



Research Article

AN EVALUATION OF THE ADVANTAGES OF TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN THE KEY REGION OF AN GIANG PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to evaluate the advantages of tourist attractions in the key region of An Giang province. The Synthetic Marking Scheme (SMS) and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) were both utilized to evaluate 29 tourist destinations in the region within eight indicators, including attraction, infrastructure, management, sustainability, linkage ability, location, capacity, and tourist operation timetable. The result shows that among the 26 evaluated tourist attractions, there were 8 attractions at the group I (highest advantage), 4 at the group II (advantage), 8 at the group III (medium advantage) and 6 last tourist attractions in group IV (less advantage). In order to exploit its potentials effectively, the regional tourism department would need to continuously concentrate on enhancing the quality of services in terms of the high advantage-rated attractions, while diversifying the different types of tourism activities within the medium and less advantage-rated attractions.

Keywords: advantages; tourist attractions; the key tourism region; An Giang province

1. Introduction

Located in the upper reaches of the Mekong Delta, Southern Vietnam, the key tourism region of An Giang province including Chau Doc city, Tri Ton district, Tinh Bien district, Tan Chau town, and An Phu district has certain advantages that enable it to attract millions of tourists every year. The region has welcomed millions of tourists over recent years. According to the official records, the total number of visitors was more than 9.2 million in 2018, and 87 percent of tourists to An Giang were domestic tourists (An Giang Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism – AGDCST, 2019). However, the region has also faced challenges because of limited cooperation between the different tourist attractions in An Giang province. Moreover, a tourism cluster in An Giang has been duplicating the offerings of other destinations in the region (AGDCST, 2016). Regarding the regional integration and globalization, it is evident that the local government should

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concentrate on identifying and categorizing the tourist attractions into groups with different advantages in order to exploit effectively the tourism resources of the region (Ministry of Cultural, Sport and Tourism, 2016). Therefore, this article focuses on evaluating the advantages of tourist attractions in the key region of An Giang, thus providing suggestions for exploiting these tourist attractions effectively.

2. Research methods

In order to determine and evaluate the levels of advantages of tourist attractions in the key tourism region of An Giang, the author employed both SMS and AHP methods in this research. The SMS method was conducted with eight indicators to identify and categorize the tourist attractions into groups with different advantage levels. For AHP, this method was applied by interviews of eight experts who have extensive experience and knowledge of evaluation of tourist attractions in An Giang. The combination of SMS and AHP are presented in the following steps below:

Step 1. Selecting and identifying the evaluated tourist attractions

The evaluation was implemented based on the reality of tourism resources and its future meanings within the 26 tourist attractions (Table 1).

Table 1. The list of the evaluated tourist attractions

I. Historical and cultural monuments	15	Bau Muop temple
1 Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam temple	16	Phat Lon pagoda
2 Thoai Ngoc Hau tomb		II. National heritages
3 Tay An pagoda	17	Mubarak Church
4 Hang pagoda	18	Da Phuoc Cham pa village
5 Vinh Nguon temple	19	Chau Phong Cham pa village
6 Chau Phu temple		III. Local trade village
7 Tuc Dup historical monument	20	Chau Doc village
8 Ba Chuc historical monument	21	Van Giao village
9 Tam Buu pagoda	22	Chau Giang village
10 Phi Lai pagoda		IV. Ecosystem and landscape
11 O Ta Soc	23	Tra Su Indigo forest
12 Xvayton pagoda	24	Ta Pa lake
13 Van Linh pagoda	25	Soai So lake
14 Adilac Buddha stage	26	Bung Binh Thien lake

Source: AGDCST, 2016

Step 2. Establishing the indicators for evaluation

Based on the previous studies of tourist attractions (Nguyen, 1995; Nguyen, 2015; Nguyen, 2015; Nguyen, & Vu, 2018) and author's separate research (Nguyen, 2018), the indicators of evaluation were established with the following detailed descriptions:

- *Collected indicators* included eight indicators: attractiveness, infrastructure, management, sustainability, linkage, location, capacity, and tourist operation timetable (Figure 1)

