



PROPOSING SOLUTIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CAN THO CITY BASED ON SWOT ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is becoming an important sustainable development trend for many localities, including Can Tho. Based on the SWOT analysis method, this paper evaluates the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of community-based tourism in Can Tho, thereby proposing solutions to enhance the exploitation of potential and ensure sustainable development.

Keywords: Can Tho, community-based tourism, SWOT analysis

1. Introduction

Tourism has become a key economic sector, contributing increasingly to the national GDP, creating more jobs, and promoting the development of other economic sectors (UNWTO, 2019). The World Travel & Tourism Council estimates that the tourism sector's contribution to global GDP in 2024 will increase by 12.1% compared to the previous year, reaching 11.1 trillion USD, accounting for 10% of global GDP (WTTC, 2023). In Vietnam, in 2023, the tourism sector's contribution to GDP reached 6.6%, although still lower than the pre-Covid-19 period, it has significantly increased compared to the previous three years (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2024). However, the question remains how to develop tourism sustainably by harmoniously combining the exploitation and conservation of tourism resources and fairly distributing the benefits of tourism to stakeholders, including local communities. To address this, community-based tourism is seen as a significant form of tourism, contributing to poverty alleviation, supporting the local community's economy, and preserving and promoting local cultural values.

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Can Tho, the economic and cultural center of the Mekong Delta, possesses many intangible cultural heritages and unique ecological landscapes. Studies by Khanh and Toan have shown that the exploitation of intangible cultural heritage can become an important driving force for tourism development in the locality. In particular, traditional festivals, handicrafts, and local cuisine are factors that attract both domestic and international tourists (Khanh & Toan, 2016). Additionally, Can Tho has great potential for ecotourism, especially when linked with neighboring regions. The development of ecotourism not only protects the environment but also creates economic opportunities for local communities (Nhat, 2024). Despite its potential, community-based tourism in Can Tho still faces many challenges. Specifically, tourism development in the Mekong Delta lacks regional linkages and infrastructure investment. This leads to the ineffective exploitation of tourism products, especially agricultural tourism (Doan & Bui, 2012; Canh, 2020).

International studies provide valuable lessons for the development of community-based tourism in Can Tho. Wall (2013) emphasizes the importance of responsible tourism management, where local communities must be empowered and actively participate in the tourism development process. Scheyvens also highlights the role of tourism in empowering communities, helping them improve their economic and social well-being (Scheyvens, 2002). However, Tosun (2000) warns about the limitations of community participation in developing countries due to a lack of resources and government support. This is also true for Can Tho, where community participation in tourism is still limited.

Thus, community-based tourism in Can Tho has great potential to become a driving force for economic and social development. However, to achieve this, close cooperation among stakeholders is needed, as well as the application of lessons from domestic and international research. The sustainable development of community-based tourism not only brings economic benefits but also contributes to the preservation of culture and the environment, creating a bright future for Can Tho and the Mekong Delta. In this paper, using the SWOT model, we conduct a comprehensive analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges that community-based tourism in Can Tho will face. From there, we propose reasonable solutions for local community-based tourism to maximize its strengths, minimize its weaknesses, seize opportunities, and overcome challenges.

2. Scope and Methods

2.1 Research Scope

The paper focuses on community tourism in Can Tho City, one of the urban areas of Vietnam. Can Tho has a particularly important strategic position, located in the center of the Mekong Delta, and is the gateway to the lower Mekong River. The city has a population of about 1.2 million people, playing an important role in intra-regional transportation and international connections. Can Tho City has a total natural area of 1,440.40 km², including 09 district-level administrative units, including 05 districts (Ninh

Kieu, Cai Rang, Binh Thuy, O Mon, Thot Not) and 04 districts (Phong Dien, Thoi Lai, Co Do, Vinh Thanh).

