

STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN LY SON DISTRICT, QUANG NGAI PROVINCE TO THE YEAR 2030

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to evaluate the current state of tourism in Ly Son district, Quang Ngai province, and identify external factors influencing its development. Based on this assessment, the study proposes strategies for the sustainable development of tourism in the region. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing synthesis and analysis techniques in conjunction with the SWOT matrix method to formulate strategic recommendations. The research identifies three principal strategies: revitalizing traditional cultural activities that have faded over time to enhance tourism offerings; recruiting and training both new and existing local human resources for the tourism sector; and investing in advanced technologies for the sustainable exploitation of water resources. The findings are expected to support tourism authorities in Ly Son in developing informed and effective policies for long-term tourism sustainability. A notable limitation of this study is the absence of primary data collected from local residents, tourists, and tourism stakeholders; instead, the analysis relied on existing historical data. The results from this study will provide insight into the current state of tourism in Ly Son, helping managers and policymakers develop sustainable development strategies for the local tourism industry in the future.

Keywords: Ly Son, tourism, SWOT analysis, sustainable tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2015, Ly Son tourism has experienced continuous development. Initially regarded as a nascent destination with virtually no tourism activity, Ly Son has since emerged as a prominent tourist attraction within Quang Ngai province, gaining recognition among both domestic and international visitors. In the early stages of its development, tourism in Ly Son largely evolved through the spontaneous efforts of local residents, without a clearly defined strategic direction. However, from 2020 onward, the district has implemented more structured and locally oriented tourism development policies. The commitment to "building Ly Son tourism in a sustainable direction" was formally emphasized during the district's socio-economic planning conference [1]. According to Nguyen Minh Tri, Secretary of Ly Son District, the locality aims to seize opportunities to promote the sustainable development of its tourism sector. However, establishing Ly Son as the center of marine and island tourism in Quang Ngai province presents significant challenges, with sustainable development proving even more complex. Achieving sustainable tourism requires adherence to strict standards,

including environmental protection, minimizing the depletion of tourism resources, promoting socio-economic growth, and ensuring that all stakeholders benefit equitably.

While SWOT analysis is widely acknowledged as an effective and practical tool in strategic management, particularly within the business sector [2,3], its use in tourism—especially at the local or destination level—remains comparatively underexplored. Most research applying SWOT tends to concentrate on large-scale organizational strategies or national tourism development frameworks, leaving a significant gap in studies focused on evaluating tourism potential and sustainability at the local scale. Distinct cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic factors shape local tourism contexts, necessitating tailored strategic approaches. This study uses SWOT analysis along with Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrices to fill the gap in research about local tourism potential and sustainability. This local approach shows that SWOT can be useful outside of businesses and offers a detailed view for planning tourism in specific places, helping to advance research on sustainable tourism.

To solve the problem of sustainable tourism development in Ly Son and fill the gap in academic research, the authors conducted a study titled "*Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy of Ly Son District—Quang Ngai Province to 2030*". The objectives of the study are (1) to assess the current state of tourism in Ly Son recently, (2) to evaluate external factors influencing Ly Son tourism, and (3) to identify appropriate strategies for the sustainable development of tourism in accordance with the district's orientations and policies. The study will offer comprehensive insights to stakeholders and support collaborative efforts to promote sustainable tourism in Ly Son in the coming years.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Tourism

Tourism refers to activities involving travel outside one's regular place of residence for a period not exceeding one year aimed at fulfilling various needs, such as sightseeing, recreation, entertainment, research, and exploration, or for other legal purposes [4]. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as the activities of temporary residents engaged in travel for the purpose of exploration, leisure, relaxation, or other experiences; it excludes travel primarily intended for economic gain [5]. Tourism can also be considered a form of active rest in an environment different from one's usual place of living [6]. In addition, tourism is a business involving the organization of travel, accommodation, dining, entertainment, and related services to meet tourists' needs, which in turn generates economic and socio-political benefits for both the destination and businesses [7]. These various definitions highlight the common understanding that tourism involves travel away from home for short periods, primarily for enjoyment, exploration, and relaxation [4,6]. Today, tourism is a thriving industry that provides services to tourists seeking such experiences [7].

2.2. Sustainable tourism development

Sustainable tourism development refers to the advancement of tourism that aligns with sustainability objectives. According to [4], it involves tourism development that simultaneously addresses socio-economic and environmental requirements, ensuring the balance of interests among stakeholders and safeguarding the ability to meet future tourism needs. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism development as progress that satisfies the needs of current visitors and local communities while safeguarding and enhancing opportunities for future generations [5]. This

approach entails the responsible management of resources to meet economic, social, and aesthetic demands while preserving the integrity of cultural heritage, essential ecological processes, biodiversity, and life support systems [8].

The definitions of sustainable tourism development provided by [5,6] highlight several key implications: Alignment with current development needs, fulfillment of socio-economic requirements for all stakeholders involved in tourism activities, and the protection of tourism resources to ensure their availability for future use. These aspects demonstrate that sustainable tourism development involves a strategic approach to preserving and utilizing tourism resources in the long term to meet present needs. It emphasizes the necessary balance between environmental, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions to guarantee the long-term sustainability of tourism [8].

A recent conceptualization of sustainable tourism is provided by [9], who emphasizes that sustainable tourism extends beyond environmental preservation to encompass tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. This perspective highlights the importance of aligning tourism practices with the cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic images of a destination, ensuring that tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. By focusing on these dimensions, sustainable tourism aims to foster positive experiences for tourists and strengthen their loyalty to destinations, thereby contributing to the long-term viability and competitiveness of tourism locales. This approach underscores the necessity of integrating environmental stewardship with cultural sensitivity and economic responsibility in tourism planning and management.

