultural characteristics. For example, in fishing villages on Ha Long Bay, people often perform dum singing, sea chants, and wedding songs on boats during festivals and weddings. While boats were formerly operated with sails, some floating houses have now appeared. In terms of beliefs, fishing village communities commonly worship sea deities to pray for peace and good fortune, and worship the Whale God (*Cá Ông*) for protection and the safety of fishermen. These cultural practices represent a unique feature that attracts tourists.

*Sixthly*, livelihood activities such as fishing, aquaculture, and seafood processing in certain fishing villages are causing severe marine environmental pollution (Dinh *et al.*, 2013). Most waste sources in these villages are untreated and discharged directly into the marine environment. Coastal residents living on boats and floating houses for the convenience of fishing and aquaculture frequently release wastewater and solid waste into the sea. On average, each household discharges approximately 10 cubic meters of sewage into the ocean per month. Although local authorities have implemented various solutions, the problem remains unresolved; residents continue to illegally dump domestic waste directly into the sea, and floating houses still use styrofoam buoys, which fragment when exposed to weather changes and sea waves.

### ***3.2. The level of tourist attractiveness of coastal fishing villages in Northern Vietnam***

Table 2 summarizes the survey results on tourists' perceptions of the importance of 15 destination attributes of a fishing village. It can be seen that most of the destination attributes in Northern Vietnamese fishing villages were rated highly in terms of importance (average values of 4.0 or above appeared in 12 out of 15 attributes). Among them, several attributes were considered to play a more significant role in determining domestic tourists' destination choices, ranked in descending order as follows: seafood cuisine; accommodation facilities; natural landscape and pristine features; information and promotion about the fishing village; residents' lifestyle; marine ecosystem; and climate and weather.

Table 3 indicates that tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness of Northern coastal fishing villages are consistently rated lower than the perceived importance of destination attributes. Tourists identify several appealing features, including natural landscapes and pristine environments, security and safety, historical attractions, accommodation facilities, climate and weather, marine ecosystems, a diversity of products and shopping services, transportation and travel conditions, affordability, and seafood cuisine. However, less attractive attributes include environmental sanitation, information and promotion about the fishing village, residents' lifestyle, and attitudes toward tourists. These findings reflect a common challenge among Vietnam's coastal tourism destinations, including Northern fishing villages, which requires improvement in the near future.

TABLE 2: Importance levels of destination attributes of fishing villages in Northern Vietnam

Destination attributes	Importance Levels										Mean score
	Not important at all		Not important		Neutral		Important		Very important		
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Natural landscape and pristine features			40	20.0	85	42.5	75	37.5	4.18		
Marine ecosystem			22	11.0	90	45.0	88	44.0	4.33		
Climate and weather			22	11.0	76	38.0	102	51.0	4.40		
Historical attraction	2	1.0	27	13.5	69	34.5	102	51.0	4.35		
Events and festivals			30	15.0	68	34.0	102	51.0	4.36		
Local residents' lifestyle	1	0.5	28	14.0	67	33.5	104	52.0	4.37		
Attitudes toward tourists			16	8.0	79	39.5	105	52.5	4.45		
Information and promotion about the fishing village			38	19.0	92	46.0	70	35.0	4.16		
Diversity of products and shopping services	1	0.5	62	31.0	69	34.5	68	34.0	4.02		
Pricing			39	19.5	89	44.5	72	36.0	4.17		
Accommodation facilities			37	18.5	85	42.5	78	39.0	4.21		
Seafood cuisine			33	16.5	64	32.0	103	51.5	4.35		
Transportation and accessibility			33	16.5	84	42.0	83	41.5	4.25		
Security and safety			23	11.5	69	34.5	108	54.0	4.43		
Environmental sanitation			26	13.0	86	43.0	88	44.0	4.31		

Note: Not important at all = 1 point; Not important = 2 points; Important = 3 points; Neutral = 4 points; Very important = 5 points. Sample size: 200 respondents.  
Source: Author's survey data, 2023.