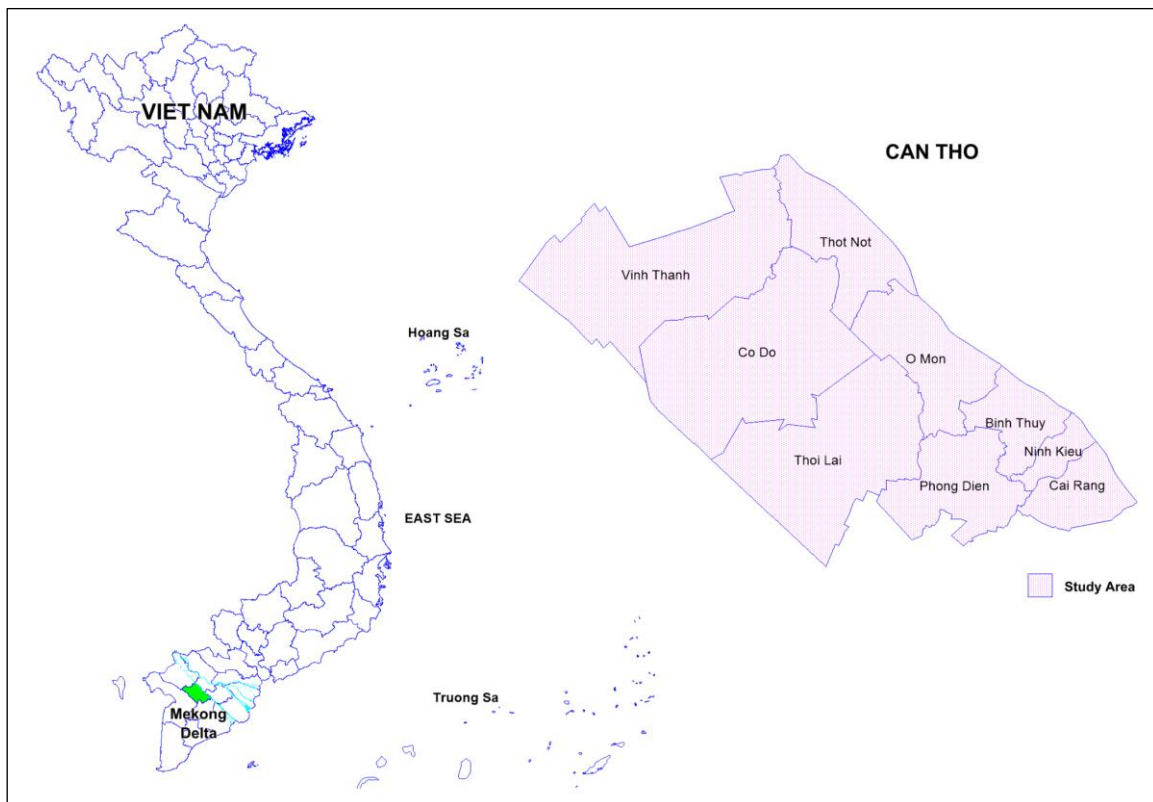


Figure 1: Study Area (Can Tho City)

2.2 Research Methods

2.2.1 Data Collection Method

The paper synthesizes information from reports, books, scientific articles, and documents related to community-based tourism in Can Tho. We also conducted field surveys, observations, and data collection from typical community-based tourism sites in Can Tho, such as Con Son, Phong Dien, and Binh Thuy.

2.2.2 SWOT Analysis Method

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) model is a popular strategic analysis tool that helps evaluate internal factors (strengths, weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities, threats) of an organization, industry, or field. SWOT analysis is widely used in socio-economic development planning, including the tourism sector. When applied to community-based tourism, the SWOT model helps identify factors affecting the development of this type of tourism, thereby proposing appropriate solutions (Nhan, 2015).

In this paper, through SWOT analysis, the author will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of community-based tourism, as well as internal and external factors that

may positively or negatively impact the development goals of community-based tourism in Can Tho City. After analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of community-based tourism, we will propose development solutions for community-based tourism in Can Tho by constructing a SWOT matrix.