We contend that sustainable tourism, regardless of the perspective taken, aims to create positive outcomes for all stakeholders at a destination. While [9] emphasizes tourist loyalty as a central goal of sustainable tourism, this view remains limited. In our view, sustainable tourism involves not only satisfying tourists but also addressing the interests of multiple stakeholders and promoting long-term sustainability across economic, environmental, and sociocultural dimensions. Therefore, we argue that the definition provided by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) remains highly relevant, as it offers a comprehensive framework for balancing present needs with future development opportunities.

2.3. Principles and criterias for evaluating sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism development in a locality must have a long-term and sustainable strategy that meets the current needs of the locality. Therefore, sustainable tourism development needs principles. According to UNWTO, sustainable tourism development needs the following principles:

Optimal use of environmental resources: This refers to the efficient utilization of environmental resources to sustain essential ecological processes, while conserving natural heritage and biodiversity [5].

Respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of local communities: This involves the preservation of cultural heritage and traditional values, while fostering understanding and harmony among diverse cultures [5].

Ensuring long-term and viable economic activities: This entails the equitable distribution of socio-economic benefits among all stakeholders, providing stable employment, income opportunities, and social services for local communities, contributing to poverty reduction and fostering local development [5].

There are various perspectives on the criteria used to evaluate sustainable tourism development. However, after a thorough review of the literature and adopting an appropriate approach to sustainable tourism development, the author proposes several key criteria for

evaluation based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). These criteria include: sustainable management, socioeconomic impacts, cultural impacts, and environmental impacts, which encompass resource consumption, pollution reduction, and the conservation of biodiversity and landscapes [10]. Therefore, a locality or country aiming to achieve and be recognized for sustainable tourism development must meet these targets, and the degree of achievement will be assessed using this four-factor framework [11].

2.4. Essential factors for sustainable tourism development

Sustainable tourism development is shaped by a wide range of interrelated factors. Although various studies have proposed different contributing elements, there remains limited agreement on a standardized set of core factors. This study proposes that certain key elements are particularly influential in driving sustainable tourism, based on their fundamental roles in shaping the long-term viability of tourism destinations. These include: the tourism infrastructure system and industry facilities, which provide the physical and operational foundation for tourism activities [12, 13]; natural and cultural tourism resources, which form the basis of tourist attraction and local identity [12, 13]; the quality and availability of human resources, as a skilled workforce ensures service efficiency and visitor satisfaction [12, 13]; the competence of tourism management organizations, which influences policy implementation and destination governance [13]; and the quality of tourism services, a determinant of tourist experience and repeat visitation [13].

In addition, community participation is essential for fostering local ownership and equitable benefit-sharing [12,13]; while security and socio-political stability are prerequisites for safe and reliable tourism environments [14]. Other critical factors include tourism policies, tourist market dynamics, local economic development, and tourism technology, all of which influence the adaptability and competitiveness of a destination. Together, these constitute the primary pillars supporting sustainable tourism, though secondary factors may also play supporting roles in specific contexts.

2.5. Internal factor evaluation matrix, External factor evaluation matrix, SWOT

The Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) Matrix is a strategic management tool used to assess a organization's internal strengths and weaknesses in a structured, quantifiable way. It helps organizations identify key internal factors and evaluate their relative importance and performance. The IFE Matrix is especially useful in early strategic planning stages, such as SWOT analysis, helping align internal capabilities with strategic goals [2].

The External Factor Evaluation (EFE) Matrix is a strategic management tool designed to evaluate a organization's external environment by identifying and assessing key opportunities and threats that may impact organizational performance. It provides a structured approach to scanning the external macroeconomic, social, technological, and competitive environments. The EFE Matrix is widely used in strategic planning to support environmental analysis and inform decision-making [2].

SWOT analysis is a foundational strategic management tool used to evaluate an organization's internal and external environments by identifying its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Internal factors—strengths and weaknesses—pertain to an organization's resources, capabilities, and operational efficiency, while external factors—opportunities and threats—are shaped by industry trends, market dynamics, and broader macroeconomic forces. The analysis facilitates strategic alignment by helping organizations leverage strengths, address weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate threats. It is particularly valuable during the formulation stage of strategic planning and is often used

alongside other tools such as the IFE and EFE matrices for comprehensive environmental assessment [2,15]. By synthesizing both internal and external insights, SWOT analysis enables informed decision-making and supports the development of sustainable competitive advantages.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, we employed the SWOT analysis method as a strategic tool. To develop the SWOT matrix, we utilized the Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrices, as outlined by [2]. Using the IFE matrix, we analyzed the current state of sustainable tourism in Lý Sơn through document analysis and direct field observations. Similarly, the EFE matrix was used to examine the external environment affecting sustainable tourism in the area. The IFE matrix identified key strengths and weaknesses, while the EFE matrix highlighted opportunities and threats from the external context.

After analyzing both the internal and external environments of sustainable tourism in Lý Sơn, we compiled a set of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Based on both expert evaluations and our own field assessments, we constructed a SWOT matrix, which served as the foundation for identifying appropriate strategic directions. As noted by [15], SWOT analysis enables decision-makers to match internal capabilities with external conditions in order to formulate strategies that enhance organizational resilience and competitiveness. The resulting strategies are designed to support the sustainable development of tourism in Ly Son.