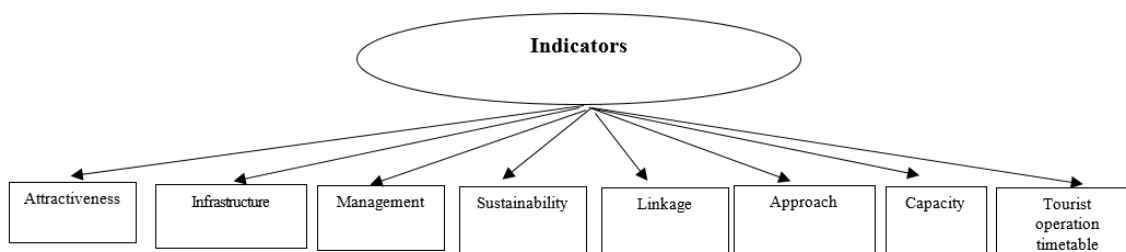


Figure 1. Indicators

- *Advantage levels* are categorized differently in Table 2.

Table 2. The advantage levels of the indicators

No.	Indicators	Advantage levels				
		(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
1	Attractiveness	Very attractive	Attractive	Medium	Unattractive	Extremely Unattractive
2	Infrastructure	Very good	Good	Medium	Bad	Extremely bad
3	Management	Very good	Good	Medium	Bad	Extremely bad
4	Sustainability	Very good	Good	Medium	Bad	Extremely bad
5	Linkages	Very high	High	Medium	Low	Very low
6	Location	Very advantage	Advantage	Medium	Disadvantage	Extremely disadvantage
7	Capacity	Very large	Lager	Medium	Small	Very small
8	Time	Very long	Long	Medium	Short	Extremely short

Step 3. Generating the weights of indicators with AHP

In order to identify the weight of the indicators, the research employed Analytic Hierarchy Process – AHP. The AHP is a structured technique for organizing and analyzing complex decisions based on mathematics and psychology. It was developed by Thomas L. Saaty in the 1970s. In this research, the AHP was applied with the following steps.

(1) - *Identify the graph of indicators* (Figure 1).

(2) - *Find the importance of each indicator based on the Saaty’s table* (Table 3).

Table 3. The fundamental scale

Importance	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal importance	Two activities contribute equally to the objective
3	Moderate importance	Experience and judgment slightly favor one activity over another
5	Essential or Strong importance	Experience and judgment strongly favor one activity over the other

7	Very strong importance	An activity is strongly favored and its dominance demonstrated in practice
9	Extremely importance	The evidence favoring one activity over another is of the highest possible order of affirmation
2,4,6,8	Intermediate values between the two adjacent judgments	When compromise is needed.

Source: (Saaty & Vargas, 2012)

(3) - Establish the pair –wise comparison matrix (Table 4)

Table 4. Pair – wise comparison matrix

Factors	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
C1	1	1	5	4	3	1	3	3
C2	1	1	3	5	2	2	2	1
C3	0,2	0,33	1	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5
C4	0,25	0,2	1	1	1	0,5	2	0,5
C5	0,33	0,5	2	1	1	0,5	2	0,5
C6	1	0,5	2	2	2	1	4	1
C7	0,33	0,5	2	0,5	0,5	0,25	1	0,5
C8	0,33	1	2	2	2	1	2	1
Total	4,5	5,0	18,0	16,5	12,0	6,75	16,5	8,0

(4)- Calculate the weight of each indicators (Table 5)

Table 5. The result of analysis of pair – wise comparison matrix

Indicators	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	Total	Weights	CI
C1	0,22	0,20	0,28	0,24	0,25	0,15	0,18	0,38	1,90	0,24	8,40
C2	0,22	0,20	0,17	0,30	0,17	0,30	0,12	0,13	1,60	0,20	8,44
C3	0,04	0,07	0,06	0,06	0,04	0,07	0,03	0,06	0,44	0,05	8,39
C4	0,06	0,04	0,06	0,06	0,08	0,07	0,12	0,06	0,55	0,07	8,42
C5	0,07	0,10	0,11	0,06	0,08	0,07	0,12	0,06	0,69	0,09	8,35
C6	0,22	0,10	0,11	0,12	0,17	0,15	0,24	0,13	1,24	0,15	8,42
C7	0,07	0,10	0,11	0,03	0,04	0,04	0,06	0,06	0,52	0,06	8,28
C8	0,07	0,20	0,11	0,12	0,17	0,15	0,12	0,13	1,07	0,13	8,37
Total	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0			CI= 0,05