3. Theoretical Basis of Community-Based Tourism

3.1 Some Concepts of Community-Based Tourism

Community-based tourism is a form of tourism where the local community takes ownership, with residents participating in the management, operation, and benefits of tourism activities.

In 1997, Responsible Ecological Social Tours (REST) defined: *"community-based tourism is concerned with sustainable environmental, social, and cultural practices; the community is the owner and manager, for the community, thereby helping tourists increase their benefits from learning from the community and local lifestyles."*

According to the World Tourism Organization, community-based tourism is an approach to tourism development that aims to create direct benefits for local communities while conserving natural and cultural resources (UNWTO, 2013).

In Vietnam, the concept of community-based tourism was first mentioned in the Workshop on Sharing Experiences in Developing Community-Based Tourism in Vietnam held in Hanoi (2003) and was defined as: *"developing tourism with community participation to ensure sustainable culture and nature; raising awareness and empowering the community. The community shares the benefits from tourism activities, receives cooperation and support from the government and international organizations."*

Although expressed differently, the issues of sustainability and the local community are central to the concept. Therefore, community-based tourism can be understood as a tourism development method where the local community is the main participant in tourism activities, through which they enjoy economic benefits while being responsible for protecting tourism resources sustainably.

3.2 Characteristics of Community-Based Tourism

Community-based tourism has the following main characteristics:

- Local residents directly participate in tourism activities, from management to service provision.
- Tourism activities are linked to the conservation of natural and cultural resources, ensuring long-term benefits.
- Tourists not only visit but also directly experience the life and customs of the community.
- Profits from tourism are reinvested into the community, improving the quality of life and local development.

3.3 The Role of Community-Based Tourism

Community-based tourism plays an important role in sustainable development, reflected in three main aspects:

- Economically, community-based tourism creates additional income for local residents, promoting the development of small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Socially, community-based tourism contributes to the preservation and promotion of local cultural values, strengthening community cohesion.
- Environmentally, community-based tourism encourages the protection of natural resources, reducing the negative impacts of mass tourism.

4. Analysis of the Current Situation of Community-based Tourism in Can Tho

4.1 Overview of Community-Based Tourism in Can Tho

Can Tho City, the center of the Mekong Delta, possesses favorable natural conditions with a dense river system, lush fruit orchards, and a distinctive garden culture. This is an important basis for developing community-based tourism linked with ecotourism and cultural tourism. In recent years, community-based tourism in Can Tho has developed significantly, contributing to the diversification of tourism products and improving the economic life of residents.

Typical community-based tourism sites in Can Tho include:

- Con Son (Binh Thuy District): Known for its community-based tourism model, activities include visiting fruit gardens, experiencing traditional cake-making, and watching flying fish.
- My Khanh Tourism Village (Phong Dien District): Combines ecotourism, cultural tourism, and traditional cuisine.
- Ba Cong, Vam Xang, Ba Hiep Ecological Gardens (Phong Dien District): Specialize in garden tourism and rural life experiences.
- Cai Rang Floating Market: A destination rich in river culture, combining community-based tourism and commerce.

Although some community-based tourism models have been established, development is still uneven and faces many challenges that need to be addressed.

4.2 SWOT Analysis of Community-Based Tourism in Can Tho

4.2.1 Strengths

The history of Can Tho is closely linked to the history of the Southern region's land reclamation, with many unique cultural features that create the "friendly, hospitable, generous, and heroic" character of the people. This is one of the factors that attract tourists and can be considered a resource to promote community-based tourism.

Can Tho City has flat terrain, a dense river network forming an important transportation route that contributes to socio-economic development. The river system, fruit orchards, and vast fields create unique conditions for developing water-based

tourism, which is closely linked to the local community and brings many benefits to residents.