4. RESEARCH RESULT

4.1. Ly Son tourism situation

4.1.1. Assessment of the current situation of tourism infrastructure and technology

The current transportation infrastructure in Ly Son district consists of three main inter-village roads, with six high-speed boats operating to carry passengers between the mainland and the island. The frequency of boat operations is determined by passenger demand at specific times. Transportation services for passengers traveling between the larger and smaller islands have also become more stable and professional, with 17 operational canoes currently in service [16]. Additionally, there are four local travel enterprises operating within the district. Other tourism-related infrastructure has been upgraded alongside improvements to public welfare infrastructure, including the construction of the Ly Son Military and Civilian Combined Hospital, which was completed in mid-2024 at a cost of 287 billion VND. A new port, Ben Dinh Port, has also been developed, with investments made in the construction of a breakwater to safeguard ships entering and exiting the port, alongside a 36 billion VND investment for an An Binh bridge breakwater [17]. In response to the lack of public lighting and road infrastructure, the district has invested 8.5 billion VND in improving the lighting system. The center of Ly Son district also features a square regularly used for festivals and events, attracting tourists [12]. According to updated data in 2024, the district has a total of 130 accommodation establishments, including 17 hotels, 53 motels, 55 homestays, and 5 hostels, with a total of 1,057 rooms. Over 15 restaurants are available to serve tourists on the island. Since 2017, two tram companies have been operating on Ly Son Island, and the Mai Linh taxi company has been providing services since 2018. These developments indicate that Ly Son's infrastructure, both material and technical, is well-equipped to meet the current and future needs of tourists.

Based on the current situation, the following strengths of the facilities and technical infrastructure can be identified: (S1) Facilities and technical infrastructure are well met.

4.1.2. Assessment of the current situation of tourism resources

According to [18], Ly Son Island District was formed through volcanic geological tectonic activities, which have created diverse and abundant tourism resources. Ly Son boasts beautiful landscapes, unique geomorphology, and notable sites such as To Vo Gate, Hang Pagoda, Hang Cave, Gieng Tien Crater, and Thoi Loi Crater. Its rich marine ecosystem, with pristine coral reefs, earned recognition from Forbes Magazine in 2019 as one of the top 10 most beautiful beaches in Vietnam. However, despite the stunning beaches, they are not suitable for swimming due to the presence of corals and rocks, though the sea remains remarkably clear.

In addition to its natural resources, Ly Son's cultural tourism is even more prominent. The island holds deep historical significance, being the home of the heroes of the Hoang Sa Squadron and the North Sea governor, who sailed to establish and enforce Vietnam's sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. Ly Son is also home to over 50 historical and cultural relics, including 6 national-level and 19 provincial-level relics, as well as archaeological sites like Xom Oc and Suoi Cuong. The island celebrates unique traditional festivals, such as the Fishing Prayer Ceremony and the Blessing Festival, and is renowned for its lullabies that commemorate the land's origins and the sacrifices made by those who served in the Paracels.

Culturally, Ly Son is also known for its distinctive cuisine, attracting both domestic and international visitors. Specialties include garlic salad, stir-fried moon snails with chili sauce, hum porridge, seaweed salad, and seafood, along with its famous "white gold" Ly Son garlic. To further promote tourism, the provincial government has developed cultural and sports events like the "Ly Son Cross Island" swimming event, women's beach volleyball, marathons, and national parachute competitions.

Despite Ly Son's abundance of natural and cultural resources, it faces significant shortcomings. According to [18] points out that notable weaknesses include the lack of suitable beaches for swimming, ineffective exploitation of tourism resources, and the disappearance of some indigenous cultural features. Based on this analysis, the study identifies the following key strengths and weaknesses: Strengths: (S2) Ly Son tourism resources are rich, diverse and famous; (S3) Ly Son's cuisine is delicious and special. Weaknesses: (W1) There is no suitable beach for tourists to swim; (W2) Tourism resources have not been effectively exploited; (W3) Some indigenous cultural features have disappeared.

4.1.3. Tourism human resources and tourism management qualifications

The tourism human resources in Ly Son district currently comprise approximately 2,000 direct workers and 5,000 indirect workers, with four travel agencies operating in the area. These resources include staff from hotels, motels, homestays, passenger ships, restaurants, transport fleets, taxis, and port authorities, alongside 32 domestic tour guides [16]. However, there is a significant gap in staffing at local tourist attractions. Notably, the "Hoang Sa Bac Hai" exhibition house does not have full-time staff on duty, and narrators are only available when specific groups require explanations. Additionally, many of the guides in the area have not undergone specialized training, and their foreign language skills are often limited, hindering effective communication with international tourists. This results in challenges when attempting to convey the cultural and historical significance of the attractions to foreign visitors [19].

The professional standards of tourism service staff are generally low, with many employees in hotels, motels, and homestays lacking formal training in the tourism industry. While Ly Son district has made efforts to address such issues through annual professional development classes, the impact of these efforts has been limited. The district's plan, outlined in Resolution 05 of the Quang Ngai Provincial Party Committee, has yet to fully meet expectations for improving tourism staff qualifications and developing key tourism areas in Ly Son [20]. As a result, the tourism sector struggles to attract international visitors, with only 2,000 recorded in 2023.

Below is a summary of Ly Son's tourism workforce's strengths and weaknesses: (S4) The number of staff is sufficient and (W4) Team with weak expertise, skills and foreign languages.

