



Reduction of plastic waste in tourism in Ninh Binh

Ninh Binh is one of the two leading localities nationwide in reducing plastic waste in tourism activities, according to the United Nations' assessment. The province has become a must-see destination for both domestic and foreign visitors thanks to its strategy on developing green, sustainable and community-based tourism associated with promoting the natural, historical and cultural values of the locality.

REDUCING PLASTIC WASTE TOWARDS GREEN TOURISM

In recent years, the rapid and strong development of tourism has significantly contributed to the country's economic growth. But tourism activities also increase the amount of plastic waste, putting great pressure on the environment and threatening sustainable development. How to solve this challenge is an urgent requirement for the Vietnamese tourism sector, especially as green growth is becoming the trend of the global "smokeless industry".

Most plastics are not biodegradable and take 100 or even 1,000 years to decompose. In the environment, plastic will decompose into microplastic pieces that pollute water sources and soil and enter the human food chain, endangering the lives of about 800 species of animals living in the ocean.

Plastic waste will pollute the view for tourism, affecting the tourist experience. Plastic waste has reduced tourist arrivals and revenue, affecting the livelihoods of millions of people who depend on tourism.

In Vietnam as well as in the world, nearly 50% of plastic products are designed and manufactured for single use. Of which, only a portion is recovered for recycling or destruction, while a large amount is washed into the system of rivers, canals, and then into the sea.

The amount of plastic waste and plastic bags in Vietnam accounts for about 10-12% of daily-life solid waste. In some cities with developed tourism activities, each tourist discharges an average of 5-10 plastic bags per day, 2-4 plastic bottles, milk cartons into the environment each day, not to mention the products and personal items made with disposable plastic.

The existence of plastic waste not only creates negative impacts on the landscape and environment, reducing the attractiveness of the destination, but also causes objections among tourists, leading to a decrease in the number of visitors and directly affecting the local economy.

In fact, the high growth in the number of tourists and the trend of mass tourism in Vietnam in the past period is one of the reasons why many tourist resorts have been facing the phenomenon of waste pollution, especially plastic waste. This situation makes the problem of reducing plastic waste in tourism more urgent than ever.

TOWARDS PLASTIC-WASTE-FREE TOURISM

Recently, the Vietnam Tourism Association (VTA) has cooperated with the Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources (ISPONRE) and Environment and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Vietnam to pilot a project on minimising plastic waste in tourism activities in Ninh Binh and Quang Nam provinces.

Accordingly, the main goal is to ensure that by 2025, 100% of tourist resorts, accommodation establishments, and hotels will not use non-degradable plastic bags and single-use plastic products.

To achieve this, the VITA also sets out several tasks, such as participating in developing, disseminating, and monitoring the implementation of policies and laws on reducing plastic waste in tourism; Implementing a set of criteria for recognizing plastic waste-free tourism businesses and applying plastic waste management for tourism businesses; Build and develop green tourism products without plastic waste; Promote tourism promotion activities associated with reducing plastic waste, etc.

Ninh Binh is one of two localities piloting a project on reducing plastic waste in the Vietnamese tourism sector sponsored by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), led by the VITA and the Institute of Strategy, Policy on Natural Resources and Environment preside over the implementation.

However, the application and implementation of this project in the tourist area still have some difficulties and limitations, such as High initial investment costs and no synchronization between minimizing plastic waste in and out of the resort. In addition to tourist areas, tourists come from many places and bring plastic waste to their travel schedules. Some residential waste collection points affect the beauty of tourist areas.

It is necessary to increase the implementation of some suitable applications and models to raise environmental protection awareness and reduce plastic waste in tourism activities. In addition, it is essential to focus on training knowledge and skills to train officials and workers to become pioneers and role models so that each destination will be a typical bright



spot in reducing plastic waste, contributing to the reality of plastic waste and realizing the goal of developing green, sustainable tourism.

The active participation of the tourism industry, businesses, and tourist attractions has contributed to raising awareness among people and tourists about reducing plastic waste, protecting the environmental landscape, and bringing Ninh Binh tourism to green and sustainable development. The project's initial results in reducing plastic waste in Vietnam's tourism industry in Ninh Binh are also the basis for replicating the model nationwide.

Experts from the Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment also suggested several solutions to minimize plastic waste, such as bringing a person's water bottle and refilling instead of using bottled water which will be discarded later, bringing a shopping bag or using a reusable bag when shopping, using leaves to wrap food, dispose of garbage in the right place, collect and classify garbage at homes, workplaces, event venues.

