



ANALYSIS OF CONDITIONS PROMOTING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN AN GIANG PROVINCE IN REGIONAL LINKAGES

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Abstract:

This study was conducted in An Giang province, Vietnam, to analyze factors affecting tourism development in An Giang province in regional linkages, including geographical location, tourism resources, infrastructure, tourism development policies, and safety and security in tourism. The study uses methods of synthesizing documents and comparative statistics to find conditions that promote tourism development in An Giang province. The factor analysis results show the advantages and disadvantages, from which there are reasonable solutions to develop tourism in An Giang province in regional linkages.

Keywords: tourism resources, infrastructure, tourism policy, safety in tourism, regional linkages, An Giang province

1. Introduction

An Giang is a province in the southwest, Dong Thap province in the east and Can Tho City in the southeast. In addition, An Giang shares a 100 km northern border with Cambodia. Recently, An Giang province, Vietnam's tourism industry has significantly contributed to the country's socio-economic development, especially in revenue and job creation for local people. In 2023, An Giang will welcome more than 9.2 million visitors, an increase of 122% over the same period in 2022, including 10,000 international visitors. Total revenue from tourism activities reaches more than 4,600 billion VND, an increase of 114% over the same period in 2022.

However, the reality of An Giang tourism development still needs to be improved, and there are still redundant services. In particular, tourism links with neighbouring

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localities have yet to be effective. To promote the development of An Giang tourism in regional linkages, it is necessary to identify and evaluate influencing factors to effectively promote the comparative advantage between An Giang and neighbouring localities regarding products of this type of tourism.

Therefore, this study examines the conditions that promote tourism development in An Giang province in regional linkages by analyzing factors such as geographical location, tourism resources, infrastructure, politics tourism policy, safety and security in tourism with tourism development in An Giang province in regional linkages to evaluate and propose appropriate development directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of the Research Area

An Giang is located in southwest Vietnam, adjacent to Dong Thap, Kien Giang provinces, and Can Tho City. The Northwest borders the Kingdom of Cambodia with a 95.05km long border through Vinh Xuong, Tinh Bien, and Khanh Binh international border gates.

Regarding administrative division, An Giang province has two cities, two towns, and seven districts. In 2023, the population of An Giang province was 1.9 million people, accounting for 11% of the entire population of the Mekong Delta and 1.95% of Vietnam's population. The population density is 538 people/km², higher than the whole country and the Mekong Delta region.

The population distribution is uneven and densely concentrated in city centers and towns but sparse in mountainous districts such as Tri Ton and Tinh Bien. An Giang province is home to ethnic communities, including Kinh, Cham Islam, Khmer, and ethnic Chinese. Ethnic groups, with their characteristics, have contributed to creating a diverse culture rich in national identity and attractive to domestic and foreign tourists.

In terms of economics, the province's economy has experienced rapid and stable growth. The total Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) at accurate prices in 2023 will reach 73,454 billion VND, and the economic growth rate will reach 5.11%. The economic structure has shifted towards reducing the proportion of agricultural sectors and increasing the proportion of industrial and service sectors.

2.2. Overview of Issues Related to the Research Field

Regional integration is becoming popular in tourism development because of its benefits to the location and area involved (Rogerson, 2015; Telfer, 2014). To promote tourism development, it is necessary to identify factors affecting regional linkages in tourism to help increase competitiveness and attract investment and tourists and connect and expand tourism to take advantage of resources, geographical location, infrastructure, and other resources (Moscardo *et al.*, 2017; Scheyvens, 2018). Regional linkages in tourism will minimize duplicate products and maintain long-term benefits, developing sustainable tourism (Scheyvens, 2018). Therefore, research on factors affecting regional linkages in tourism to integrate sustainable development is essential.

Geographic location directly or indirectly affects tourism elements and regulates the ability and level of linkage in tourism development. Specifically, geographical location contributes to regulating tourism objects' natural and cultural characteristics. Geographic location affects tourists' attitudes, psychology, and choices regarding the destination's image. This is essential in deciding whether tourists will visit (John, 1979). The geographical location of a tourist destination also contributes to the formation and development of the tourism market (Mirela & Sabina, 2014).

Tourism resources play a significant role in tourism development. Tourism resources directly impact the formation of tourism products, types of tourism, and organization of tourism territories (Nguyen *et al.*, 2017). Tourism resources are divided into natural tourism resources and cultural tourism resources. Natural tourism resources include natural landscapes, geological elements, geomorphology, climate, hydrology, ecosystems, and other natural elements that can be used for tourism purposes (Law Travel, 2017). Cultural tourism resources include historical relics, revolutionary relics, archaeology, architecture, traditional cultural values, festivals, folk arts, and other cultural values. Creative works of human labor can be used for tourism (Tourism Law, 2017).

Infrastructure plays a vital role in tourism development, and factors directly affect transportation systems, communication, electricity, and water supply systems.