In terms of tourism management, while most employees possess the necessary professional qualifications in tourism, sports, and culture, the rapid development of the tourism sector recently highlights the need for further training and field experience. The management team could benefit from studying other successful tourism destinations to gain broader perspectives and better inform future policy decisions. For instance, proposals such as the construction of a hut on a lava rock area in An Binh commune and the introduction of package COMBO ticket sales for Ly Son tourism faced significant resistance from the local population and lacked broad consensus [1,21]. These proposals underscore the importance of involving the community in decision-making and developing management strategies that are flexible and responsive to local conditions.

Despite these efforts, there is still an insufficient number of tourism management staff to adequately handle the growing number of tourists and manage local heritage sites. This represents a critical issue for the development of tourism in Ly Son. The key weaknesses identified in tourism management are the following: (W5) The number of tourism management has not met the needs of tourism development; (W6) Tourism leaders of Ly Son have not been flexibly applied in real situations.

In conclusion, although Ly Son has enough tourism staff, significant challenges remain in their expertise, skills, and ability to communicate with international visitors. The tourism management team also requires further capacity building to adapt to the evolving needs of the tourism industry. Addressing these issues is crucial for the sustainable development of Ly Son's tourism sector.

4.1.4. Quality of tourism services

Tourism services in Ly Son that significantly impact visitors include the Quang Ngai Port Authority, which manages passenger ships and canoes to the islands; accommodation services; restaurants; shuttle bus services to tourist attractions; sales points along the central road; tour guides; event services; and team-building activities offered by tour operators. Overall, the quality of services provided is satisfactory, with staff members being attentive and dedicated to serving guests. Some employees make up for their lack of expertise with enthusiasm and hospitality. These individuals contribute positively to the overall tourist experience despite their limited technical training. The assessment of the tourism service quality highlights the strength of Ly Son's service sector in offering an appropriate level of service, which meets the needs of most visitors, creating a welcoming atmosphere that encourages repeat visits. Nonetheless, improving the professional skills of service staff remains an area for further development, ensuring that the destination maintains high standards in the long term. We summarize the evaluation of service quality as follows: (S5) Consistent service quality.

4.1.5. Technology used for tourism in Ly Son

Currently, the tourism service providers in Ly Son have not fully utilized modern technologies for short tourism experiences focused on coral reefs and marine life. The services offered in this area rely on traditional methods, such as using mirrors and basket boats to transport tourists for coral and marine life viewing. While these practices reflect the cultural heritage of the island, they also pose safety risks compared to more advanced technologies used in other regions. Historically, the people of Ly Son have employed oval-shaped diving goggles and basket boats for coastal seafood collection, and while this method preserves tradition, it is more hazardous than contemporary alternatives. Furthermore, Ly Son has not yet adopted technologies or water entertainment services, such as jet skis or surf canoes, which are commonly available in other tourist destinations. Although Ly Son has introduced stand-up paddleboarding (SUP), it is primarily used for photography, as the large waves and sea conditions make it unsafe for tourists to venture far from the shore. Additionally, Ly Son has not yet implemented the use of cable car technology for scenic views and transportation to An Binh Island. Therefore, a key weakness identified is that Ly Son has not yet exploited modern technologies to enhance its tourism offerings, as reflected in Weaknesses: (W7) Have not taken advantage of modern technologies for tourists snorkeling to see corals.

4.1.6. Community involvement in sustainable tourism development

Practical observation reveals an increasing focus on the sustainable development of local tourism among the people of Ly Son. In the past, motel owners would often go to the wharf to actively attract tourists, which had a negative impact on the local tourism landscape. However, this practice has largely been discontinued, thanks in part to government awareness campaigns and a shift in public consciousness. Similarly, motorcycle taxi and tram drivers once engaged in the practice of aggressively pulling passengers, but this behavior has also subsided, reflecting a broader change in attitudes towards tourism. This shift indicates that the local population is now more concerned with the long-term benefits of tourism rather than immediate gains. Various individuals, community groups, and tour operators regularly participate in beach clean-up programs, contributing to a cleaner and more appealing island environment. In June, local guides and unions also pooled resources to renovate the area around the starting point of the cross-sea swimming event by purchasing and transporting large quantities of sand to enhance the beauty of the coastline. Furthermore, there is no longer any aggressive solicitation by street vendors targeting tourists. These collective efforts demonstrate that the people of Ly Son are committed to the sustainable and long-term development of local tourism. Thus, a key strength identified is (S6): People join hands to develop sustainable tourism in the locality.

4.1.7. Ly Son tourism development policy

Practical observation reveals a significant shift toward sustainable tourism development among the residents of Ly Son. In the past, motel owners would often approach tourists at the wharf to attract them, a practice that negatively impacted the local tourism environment by creating congestion and detracting from the scenic beauty of the area. However, this behavior has largely been discontinued, thanks in part to government awareness campaigns and an evolving public consciousness regarding the importance of preserving the island's natural and cultural heritage. The local community now recognizes the long-term benefits of a more organized and sustainable approach to tourism, rather than focusing on immediate gains.

Similarly, motorcycle taxi and tram drivers, who once engaged in aggressive passenger solicitation, have also changed their approach, reflecting a broader transformation in tourism-related behaviors on the island. This change in attitude signifies a shift from short-term, profit-driven actions to a more mindful consideration of the island's reputation and future prosperity.

Such developments demonstrate the growing recognition among the local population that sustainable tourism practices will ensure the preservation of their environment and enhance the island's long-term economic viability.