(Source: A survey for experts with AHP, 2017, n=8)

*Step 4. Establishment of the synthetic marking indicators***Table 6.** *The synthetic marking indicators*

No.	Indicators	Levels	Scores	Weights	Total
1	Attractive	Very attractive	5	0,24	1,2
		Attractive	4		0,96
		Medium	3		0,72
		Unattractive	2		0,48
		Very unattractive	1		0,24
2	Infrastructure	Very good	5	0,20	1
		Good	4		0,8
		Medium	3		0,6
		Bad	2		0,4
		Very bad	1		0,2
3	Management	Very good	5	0,15	0,75
		Good	4		0,6
		Medium	3		0,45
		Bad	2		0,3
		Very bad	1		0,15
4	Environment	Very good	5	0,13	0,65
		Good	4		0,52
		Medium	3		0,39
		Bad	2		0,26
		Very bad	1		0,13
5	Linkages' ability	Very high	5	0,09	0,45
		High	4		0,36
		Medium	3		0,27
		Low	2		0,18
		Very low	1		0,09
6	Location and approach	Very advantage	5	0,07	0,35
		Advantage	4		0,28
		Medium	3		0,21
		Disadvantage	2		0,14
		Very Disadvantage	1		0,07
7	Capacity	Very large	5	0,06	0,3
		Large	4		0,24
		Medium	3		0,18
		Small	2		0,12
		Very small	1		0,06
8	Tourist operation timetable	Very long	5	0,05	0,25
		Long	4		0,2
		Medium	3		0,15
		Short	2		0,1
		Very short	1		0,05

Step 5. Categorize into the different advantage levels group (Table 7)

Table 7. The group of the advantage levels of tourist attractions

No.	Levels		Scores	Ranking
1	Tourist attractions with high advantage	*****	4,21 – 5,0	I
2	Tourist attractions with advantage	*****	3,41 – 4,2	II
3	Tourist attractions with medium advantage	***	2,61 – 3,4	III
4	Tourist attractions with less advantage	**	1,81 – 2,6	IV
5	Tourist attractions with disadvantage	*	1,0 – 1,8	V

3. Result and discussion

Regarding the above indicators, this research synthesized and evaluated the tourist attractions of the key tourism region in An Giang (Table 8).