Transportation is a factor that impacts tourism. It is related to the structural elements of tourism, such as price and distance, and contributes to creating tourism links (Bruce, 2000). Through convenient transportation networks, tourism has become a widespread social phenomenon.

Communication is an integral part of tourism infrastructure. It is necessary to ensure information for tourists throughout the journey. Communication transports news quickly and promptly in tourism activities, contributing to domestic and international exchanges. The infrastructure must also be mentioned to provide electricity and water. These are indispensable elements to serve the essential needs of tourists.

Tourism development strategies and policies are key factors leading to success in development, tourism linkages, and ensuring tourism sustainability (UNEP, 2009). Tourism strategies and policies can promote or inhibit development based on their compatibility with practical requirements. Based on the size and scope of the territory, tourism development strategies and policies can be divided into general development strategies and policies for the whole country, local tourism development strategies and policies, and tourism development strategies and policies for each tourist destination.

Security and social safety conditions: peace, political stability, and social safety are essential to tourism development, especially in integration. Conditions of peace, political stability, and social safety can promote the development of tourism products and types (MA Clement & A Georgious, 1998) but also hinder the industry's growth in territories with unstable political environments (Samer, 2016). On the contrary, tourism development is considered a tool that consolidates peace and strengthens relationships between countries worldwide (UNWTO, 2015).

3. Material and Methods

Methods used in research include collecting documents and analyzing and synthesizing data. Statistical and comparative methods are also used to compare the tourism development of An Giang province and surrounding areas. The documents are collected from sources such as research documents by domestic and foreign authors on tourism development in regional linkages; Data on natural, population, and socio-economic characteristics from the Statistics Department of An Giang province; Electronic reports, data from scientific research works, specialized magazines at home and abroad related to the research problem. Data and reports ensure reliability and are scientific and accurate in space and time.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Geographic Location

One of the advantages of promoting tourism links between An Giang and surrounding areas is location and geographical distance. An Giang is located close to surrounding localities. An Giang is one of four provinces and cities in the critical economic region of the Mekong Delta, located adjacent to major tourism centers of the region and the country, nearly 190km from the tourist center of Ho Chi Minh City, 60km from Can Tho city center. With the increasingly improved transportation system, the geographical location allows the province's tourism industry to easily connect with tourist centres and neighbouring localities, forming tourist routes with a chain of tourist attractions, diverse and unique products, and types of tourism.

4.2. Tourism Resources

Tourism resources are a condition and a critical input factor for tourism activities and are also a factor affecting the sustainable development of tourism. Quantity, type, structure, diversity, location, and exploitation ability directly impact development orientation, goals, and selection of typical tourism products. Identify solutions for tourism development, socio-economic efficiency, and the ability to develop tourism in the corresponding direction. Natural resources are fundamental and essential for creating tourism products. The scale and ability to develop depends on the quantity, quality, and combination of natural resources. The larger the scale and the higher their quality, the more likely they are to become an attractive destination, attracting tourists and helping to expand and develop the tourism market. Tourism activities must be based on the exploitation and use of resources.

4.2.1 Natural Tourism Resources

An Giang province's natural tourism resources are very favorable. The terrain with mountains and plains is a unique feature of An Giang province in the Mekong Delta and has excellent value for exploitation and development. Among them, the most prominent

is That Son (Seven Nui) region, which covers the entire Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts. In particular, in That Son region, many historical and religious relics with unique values can develop various tourism types and products such as relaxation, recreation, entertainment, sightseeing, and spiritual pilgrimage. In the delta terrain, the terrain type with great potential for exploiting tourism development is the dunes (islands), which are high in the middle and gradually lower on both sides. Typical examples are My Hoa Hung Island (Long Xuyen) and Gieng Island (Cho Moi). On these islands, it is possible to develop various types of tourism, such as river tours, exploring and experiencing the landscape, and learning about livelihoods and community life.

4.2.2 Cultural Tourism Resources

An Giang is one of the few localities in the region with a system of historical relics spanning historical periods, diverse in types such as archaeological and historical relics. Revolutionary history, cultural beliefs. A typical example is the Oc Eo (Thoai Son) archaeological site of the Funan Kingdom period; revolutionary relics (Tuc Dup Hill Historical Site); historical figures (Thoai Ngoc Hau Mausoleum; President Ton Duc Thang's memorial area); religious and belief works (Tay An Pagoda, Ba Chua Xu Temple at Sam Mountain). According to statistics from the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of An Giang, in 2023, the province will have two relics ranked at the extraordinary national level, 27 historical and cultural relics ranked at the national level, and 48 at the national level provincial. The province has 41 festivals, accounting for 3.4% of the total number of festivals in the entire Mekong Delta region, of which one festival is managed at the Ministry level, six festivals are managed at the provincial level, and localities manage the rest. The most attractive festival for tourists is the Ba Chua Xu festival in Sam Mountain in Chau Doc City, An Giang province.