In addition to these shifts in behavior, residents and local businesses are actively participating in environmental conservation efforts. Community groups, tour operators, and individuals regularly engage in beach clean-up programs, contributing to a cleaner and more appealing environment for both tourists and locals. One notable initiative took place in June when local guides and unions came together to improve the area around the starting point of the cross-sea swimming event. By purchasing and transporting large quantities of sand, they enhanced the natural beauty of the coastline, creating a more inviting atmosphere for visitors.

Furthermore, the eradication of aggressive solicitation by street vendors has significantly enhanced the overall visitor experience. This change is indicative of a collective effort to create a more professional and welcoming tourism environment in which tourists are not subject to undue pressure.

These collective efforts by the people of Ly Son reflect their commitment to fostering a sustainable and long-term tourism model. By prioritizing the island's environmental and cultural integrity, local residents are ensuring that Ly Son remains an attractive and viable destination for future generations. Therefore, a key strength identified in this context is (S7): The local government is interested in tourism promotion.

4.1.8. Security, socio-politics of Ly Son

Ly Son Island District is an island district located 15 nautical miles from the mainland, so it is straightforward to isolate from the mainland. This also leads to very stable security and politics in the district. There are no criminal groups operating in the area; there is no theft. At the same time, the police force regularly patrols, which should significantly limit evils and traffic safety for tourists. Besides, due to the nature of honest people, there is no phenomenon of petty robbery. So here are the strengths: (S8) Safety and security.

In conclusion, the analysis of the current state of tourism in Ly Son reveals several notable strengths that position the island as a potential tourism hub for the province. These strengths provide a strong foundation for the development of tourism in the area. However, alongside these advantages, there are also inherent limitations that must be addressed to ensure the sustainable development of local tourism. We must effectively manage these challenges to align with long-term goals and support the continued growth of the tourism sector in Ly Son.

4.2. Analysis of external factors affecting Ly Son tourism

4.2.1. Tourism market and other volumes to Ly Son

First, analyze the current visitor market to Ly Son, then use it as a basis to evaluate whether other factors are suitable compared to the scale of tourists to Ly Son. From 2015 to 2019, the number of visitors to Ly Son has always grown. However, after 2 years of the epidemic, tourism trends have changed. Therefore, the author only analyzes the actual data on the number of visitors to Ly Son in 2022, 2023 and half of 2024 to see the specific situation of the Ly Son tourism market.

According to statistics from Ly Son District, in 2023, the total number of tourists visiting Ly Son reached 170,000, including 2,000 international visitors, marking a 126% increase compared to 2022. While specific data on the total number of visitors to Ly Son in early 2024 is not yet available, local government assessments indicate a significant decline in tourist

numbers. The peak tourist season this year has seen a marked reduction compared to the same period last year [22]. Initially, projections indicated that Ly Son Island District would welcome approximately 16,000 visitors between April 22 and May 1, 2024. However, the actual number of tourists during this period was only 10,824, which constitutes about 68% of the original estimate and is roughly 95% of the number recorded during the same period in 2023. Notably, during the five public holiday days from April 27 to May 1, 2024, there were 8,179 visitors from the mainland to Ly Son Island, representing 92.3% of the number recorded during the same period in 2023.

Assessing the situation of tourists to Ly Son through 2022, 2023 and early 2024, the author believes that the number of visitors this year tends to decrease compared to 2023. Here are the threats for Ly Son tourism: (T1) The number of visitors is decreasing due to the impact of decreasing economy.

4.2.2. The government's general tourism development policy

Currently, the state has established mechanisms and policies to mobilize resources and increase investment in tourism development, positioning it as a key economic sector in the country. These policies focus on promoting sustainable tourism, preserving nature and the environment, and safeguarding national cultural values [23]. Quang Ngai Province has implemented a policy to transform Ly Son into a "National Tourism Center." Previously, the Prime Minister issued Decision 1995/QĐ-TTg on November 4, 2014, outlining mechanisms and policies to support the development of Ly Son Island District, Quang Ngai Province, from 2015 to 2020. Moreover, in November 2022, the Politburo adopted Resolution 26-NQ/TW, dated November 3, 2022, addressing "Socio-economic Development and Ensuring National Defense and Security in the North Central and Central Coast Regions through 2030, with a vision to 2045." This resolution emphasizes the development of Ly Son Island District as a key sea-island tourism hub [18]. Additionally, the resolutions from the XX Congress of Party Deputies of Quang Ngai Province and Resolution No. 05-NQ/TU of the Provincial Party Committee have identified sea-island tourism as the region's primary tourism type [18]. Consequently, the policies of both the government and Quang Ngai Province create favorable conditions for the sustainable development of Ly Son's tourism industry. This presents a significant opportunity for Ly Son's tourism. (O1) The government and Quang Ngai province have policies and create favorable conditions for the development of Ly Son tourism into a sea-island tourism center.

4.2.3. Natural conditions, climate

Ly Son and localities in the central sea in general are affected by the general weather, the storm season will start from August to the end of December every year. Therefore, Ly Son tourism only operates normally from January to August every year. This is a challenge for island tourism in general and Ly Son in particular. However, it is also a sea area, so usually the hot season will have a more pleasant temperature than on land. Therefore, it creates an opportunity for tourists to visit and relax in Ly Son in summer. From the above statement, it shows: (O2) Favorable climate for visitors in summer and (T2) the weather is only guaranteed for visitors from January to August every year (time of visiting is short).