Table 8. A synthetic evaluation of the tourist attractions

No.	Tourist attractions	Indicators								Total	Ranking
		Attractiveness	Infrastructure	Management	Sustainability	Linkage	Location	Capacity	Time		
I. Historical and cultural monuments											
1	Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam temple	1.2	1	0.75	0.52	0.45	0.21	0.3	0.25	4.68	I
2	Thoi Ngoc Hau tomb	0.96	1	0.75	0.52	0.45	0.21	0.3	0.25	4.44	I
3	Tay An pagoda	1.2	0.8	0.6	0.52	0.45	0.21	0.24	0.2	4.22	I
4	Hang pagoda	1.2	1	0.75	0.52	0.45	0.21	0.3	0.2	4.63	I
5	Vinh Nguon temple	0.96	0.6	0.45	0.39	0.45	0.21	0.3	0.2	4.01	II
6	Chau Phu temple	0.96	0.6	0.45	0.39	0.45	0.21	0.3	0.15	3.51	II
7	Tuc Dup historical monument	0.96	0.8	0.75	0.65	0.18	0.14	0.24	0.2	3.91	II
8	Ba Chuc historical monument	0.72	0.6	0.45	0.39	0.18	0.14	0.18	0.15	2.81	III
9	Tam Buu pagoda	0.72	0.6	0.3	0.39	0.18	0.14	0.12	0.1	2.55	IV
10	Phi Lai pagoda	0.72	0.6	0.3	0.39	0.18	0.14	0.12	0.1	2.55	IV
11	O Ta Soc	0.72	0.4	0.15	0.14	0.18	0.14	0.12	0.39	2.55	IV
12	Xvayton pagoda	0.96	0.4	0.45	0.39	0.18	0.14	0.12	0.15	2.79	III
13	Van Linh pagoda	1.2	1	0.6	0.52	0.36	0.14	0.3	0.2	4.32	I
14	Adilac Buddha pagoda	1.2	1	0.6	0.52	0.36	0.14	0.3	0.2	4.32	I
15	Buddha pagoda	1.2	1	0.6	0.52	0.36	0.14	0.3	0.2	4.32	I
16	Ba Chua Xu Bau Muop temple	0.72	0.8	0.6	0.52	0.45	0.21	0.3	0.25	3.41	II
II. National objects											
17	Mubarak mosque	0.72	0.6	0.45	0.52	0.27	0.14	0.18	0.15	3.03	III
18	Da Phuoc village	0.72	0.4	0.45	0.39	0.27	0.14	0.12	0.15	2.64	III
19	Chau Phong village	0.72	0.4	0.45	0.39	0.27	0.14	0.12	0.15	2.64	III
III. Trade Villages											
20	Chau Doc village	0.72	0.6	0.45	0.39	0.36	0.14	0.18	0.15	2.99	III
21	Van Giao village	0.72	0.4	0.3	0.39	0.36	0.14	0.12	0.15	2.58	IV
22	Chau Giang village	0.72	0.6	0.45	0.39	0.27	0.14	0.12	0.15	2.84	III
IV. Ecological landscapes											
23	Tra Su indigo forest	1.2	1	0.75	0.65	0.36	0.21	0.3	0.2	4.67	I
24	Ta Pa lake	0.72	0.4	0.15	0.52	0.18	0.14	0.12	0.1	2.33	IV
25	Soai So – Suoi Vang lake	0.72	0.6	0.6	0.52	0.27	0.14	0.18	0.15	3.18	III
26	Bung Binh Thien lake	0.72	0.4	0.3	0.26	0.09	0.07	0.12	0.1	2.06	IV

Table 8 illustrates that there are differences between tourist attractions in terms of each evaluated indicator.

- *Attractiveness*: Table 8 shows that Cam Mountain, Sam Mountain, and Tra Su Indigo forest are the most attractive tourist attractions in the region because of the diversity of tourism. In particular, Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam temple is the tourist destination with the highest level of attraction. The temple is also considered as the core of the tourism sector in An Giang. In fact, An Giang's tourism cluster is mostly based on religious tourism with the most successful tourist attraction being Ba Chua Xu Temple and its festival. The rest of the attractions are quite simple landscapes.

- *Infrastructure*: According to Table 8, there are seven attractions that have the best infrastructures and material facilities, including Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam Temple, Thoai Ngoc Hau Tomb, Hang Pagoda, Tra Su indigo forest, Van Linh pagoda, Adilac Buddha stage, and Buddha pagoda. In particular, Cam Mountain has utilized the suspension cable in 2015. The system has 3.5 km in length with 2 modern stations and 89 cabins that can transport 8 people each. The VND 300-billion project was designed and invested with a capacity of 2,000 tourists per hour. The rest of the attractions are ranked at the medium and less advantage levels because of certain limitations in transportation, water and electricity-supplying systems, and guesthouses.

- *Management*: The following tourist attractions such as Sam Mountain, Sam Mountain, Tuc Dup Mountain, and Tra Su Indigo forest have a fairly complete management system with separate management functions. These are considered as the main tourist parks in An Giang, and the management system is built and divided into separate parts such as general management, ticketing department, and multimedia department. The rest of the attractions are ranked at the medium and less advantage levels due to the shortage of separate management parts.