Ninh Binh was selected for carrying out the project because it has defined tourism as a spearhead economic sector, developing green, sustainable tourism as a foundation for green growth of other sectors and fields.

POLICES AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In different phases of development, Ninh Binh has adjusted its policies and strategies to match with real conditions and available resources, under which tourism has always been defined as a priority field.

In recent years, Ninh Binh has issued numerous resolutions, decisions and programmes on tourism development. In particular, the Resolution of the 22nd Congress of the provincial Party Organisation for the 2020-2025 tenure has defined developing infrastructure for tourism as a spearhead economic sector, and it will be one of the three strategic breakthroughs to create strong economic structuring, switching from construction material exploitation to tourism development in a bid to build a green economic growth model. To date, localities in the province have always paid due attention to protecting the natural landscape and historical relic sites, and zone off areas for prohibiting the exploitation of limestone and special use forests.

These viewpoints have helped lure more investors to Ninh Binh, thereby turning it into a safe, friendly and attractive destination with many attractions such as Trang An ecological site, Tam Coc - Bich Dong, Van Long Natural Wetland Reserve; Cuc Phuong National Park, Thung Nham Bird Sanctuary and Bai Dinh pagoda.



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Besides, the province has paid more attention to ensuring social order and security, environmental sanitation, food safety and hygiene, and civilized tourism at destinations, restaurants, hotels and tourism service establishments.

Thanks to these efforts, Ninh Binh has been named among top cities and provinces nationwide in ensuring security, safety and environmental hygiene.

Developing tourism sustainably has created momentum for other sectors to develop and turned Ninh Binh into a self-budget-balancing province, therefore reducing burden for the central government.

Bui Van Manh, Director of the Ninh Binh Department of Tourism, said the province's consistent strategy is to develop green, sustainable and community-based tourism. To realise this goal, it must depend on three main pillars namely local people, businesses and state. We have built a specific strategy to carry out the goal gradually. While making investment in tourism, we must respect the natural, cultural and historical values of each locality in a bid to develop sustainable tourism products.

Currently, Ninh Binh has stepped up communication work to raise awareness among local people and enterprises of protecting the environment. It has established a model of effective, close cooperation between the State, enterprises and local people in exploiting the nature. In which, the responsible and active participation of local people is highly acknowledged.

The development of community-based tourism at some popular destinations like Trang An, Tam Coc - Bich Dong and Van Long must ensure the harmony between the environment, landscapes, and tourism. Local people and enterprises benefit from the nature and heritages and they must hold responsible for protecting the nature and heritages. While serving tourists, boat rowers at Trang An, Van Long and Tam Coc always prepare waste baskets and remind tourists not to throw trash into the environment.

Typically, the Thung Nham tourist area, Hoa Lu district, has focused resources on investing in infrastructure development in a synchronous direction, harmoniously combining business activities with protecting the ecological environment and landscape to reduce waste.

The tourist area has invested in pure drinking water production technology with a capacity of about 500 m³ per day and night, meeting the needs of tourists and minimizing the use of plastic bottled drinking water. In addition, focus on propaganda and training for officials and workers operating in the field of tourism services

on environmental protection and minimizing plastic waste; Actively replace plastic products with environmentally friendly wood, china, and porcelain products.

At Trang An Ecotourism Area, they are currently focusing on propaganda and training for officials and workers operating in the field of tourism services on environmental protection and minimizing plastic waste. Environmental protection activities have received good feedback and impressions from service users.

The development of green tourism or experience tourism have helped tourists to enjoy and experience daily activities of local people and helped Ninh Binh to revive and develop traditional craft villages such as Kim Son sedge making, Van Lam embroidery village, and Ninh Van stone carving village.

Ninh Binh set a target of welcoming 8 million visitors and earn 8 trillion VND by 2025. To achieve the targets, the tourism sector will focus on investing synchronic and high-quality technical infrastructure; diversifying tourism products to meet tourists' demand; and launching new tourism products that bears unique and attractive cultural and historical values.

Moreover, the province will enhance cooperation between departments, sectors, localities and enterprises in tourism activities; increase state management of tourism; ensure security, order, food safety and environmental sanitation; and organise regular inspections to promptly handle violations of construction in the core areas of Trang An and other destinations ■

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