4.2.4. Technology used for marine tourism

Currently, in the domestic and international markets, there are many modern technologies applied to scuba diving and recreation in the sea. Such as snorkeling technology, seawalking technology, scuba diving technology, and glass-bottomed ships with coral views on board.

Technologies use water entertainment such as jet skis and flyboards. This shows that other localities are using technologies to exploit the potential of marine tourism very well, such as Quy Nhon and Phu Quoc. So with technology, it is a threat for Ly Son: (T3) Other localities use modern scuba diving and recreation technology.

4.2.5. Analysis of future travel demand

A significant portion of respondents, 73%, expressed interest in sustainable tourism, with 50% actively seeking these options when planning their trips [24]. The growth of the middle class is indicative of an increase in the number of individuals with greater disposable income. As a result, Vietnamese people are increasingly engaging in both domestic and international travel, driven by the desire for connection and unforgettable experiences. Notably, 20% of those surveyed cited spending time with family and friends as their primary motivation for travel in the upcoming year [24]. The Global Travel Trends (GTI) 2023 study further supports this, revealing that 41% of families have already planned trips for the first half of the year [25]. Several factors contribute to the anticipated increase in both international and domestic tourism demand, including simplified visa processes, the widespread use of electronic payments, improved and faster transportation, and more leisure time for travel facilitated by technological advancements in job acquisition. Additionally, greater attention from the government to workers' holidays and a shifting societal mindset toward leisure and knowledge acquisition contribute to this trend. The expanding middle class and improvements in the national economy further support the growth of tourism demand. All these factors point to a promising future for tourism, presenting a valuable opportunity for Ly Son (O3): The demand for tourism in the future is large.

4.2.6. Competitors

In conclusion, the analysis of Ly Son's tourism reveals several strengths, such as its rich natural resources, unique geological formations, marine ecosystems, and cultural heritage, including historical sites and traditional festivals. These factors position Ly Son as a potential tourism hub for Quang Ngai Province. Additionally, the local community's growing commitment to sustainable tourism practices is a positive sign for long-term development. However, to ensure sustainable growth, challenges such as a lack of professional tourism services and insufficient infrastructure must be addressed. The local workforce's limited training, particularly in foreign languages and technical skills, could hinder Ly Son's ability to attract international tourists and compete with more developed destinations in Vietnam [18].

Furthermore, while Ly Son's natural and cultural resources are significant assets, they also present competition from other nearby coastal destinations, such as Phu Quoc, Quy Nhon, and Da Nang. These destinations have more developed tourism infrastructures and offer a wider range of services, including modern transportation options, luxury accommodations, and well-established entertainment activities. Phu Quoc, for instance, has become one of Vietnam's leading beach destinations, with advanced facilities such as international airports, high-end resorts, and a range of water sports. Similarly, Da Nang and Quy Nhon benefit from better accessibility and more diversified tourism offerings, including city tours, cultural attractions, and well-developed beachfront resorts. In addition, competition from neighboring islands like Con Dao and Cat Ba also poses a threat to Ly Son's tourism growth. These destinations have developed their own unique tourism products, such as ecotourism, cultural tours, and historical sites, attracting both domestic and international visitors. Thus, identifying threat (T4): There are many competitors (many other destinations).

4.2.7. Tourism human resources

Currently, numerous universities and colleges across the country are offering programs that train tourism-related human resources, particularly for travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, and other tourism services. According to incomplete data, over 77 universities and colleges nationwide provide education and training in fields related to tourism, hospitality, and service management [26]. This growing trend in tourism education ensures that a significant number of well-trained professionals will enter the workforce each year, contributing to the development of the tourism industry. These institutions are equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the increasing demand for qualified workers in the sector. As a result, this expanding pool of skilled labor presents a valuable opportunity for tourism-related businesses to improve service quality and enhance their competitiveness. Therefore, one of the key opportunities for the industry is the continuous supply of highly trained graduates each year, as reflected in Opportunities: (O4) There is a large number of well-trained workers who graduate from universities and colleges every year.

In conclusion, the analysis of external factors affecting Ly Son tourism reveals both significant opportunities and challenges. These opportunities and challenges have been thoroughly examined and will serve as crucial data for the strategic analysis of Ly Son tourism. This comprehensive evaluation will inform the development of strategies aimed at optimizing the potential of Ly Son’s tourism sector while addressing the challenges identified.

4.3. Sustainable tourism development strategy

4.3.1. Innernal factor evaluation Matrix (IFE) and External factor evaluation Matrix (EFE)

The author has assessed the strengths and weaknesses of Ly Son tourism based on the analysis of its current situation in recent years. We built the internal matrix as follows:

Table 1. IFE Matrix

Strength (S)	Weakness (W)
(S1) Facilities and technical infrastructure are well met.	(W1) There is no suitable beach for tourists to swim
(S2) Ly Son tourism resources are rich, diverse and famous.	(W2) Tourism resources have not been effectively exploited.
(S3) Ly Son's cuisine is delicious and special.	(W3) Some indigenoues cultural features have disappeared.
(S4) The number of staff is sufficient.	(W4) Team with weak expertise, skills and foreign languages.
(S5) Consistent service quality.	(W5) The number of tourism management has not met the needs of tourism development.
(S6) People join hands to develop sustainable tourism in the locality.	(W6) Tourism leaders of Ly Son have not been flexibly applied in real situations.
(S7) The local government is interested in tourism promotion.	(W7) Have not taken advantage of modern technologies for tourists snorkeling to see corals.
(S8) Safety and security	Safety and security

Source: The author synthesized from the analysis of the current situation

Through the analysis of external factors affecting Ly Son tourism, we can identify opportunities and threats for Ly Son. We built an external matrix as follows:

Table 2. EFE Matrix

Opportunity (O)	Threat (T)
(O1) The government and Quang Ngai province have policies and create favorable conditions for the development of Ly Son tourism into a sea-island tourism center.	(T1) The number of visitors is decreasing due to the impact of decreasing economy.
(O2) Favorable climate for visitors in summer	(T2) The weather is only guaranteed for visitors from January to August every year (time of visiting is short).
(O3) The demand for tourism in the future is large.	(T3) Other localities use modern scuba diving and recreation technology.
(O4) There is a large number of well-trained workers who graduate from universities and colleges every year.	(T4) There are many competitors (many other destinations).