- *Sustainability*: Table 8 illustrates that the 26 tourist's attractions in the region are not really damaged. Most of the landscapes are continuously conserved by the original features and could be restored immediately by degradation failures. However, some of the historical or religious attractions, such as O Ta Soc monument and Xvayton pagoda, have been downgraded since they were affected by different factors such as climate and human.

- *Linkage*: For the attractions located in or nearby the center of Chau Doc city, linkage ability is considerable. For example, the tourist attractions with the highest ratings are Sam Mountain and Cam Mountain that located in Chau Doc and Tinh Bien. Also, for the attractions far from the center (Bung Binh Thien, Tapa Lake), the linkage ability is lower when compared to the attractions above.

- *Location*: The result in Table 8 shows that among the 26 places, eight are rated at the high advantage level because they are located in Chau Doc city which is convenient for transportation. Some attractions at the advantage level are located in Tinh Bien. Most of

the attractions rated at the medium advantage level are located in Tri Ton, and one at the less advantage level is located in An Phu which is difficult in transportation because of limited means of transport from and to Chau Doc.

- *Capacity*: Table 8 shows that Cam Mountain, Tra Su forest, and Tuc Dup are the destinations with the largest capacity.

- *Tourist operation timetable*: Generally, the implementation of An Giang tourism is affected because of fewer tourism forms and activities which only attract travelers seasonally. However, Cam Mountain, Sam Mountain, and Tra Su forest are the most stable in attracting visitors because they have offered different norms of tourism such as sightseeing tours and religious tours in summer and culinary tours on rainy days. The rest are limited due to tourism seasons.

Also, Table 8 shows that the evaluated tourist attractions are divided into four groups. The highest rating is Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam temple with 4.68, and Bung Binh Thien is the lowest rating with 2.06. The different groups of tourist attractions are diagrammed by the Radar Chart type.

• **Group I. Tourist attractions with high advantage**

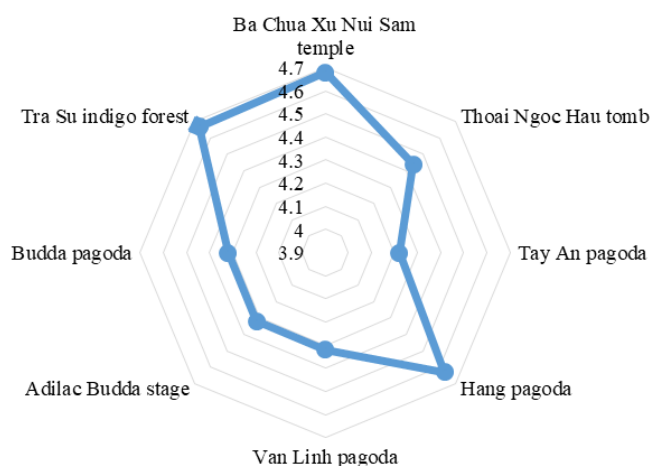


Figure 2. Group I

Among the total of 26 selected tourist attractions, there are 8 attractions at group I, accounting for 19.6 percent. The average value of this group is 4.45. There are three tourist attractions with a higher average value to 4.45, including Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam temple (4.68), Tra Su indigo forest (4.67), and Hang pagoda (4.63). Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam is considered the most significant attraction with most of the higher indicators than others in this group. Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam Temple is the place where people come to join religious ceremonies with the belief that they will bring prosperity to the visitors and success to their businesses. Basically, the tourism in An Giang heavily depends on the success of the Ba Chua Xu festival, thanks to its contribution in terms of the volume and expenditures of visitors, its prestige, and its unique qualities. Tra Su Indigo Forest symbolizes the beauty of

An Giang's flooding season with flooded mangrove forest habitat and abundant flora and fauna. With an area of 845 ha, Tra Su is the home to about 140 plant species, 11 mammal species, and 23 fish species, including rare species which have a great value in science. The rest including Thoai Ngoc Hau tomb, Van Linh pagoda, Tay An tomb, Buddha Pagoda, and Adilac Buddha stage have lower scores than the attractions mentioned above.