TABLE 3: Attractiveness level of destination attributes of fishing villages in Northern Vietnam

Destination attributes	Attractiveness Level											Importance level (mean) (b*)	Difference (c = a-b)				
	Not at all attractive			Not attractive			Neutral			Attractive				Very attractive		Mean score (a)	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)		Frequency	Percentage (%)		Frequency	Percentage (%)		Frequency	Percentage (%)				Frequency		Percentage (%)
Natural landscape and pristine features	7	3.5	4	2.0	50	25.0	62	31.0	77	38.5	3.99	4.18	-0.19				
Marine ecosystem	5	2.5	14	7.0	45	22.5	71	35.5	65	32.5	3.89	4.33	-0.44				
Climate and weather	6	3.0	11	5.5	51	25.5	62	31.0	70	35.0	3.90	4.40	-0.5				
Historical attraction	7	3.5	5	2.5	54	27.0	60	30.0	74	37.0	3.95	4.35	-0.4				
Events and festivals	3	1.5	17	8.5	69	34.5	69	34.5	42	21.0	3.65	4.36	-0.71				
Local residents' lifestyle	8	4.0	20	10.0	65	32.5	69	34.5	38	19.0	3.55	4.37	-0.82				
Attitudes toward tourists	9	4.5	17	8.5	67	33.5	70	35.0	37	18.5	3.55	4.45	-0.9				
Information and promotion about the fishing village	13	6.5	14	7.0	67	33.5	61	30.5	45	22.5	3.56	4.16	-0.6				
Diversity of products and shopping services	7	3.5	7	3.5	61	30.5	62	31.0	63	31.5	3.84	4.02	-0.18				
Pricing	5	2.5	13	6.5	67	33.5	63	31.5	52	26.0	3.72	4.17	-0.45				
Accommodation facilities	8	4.0	5	2.5	45	22.5	79	39.5	63	31.5	3.92	4.21	-0.29				
Seafood cuisine	19	9.5	8	4.0	38	19.0	85	42.5	50	25.0	3.70	4.35	-0.65				
Transportation and accessibility	10	5.0	21	10.5	23	11.5	85	42.5	61	30.5	3.83	4.25	-0.42				
Security and safety	6	3.0			29	14.5	93	46.5	72	36.0	4.13	4.43	-0.3				
Environmental sanitation	16	8.0	12	6.0	41	20.5	96	48.0	35	17.5	3.61	4.31	-0.7				

Note: Not at all attractive = 1 point; Not attractive = 2 points; Neutral = 3 points; Attractive = 4 points; Very attractive = 5 points. Sample size: 200 respondents.

\* Value (b) calculated from Table 2.

Source: Authors' survey data, 2023.

The comparative assessment results regarding the level of tourist attractiveness of coastal fishing villages in Northern Vietnam vary significantly among different tourist groups, as demonstrated by the Kruskal-Wallis test presented in Table 4.

**TABLE 4: Tourist attractiveness of Northern coastal fishing villages across different tourist groups**

Attributes	Independent variables (Asymp. Sig. values from Kruskal-Wallis test)					
	Region	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Purpose
Natural landscape and pristine features	0.224	0.549	0.822	0.232	0.485	0.114
Marine ecosystem	0.818	0.691	0.650	0.135	0.981	0.368
Climate and weather	0.487	0.373	0.008	0.307	0.261	0.373
Historical attraction	0.958	0.436	0.838	0.610	0.720	0.406
Events and festivals	0.279	0.203	0.016	0.080	0.410	0.137
Local residents' lifestyle	0.714	0.690	0.838	0.546	0.562	0.468
Attitudes toward tourists	0.843	0.014	0.173	0.429	0.636	0.596
Information and promotion about the fishing village	0.599	0.000	0.122	0.782	0.736	0.374
Diversity of products and shopping services	0.327	0.408	0.038	0.261	0.504	0.799
Pricing	0.542	0.843	0.578	0.228	0.796	0.771
Accommodation facilities	0.146	0.419	0.515	0.156	0.070	0.585
Seafood cuisine	0.016	0.407	0.139	0.325	0.769	0.104
Transportation and accessibility	0.149	0.913	0.800	0.896	0.889	0.285
Security and safety	0.926	0.625	0.114	0.902	0.788	0.555
Environmental sanitation	0.662	0.640	0.406	0.022	0.790	0.940