Source: The author synthesized from the analysis of the current situation

4.3.2. SWOT Matrix

From the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Ly Son tourism through the IFE matrix and EFE matrix, the authors build a SWOT matrix. Initially, the author will develop strategies that combine S+O, S+T, W+O, and W+T.

Table 3. SWOT Matrix

SWOT	O	T
S	<p>S2, S3, S5 + O1, O3: Taking advantage of tourism resources to catch the needs of tourists in the future.</p> <p>S7 + O1, O4: Propose to the provincial government to recruit more qualified tourism workers from universities to supplement the locality.</p>	<p>S4, S6, S7+T1, T2, T4: The Ly Son government focuses on training local tourism's human resources during the months when there are no tourists to meet their needs and compete in service quality.</p> <p>S6, S7 + T3: The Ly Son government and people combine financial resources to research, learn, and apply modern technologies in water exploration and recreation.</p>
W	<p>W2, W3 + O1, O3: Provincial proposals allow policies to exploit current resources and restore cultural resources to meet the future tourism market.</p> <p>W4, W5, W6+O1: Allow improving tourism labor resources by recruiting quality human resources at prestigious universities.</p>	<p>W4, W5+T1, T2, T4: Improve professional qualifications, foreign language skills and other skills of available human resources by training professional classes in the off-season of tourism.</p> <p>W7 + T3, T4: Learn modern technology suitable for application to compete with other localities.</p>

Source: Author of analysis and strategy development

4.4. Orientation of Ly Son district, Quang Ngai Province on tourism development

Ly Son Island has significant potential for tourism development compared to other areas in Quang Ngai province. As a result, Ly Son is strategically positioned to become the center of sea and island tourism in the region. Both Quang Ngai Province and Ly Son District clearly outline this direction in their resolutions, plans, and orientations. According to Ms. Pham Thi Huong, Deputy Secretary of the District Party Committee and Chairwoman of the Ly Son Island District People's Committee, the implementation of Resolution 05-NQ/TU, dated November 2, 2021, from the Quang Ngai Provincial Party Committee, which emphasizes the promotion of tourism development as a key economic sector, has prompted the Ly Son District Party Committee to establish an Action Program. Additionally, the committee has created a tourism development project for Ly Son through 2025, with a vision for 2030. The local government is prioritizing the utilization of the island's advantages for tourism growth, viewing this as a crucial aspect of achieving green and sustainable development [27]. Nguyen Minh Tri, Secretary of the Ly Son District Party Committee, highlighted the district's commitment to leveraging opportunities for sustainable tourism growth. While changing mindsets is a gradual process that requires time, success in tourism necessitates a fundamental shift in thinking. As part of this transformation, the district is organizing cultural, artistic, and communication activities to promote tourism, alongside training sessions and dialogues with tourism workers to foster appropriate practices and gradually alter the way of thinking [27]. These efforts reflect the overarching policy goal of making Ly Son a sustainable sea and island tourism hub in the coming years.

4.5. Ly Son's sustainable tourism development strategy to the year 2030

Combining the tourism development orientation of Ly Son district and specific strategies combined in the SWOT strategic matrix, the author offers the most suitable strategies to develop Ly Son tourism in a sustainable direction. However, the combination matrix above has many meaningfully overlapping combination strategies, so the author considers the most suitable strategies that still have the implication of developing Ly Son tourism. Next, the strategies must really develop Ly Son tourism in a sustainable direction.

Strategy to take advantage of and promote existing tourism resources to exploit tourists in the future: Continue to utilize Ly Son's diverse and rich tourism resources to meet future tourist demands. The Ly Son government must both exploit resources and protect them in a sustainable and beneficial way for parties participating in tourism activities.

The strategy of restoring traditional activities and culture has disappeared to serve tourism: Ly Son district should create a weekly cultural exchange night like the Central Highlands localities. This exchange night is a tourism product that combines the stories of our ancestors preserving the Paracels and Truong Sa with unique lullabies in Ly Son. Additionally, the event will feature traditional music performances that explore the fishing tradition of the Ly Son people throughout history. Sustainable tourism activities always target handicraft villages with unique traditions in the countryside, so the government should plan a suitable residential area to choose as a traditional fishing and baking village for the Ly Son people.

Strategy to recruit new tourism human resources and train existing local human resources: The Ly Son government must create a strategy to enhance local human resources and recruit new personnel from quality training schools to supplement the existing human resources. The government should also devise short-term training programs to assist locals in the tourism industry, particularly during periods when the number of tourists visiting Ly Son is relatively low. It is also important to promote the use of foreign languages among workers in the tourism industry.

Strategy to invest in modern technology in water resource exploitation: The government chooses the model of underwater recreation, diving technology to see corals, but does not affect the marine life environment and seawater environment for exploitation. This direction can call for investors to socialize and the government to manage administratively.