Geographically, most of these attractions are located in Sam Mountain and Cam Mountain areas, belonging to Chau Doc city, Tri Ton district, and Tinh Bien district. Based on the best advantage for regional tourism development, the linkage of these attractions will contribute to enhancing the competitions as well as creating provincial unique tours linked with other provinces in Mekong Delta.

- **Group II. Tourist attractions with advantage**

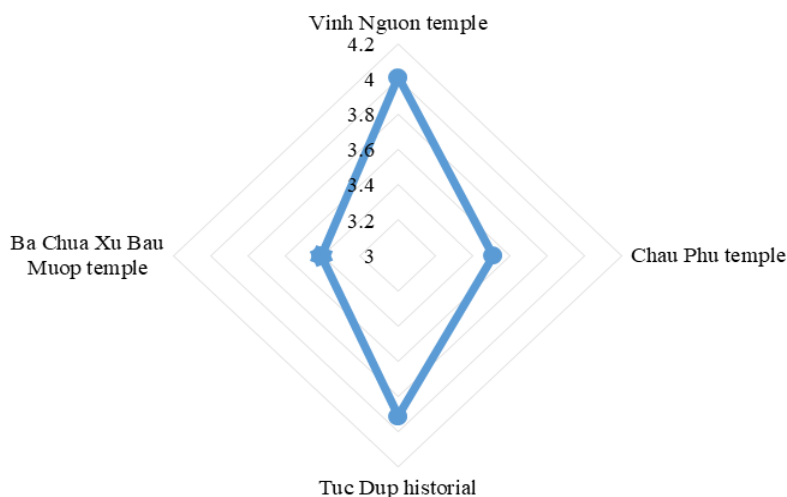


Figure 3. Group II

With four tourist attractions, this is the group with the smallest number of tourist attractions, making up 14.2% of the total number of tourist attractions rated. Compared to the group's average value (3.71), there are two tourist attractions with higher scores including Vinh Nguon temple and Tuc Dup historical monument with 4.01 and 3.91 respectively. The strengths of these attractions are indigenous tourism resources as well as the complete facilities system. The attractions have certain advantages for future development within the different types of tourism. However, they are limited at the utilization of facilities as well as the forms of tourism and its services. The rest of the tourist attractions have lower than average indicators mainly due to limited accessibility (Ba Chua Xu Bau Muop, Chau Phu temple).

These attractions have scattered in An Giang. Besides Chau Phu temple is located in Chau Doc city, the last three tourist attractions are distributed scattered in Tri Ton and Tinh Bien district.

- **Group III. Tourist attractions with medium**

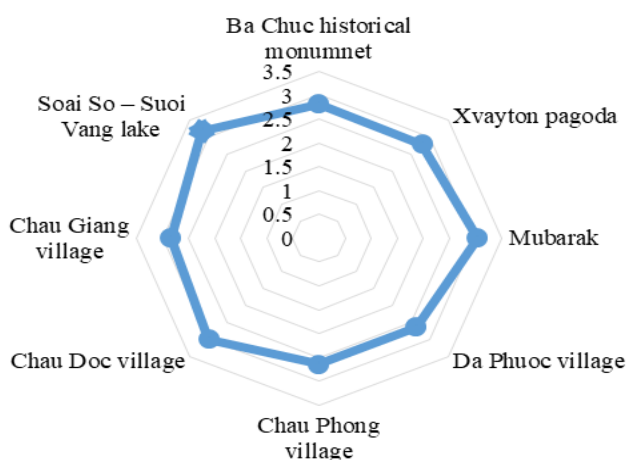


Figure 4. Group III

This group has 8 tourist attractions (30.8 percent). The tourist attractions with a higher value than the group average (2.86) include Ba Chuc historical monument, Soai So – Suoi Vang, Mubarak mosque, and Chau Doc village. These tourist attractions are mostly located in Tri Ton, Tinh Bien district, and Tan Chau town. The tourist attractions of group III such as Chau Doc Float village, Soai So Suoi Vang lake, Mubarak Mosque, Chau Giang and Da Phuoc village, Ba Chuc Charnel – house, and Xvayton Pagoda are at the medium advantage level because they have been recently developed locally.