Can Tho is one of the major economic, cultural, educational, and tourism centers of the country and the Mekong Delta key economic region. It has favorable transportation conditions by road, water, and air, and is close to the largest domestic tourist market, Ho Chi Minh City. This geographical location gives Can Tho an advantage in developing tourism in general and community-based tourism in particular, facilitating regional and international tourism development. According to statistics from the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, the number of tourists visiting Can Tho has been increasing in recent years. The target for 2025 is to attract 6.6 million tourists, with 3.4 million staying overnight, and total tourism revenue is expected to reach about 6,500 billion VND.

Table 1: Tourism Situation in Can Tho City, 2020–2024

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total tourist arrivals (million people)	5.61	2.10	5.13	5.99	6,31
Total overnight visitors (million people)	2.00	0.90	2.51	2,98	3,10
Tourism revenue (billion VND)	3.169	1.375	4.117	5.420	6.226

Source: Can Tho City Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism.

Can Tho have many traditional craft villages that play an important role in serving community-based tourism. These craft villages reflect the life of the people closely linked with nature. The products of these craft villages are exploited to serve the needs of cultural research and tourism, bringing benefits to the local people. Additionally, the city has many historical and cultural relics recognized at the city and national levels, which are potential resources for tourism development.

The transportation system is quite complete, along with electricity, water, and communication networks, creating favorable conditions for accessing, promoting, and designing community-based tourism programs.

4.2.2 Weaknesses

Despite the abundant labor force, the quality of tourism human resources is still limited, especially tour guides. Most hotel staff and managers have not been professionally trained. Residents at tourist sites lack service skills and have weak communication abilities.

The development of community-based tourism in the locality is still spontaneous, lacking planning, and not encouraging community participation. Therefore, the quality of tourism products is not high, lacking local uniqueness, often overlapping with other localities in the region, causing boredom among tourists.

Tourism infrastructure is still weak, not invested adequately and synchronously. Many tourist sites are attractive in terms of landscape, but have poor infrastructure and services. This partly reflects the low quality and competitiveness of tourism establishments and accommodation services in Can Tho.

The issue of attracting investment capital for tourism development from domestic and foreign sources has not been effective. There is a lack of synchronized investment for the development of the industry, insufficient capital, and budget for promotion and development.

The promotion and marketing of community-based tourism in Can Tho to international and domestic tourists is still weak. There is a lack of close cooperation and linkage in tourism management and activities between provinces and cities in the region and the country.

Environmental protection issues alongside tourism development have not been adequately addressed, and optimal solutions have not been proposed. The focus is mainly on exploitation and profit-making, without paying attention to the conservation and restoration of relics and systematic environmental protection.

4.2.3 Opportunities

Community-based tourism brings many benefits to local residents while contributing to the preservation of local cultural values and the natural environment. Therefore, this form of tourism is being widely encouraged and developed in many countries, including Vietnam. In Can Tho, this form of tourism receives support from the government, managers, businesses, and local communities.

Vietnam, in general and Can Tho in particular, are located in a region with high economic growth and political stability. Therefore, the tourism sector has the opportunity to develop strongly, learning from the experiences of other countries in the region and increasing its ability to attract foreign investment in the context of globalization and integration. Additionally, economic development allows people to travel more, increasing revenue for Can Tho tourism.

National programs investing in infrastructure development for Can Tho in terms of roads, waterways, aviation, and electricity and water systems open up new prospects for Can Tho tourism development.

With the development of information technology, destination marketing has been regularly and effectively implemented. Welcoming travel agents for surveys or promoting products in domestic and foreign markets has become easier.

4.2.4 Threats

Tourism resources are relatively scattered and have many similarities with other localities, so if the tourism space is not well organized, it can easily cause boredom among tourists and make it difficult to retain them for a long time.

The level of awareness about the meaning and importance of community-based tourism has improved, but is still generally low. Therefore, support from sectors, levels, and the voluntary participation of the community has not been adequate.