Source: Author's data analysis from the 2023 survey.

As shown in Table 4, although tourists belong to different demographic groups, their evaluations of the destination attributes of coastal fishing villages are generally consistent. Specifically, tourists from different regions provided similar assessment for 14 out of 15 destination attributes; by gender, 13 attributes received comparable ratings; by age group, 12 attributes received similar ratings; by educational level, 14 attributes were similarly assessed; and across occupations and travel purposes, all 15 attributes were rated similarly.

However, some differences in evaluations are observed across regions, genders, age groups, and educational levels. Specifically, regional differences appeared in the evaluation of the attribute “seafood cuisine”; gender differences emerged in the assessment of “attitude toward tourists” and “information and promotion about the fishing village”; age-based differences were found in the assessment of “climate and weather”, “events and festivals”, and “diversity of products and shopping services”; and differences by educational level were noted for the attribute “environmental sanitation”.

#### **4. Conclusion and some implications for attracting tourists to coastal fishing villages in Northern Vietnam in the near future**

Research findings indicate that the fishing villages are located along the coastline of the Gulf of Tonkin. The emergence and development of these villages are closely associated with the nation’s history of establishment and defense. Currently, the attractiveness of these fishing villages to tourists depends not only on their inherent landscape features but also on the development of other components, such as socio-cultural aspects, convenient services, and destination safety. If these components are not effectively developed or promoted, leading to unsatisfactory visitor experiences, the capacity of these fishing villages to attract and retain visitors will remain limited.

Tourists’ evaluations of the importance and attractiveness of Northern coastal fishing villages indicate that their primary motivation for visiting these destinations is to explore and engage in experiential activities. In other words, these fishing villages represent a form of exploratory and experiential tourism. They are mass tourism destinations, attracting a diverse range of visitors in terms of occupation, age, and background. Therefore, to develop fishing village tourism and cater to varied visitor segments, management agencies, local authorities, and residents should prioritize destination branding efforts by enhancing all destination-related tourism attributes.

Moreover, given the evident differences in tourists' assessments of destination attractiveness across region, age, education level, and gender, fishing villages should further develop relevant destination attributes to attract different tourists better. For instance, traditional seafood cuisine should be emphasized to attract tourists from various regions across the country and even international visitors. To attract younger generations, local ingredients and cooking traditions may be creatively combined with modern culinary techniques to create new dishes that both preserve local identity and appeal to the youth. Collaborations with major restaurants and hotels to incorporate traditional dishes into their menus would also enhance visibility and accessibility for well-educated tourists with higher spending capacity.

At the same time, management agencies and local governments should place greater emphasis on improving destination attributes that are currently perceived as less attractive, such as residents' lifestyle, attitudes toward visitors, and information and promotion about the fishing village. Enhancing these aspects would enable visitors to experience not only the natural beauty but also the socio-cultural richness of coastal communities, thereby achieving the highest level of satisfaction. For instance, it is essential to focus on promoting information, culture, and traditions of the fishing villages through various official media channels as well as personal communication platforms; creating a welcoming atmosphere so that tourists feel encouraged to engage, experience, and develop positive evaluations; diversifying recreational activities, nature-based exploration, and outdoor events; placing emphasis on cultural events and festivals; and enhancing the promotion of handicrafts and souvenirs available in the villages.

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