- **Group IV. Tourist attractions with less advantage**

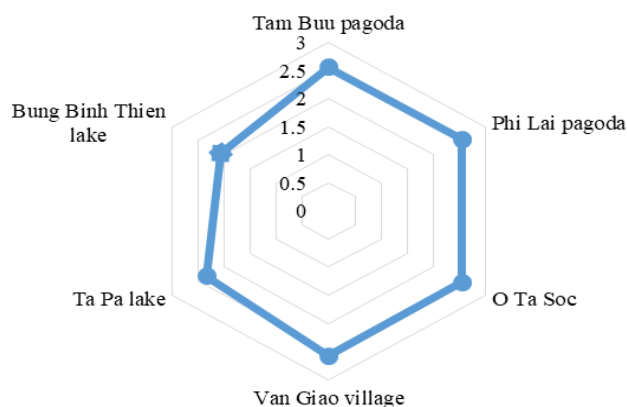


Figure 5. Group IV

This group includes six attractions: Bung Binh Thien, Tam Buu pagoda, Phi Lai pagoda, Tapa lake, Ba Chuc Charnel – house, and Van Giao village, accounting for 23.1%. The average value of this group is only 2.43. Most of these tourist attractions are generally potential and initially exploited for only local tourism because of certain limitations of infrastructure as well as tourist services.

4. Conclusion

The key tourism region of An Giang province possesses certain advantages for tourism development and remains impressive for a decade. However, regarding the evaluation on the advantage levels of the 26 tourist attractions in the region, the tourist attractions with higher attractive levels are mainly located in Chau Doc and its neighboring areas. Sam Mountain, Cam Mountain, and Tra Su are often considered as the core of the tourism sector in An Giang. The rest of the tourist attractions are little known due to some restrictions on infrastructure and services. In order to enhance the performance of tourism in the key tourism region in An Giang, the tourism department would need to have a long term plan for exploiting the evaluated tourist attractions group. For the group I and II, the local government not only maintains the current spiritual tourism but also develops heritage tourism, as well as diversifies other tourist activities. Advertising activities or promotional campaigns should be held in current popular spiritual tourism destinations. Some potential activities of promotional campaigns including farm tours and press trips should be invested and developed. A well-developed website to introduce the beauty of the tourist attractions and provide necessary travel information should be maintained properly. For group III and IV, the government should look for cooperation with the non-state sectors to sponsor infrastructure projects. The government should also create a good environment with better infrastructure as well as diversify the types of tourism activities and tourist services of the medium advantage-rated sites.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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ĐÁNH GIÁ MỨC ĐỘ THUẬN LỢI CỦA CÁC ĐIỂM DU LỊCH VÙNG TRỌNG ĐIỂM DU LỊCH TỈNH AN GIANG

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TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm đánh giá mức độ thuận lợi của các điểm du lịch tại vùng trọng điểm tỉnh An Giang. Trong nghiên cứu này, phương pháp thang điểm tổng hợp (SMS) và tiến trình phân cấp thứ bậc (AHP) được vận dụng nhằm đánh giá 26 điểm du lịch với 8 tiêu chí bao gồm mức độ hấp dẫn, cơ sở hạ tầng, khả năng quản lý, tính bền vững, khả năng liên kết, vị trí, sức chứa và thời gian hoạt động. Kết quả nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng, trong 26 điểm được đánh giá có 8 điểm ở nhóm I (mức độ thuận lợi cao), 4 điểm nhóm II (thuận lợi), 8 điểm nhóm III (thuận lợi trung bình), và 6 điểm ở nhóm IV (kém thuận lợi). Để khai thác có hiệu quả tiềm năng, các nhà quản lý hoạch định chính sách cần tập trung nâng cao dịch vụ của các điểm du lịch có mức độ thuận lợi cao, đồng thời đa dạng các sản phẩm loại hình du lịch ở các điểm du lịch có mức độ thuận lợi trung bình và kém.

Từ khóa: mức độ thuận lợi; điểm du lịch; vùng trọng điểm du lịch; tỉnh An Giang