The strategies are based on internal and external factors that affect Ly Son tourism. However, whichever strategy is necessary, it must ensure the interests of tourism participants and activities such as tourists, businesses, authorities and local people. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure the long-term development of that locality, not causing much harm to tourism resources and the surrounding environment.

5. IMPLICATION AND LIMITATION

5.1. Implications

5.1.1. Implication of management

Through the application of the SWOT analysis method, this study evaluated the current state of tourism development in Ly Son and analyzed external factors affecting the local tourism sector. Based on the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the study proposed four key strategies aimed at promoting sustainable tourism development in Ly Son by 2030. The research findings provide an important scientific foundation for tourism managers in Ly Son, Quang Ngai, to reference and effectively apply in policy formulation and practical tourism management. The proposed strategies not only assist in addressing tourism development issues ranging from basic to complex levels but also contribute to guiding the comprehensive and sustainable growth of the tourism industry. Furthermore, tourism managers in other localities can also refer to and flexibly apply these strategies in their efforts to develop sustainable tourism within their respective regions.

5.1.2. Academic implication

In this study, we apply the SWOT analysis method, a qualitative approach based on data collection and real-world observation. The SWOT method allows for the extraction of highly reliable field data, thereby supporting an objective assessment of the research situation. However, a significant challenge when applying this method lies in the high demands for analysis, synthesis, and the construction of accurate insights from the collected data. While SWOT analysis has been widely utilized in the field of business strategy planning for enterprises [3], it has not been commonly applied in tourism research, particularly at the local level [28]. Through this research, we hope to expand the application of the SWOT method in local tourism development studies and encourage future researchers to boldly apply this method in conducting more strategic and highly practical studies. Future scholars may refer to the analysis process and application of the SWOT method from this study to further develop in-depth research on sustainable tourism in the future.

5.2. Limitation

Although this study applied the SWOT analysis method to assess the current situation and formulate strategies for sustainable tourism development in Ly Son, several limitations remain. First, the study primarily relied on secondary data and field observations without conducting in-depth interviews with experts or key stakeholders in the local tourism sector. The absence of expert insights may have limited the depth and accuracy of the SWOT factor

identification. Second, the study did not integrate quantitative methods to validate and measure the impact of each SWOT factor on tourism development, resulting in an analysis that remains largely qualitative and subjective. This limitation may affect the objectivity and generalizability of the research findings. Finally, by mainly utilizing historical documents and current observations, the study may not fully capture the latest changes and dynamics within the local tourism environment. These limitations highlight the need for future research to incorporate a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to enhance the reliability and comprehensiveness of the results.

6. CONCLUSION

This study seeks to develop strategies for sustainable tourism development in Ly Son. To achieve this, the authors considered relevant theories on sustainable tourism and strategy as foundational frameworks for evaluating the current state of tourism in the region and formulating appropriate strategies. The assessment of the current situation is conducted from two perspectives: internal factors related to Ly Son's tourism and external influences directly impacting the island's tourism sector. This dual approach provides a critical foundation for strategy formulation. In developing these strategies, the authors aligned their proposals with the strategic direction set by local authorities. The proposed strategies include four key approaches: (1) leveraging and promoting existing tourism resources to attract future visitors, (2) revitalizing traditional activities and cultural practices that have disappeared to enhance tourism offerings, (3) recruiting and training new tourism professionals while utilizing local human resources, and (4) investing in modern technology for sustainable water resource management.

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TÓM TẮT

CHIẾN LƯỢC PHÁT TRIỂN DU LỊCH BỀN VỮNG HUYỆN LÝ SƠN, TỈNH QUẢNG NGÃI ĐẾN NĂM 2030

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Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là đánh giá thực trạng du lịch tại huyện Lý Sơn, tỉnh Quảng Ngãi, đồng thời xác định các yếu tố bên ngoài ảnh hưởng đến sự phát triển Du lịch Lý Sơn. Dựa trên đánh giá bên trong và bên ngoài, nghiên cứu đề xuất các chiến lược phát triển du lịch bền vững tại địa phương. Phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính được sử dụng, các kỹ thuật tổng hợp và phân tích kết hợp với phương pháp ma trận SWOT để xây dựng các chiến lược phát triển. Nghiên cứu xác định ba chiến lược chính: phục hồi các hoạt động văn hóa truyền thống đã phai nhạt theo thời gian để tăng cường các dịch vụ du lịch; tuyển dụng và đào tạo nguồn nhân lực du lịch địa phương; đầu tư công nghệ tiên tiến để khai thác bền vững tài nguyên dưới biển. Những phát hiện này được kỳ vọng sẽ hỗ trợ các cơ quan quản lý du lịch tại Lý Sơn trong việc xây dựng các chính sách và hiệu quả để phát triển du lịch bền vững lâu dài. Một hạn chế đáng chú ý của nghiên cứu này là không có dữ liệu chính được thu thập từ cư dân địa phương, khách du lịch và các bên liên quan đến du lịch; thay vào đó, phân tích dựa trên dữ liệu lịch sử hiện có. Kết quả từ nghiên cứu này sẽ cung cấp cái nhìn sâu sắc về hiện trạng du lịch Lý Sơn, giúp các nhà quản lý và hoạch định chính sách xây dựng chiến lược phát triển bền vững cho ngành du lịch địa phương trong tương lai.

Từ khóa: Lý Sơn, du lịch, phân tích SWOT, du lịch bền vững.