4.3. The Infrastructure

Compared to some regional provinces, An Giang has a complete infrastructure system. It is one of the centers of the critical economic region of the Mekong Delta. An Giang province invests in building transportation networks, communication systems, electricity and water, and technology.

The transportation network is developed in a modern direction with nearly 5,507km of roads and 1,639 bridges with a length of 55.7km. The main types of transportation in An Giang are motorways and waterways.

The communication system is increasingly perfected and meets domestic and international communication needs. The telecommunications network is increasingly invested in improving service quality. The number of fixed telephone lines reached 53,637 subscribers. The number of postpaid mobile phones is 1,378,147 subscribers; The estimated number of Internet subscribers on the network is 687,703.

The power grid system is relatively complete, and all cities and districts in the province have a national power grid. The high-voltage grid system currently includes a

220KV line passing through the An Giang area with a length of 81.5km. The medium voltage power grid has a length of 2,826km.

4.4. Mechanisms and Policies for Tourism Development

Many mechanisms and policies, from macro-management to micro-management, have been given attention and applied widely throughout the province to develop tourism into a key economic sector.

4.5. Security, Political and Social Situation

An Giang is located in an area with a stable political and social security situation. The province has an important geopolitical position, the gateway to Cambodia for the region and the whole country. The cooperation between An Giang and Cambodia, as well as neighboring localities, is increasingly emphasized.

4.6. General Assessment of factors Affecting Tourism Development in An Giang province in Regional Linkages

4.6.1. Convenience

An Giang has many advantages in geographical location as it is located in the critical economic region of the Mekong Delta, adjacent to the regional tourism center of Can Tho city, located at the gateway to information exchange trade with other countries. The geographical location and distance between An Giang and the surrounding areas favor implementing regional linkages. An Giang has diverse tourism resources, including natural and cultural tourism resources. Among them, the different and unique is Ba Chua Xu Temple at Sam Mountain with the Via Ba festival. This is also a unique factor that facilitates linkages with neighboring localities.

In comparison, the surrounding area has outstanding tourism resources such as sea and island tourism and ecotourism resources associated with rivers and water. These advantageous values can help An Giang supplement and build diverse, attractive routes, tours, and tourism programs. With critical investments, the infrastructure and technology system is increasingly perfected in a modern, updated direction. The completion and implementation of transportation projects have made an essential contribution to promoting An Giang tourism development and enhancing regional connectivity. Mechanisms and policies for developing An Giang tourism in neighbouring areas are increasingly focused. Many policy systems have initially promoted their role in guiding and promoting the improvement of the remaining elements. A stable political security contributes to promoting the province's tourism development while creating favourable conditions for the connection between An Giang and surrounding localities.

4.6.2. Difficulty

Although tourism resources in An Giang are diverse, they have yet to be exploited to their full potential. Outstanding tourism resource values compared to surrounding areas are limited. Although investment is focused on infrastructure and technology systems,

they still need to be synchronized. New investment items are mainly concentrated in several key tourist areas, such as the Nui Sam tourist areas and the Cam Mountain tourist areas. Transportation infrastructure projects connecting with surrounding localities still need to be improved in quantity, scale, and quality. The policy system, especially the policy on regional connectivity, still needs to be synchronized with linked localities. This makes implementing tourism links between An Giang and surrounding localities difficult. The construction of the new linkage mechanism only stops at the signing, has not gone into depth, and the actual effectiveness still needs to improve.

5. Recommendations

This study stops at the perspective of introduction and literature review. This result is a premise for further research on factors affecting tourism development in An Giang province, Vietnam, in connection with surrounding areas.

6. Conclusion

An Giang has many advantages for tourism development, such as favorable geographical location and diverse and unique tourism resources, including many types of tourism resources that are unique and outstanding in their scope region and the whole country. The system of mechanisms and policies for tourism development and links with surrounding areas is built, synchronized, updated, and supplemented regularly, making an essential contribution to orienting the province's tourism development. At the same time, it is an essential driving force to promote the level and scope of links between An Giang and the surrounding areas. Infrastructure is invested in a complete and synchronous direction, capable of connecting inter-provincial tourist destinations and areas and meeting the needs of connection with surrounding areas. Key infrastructure projects have been completed and put into use, contributing to shortening distances and facilitating tourism development and tourism links between An Giang and surrounding areas. Technological achievements are initially applied in tourism development management and linkages to help improve operational efficiency and promote tourism image. Factors of security and political stability make an essential contribution to the development of An Giang tourism in connecting neighboring areas.

For neighboring areas, comparative advantages in tourism resources, linkage policy mechanisms, technological infrastructure, location, and distance are essential factors facilitating linkage promotion. Travel between An Giang and localities in the region. However, besides the advantages, the factors for tourism development and tourism linkages of An Giang and surrounding areas still have many limitations, such as the fact that tourism resources, although diverse, have not been exploited to their full potential available capacity; Infrastructure and technology systems are not yet synchronized; mechanisms and policies, especially policies on regional integration, have not yet come into practice.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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