Social factors of the tourism environment still have many limitations, lacking cooperation and linkage in tourism management and activities between Can Tho and other provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta and the country.

In addition to competing with localities with similar tourism potential, such as Tien Giang, An Giang, Ben Tre, etc., community-based tourism in Can Tho also has to compete with many competitors in neighboring countries, such as Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, etc.

In the process of developing community-based tourism, a certain threshold is required to ensure a balance between exploitation and conservation. Therefore, this is also a challenge to develop tourism activities without destroying resources while effectively exploiting and developing those resources.

4.3 Development Solutions for Community-Based Tourism in Can Tho

4.3.1 SO Solution (Strengths - Opportunities)

This solution leverages the strengths of community-based tourism in Can Tho to take advantage of market opportunities.

4.3.1.1 Develop and Improve Product Quality

Community-based tourism is still relatively new in Vietnam in general and in Can Tho in particular. Therefore, the first necessary step is to accurately assess the potential and current status of community-based tourism products. From there, feasible plans should be made to diversify and improve the quality of this type of tourism.

Focus on investing in and exploiting the unique tourism resources of each area to build tourism products that reflect the local identity, avoiding duplication between locations, and targeting the needs of different markets. Can Tho's tourism products should include: *"vast fields; lush fruit orchards; vibrant river activities; friendly, hospitable, and generous locals; diverse craft villages; unique festivals of the land reclamation period; and traditional, flavorful local cuisine."*

Develop and plan entertainment areas and services for tourists. Each entertainment area should have various activities, avoiding duplication, and encouraging traditional festivals and folk games. This will create more attraction and richness for community-based tourism products based on traditional elements of local culture. This can also extend the length of stay and increase tourist spending.

Encourage the restoration of traditional handicrafts in the local community. Develop programs to promote craft villages linked with tourism to attract tourists to visit these villages. Additionally, there should be plans for production, quality management, and pricing to create competitive advantages and increase the attractiveness of the products.

Improve the quality of community-based tourism products in three aspects: service attitude, diversity and convenience of goods and services; and readiness to serve. On the other hand, it is also necessary to apply science and technology to improve tourism service technology (Linh, 2010).

4.3.1.2 Implement Linkages in Community-Based Tourism Development

In the era of globalization, tourism linkages are essential for each locality to effectively exploit advantages and potentials, promoting tourism development and making it a key economic sector. For community-based tourism in Can Tho, tourism resources are quite scattered, so it is necessary to have linkages to maximize the potential of the locality. The linkages include:

Linking tourism sites in Can Tho, where each site becomes an important link in the tourist journey. Harmoniously combining river and garden tourism, floating market visits, fruit orchards, etc., with visits to craft villages and historical sites to give tourists different experiences at each destination.

- Minimizing duplication between tourism products of different tourism businesses. Each tourism site should have unique products to create differentiation.
- Additionally, Can Tho needs to link with other localities in the Mekong Delta and the economic center of Ho Chi Minh City to support each other in promoting potentials and advantages, effectively exploiting the natural resources of each locality, and creating diverse tourism products for the whole region. Through cooperation, promote marketing, expand investment promotion areas, and strengthen training and human resource supply for tourism, creating conditions for sustainable tourism development in the region in line with international integration requirements.

4.3.2 WO Solution (Weaknesses - Opportunities)

This solution improves the weaknesses of community-based tourism in Can Tho to take advantage of market opportunities.

4.3.2.1 Develop Human Resources for Community-Based Tourism

To assess tourist satisfaction, besides the attractiveness of tourism resources, the convenience of infrastructure, facilities, and other amenities, it largely depends on the professional skills, communication abilities, and service attitudes of the tourism workforce. On the other hand, community-based tourism always encourages the participation of residents and uses the local workforce. This is considered an advantage to help tourism activities develop. Therefore, it is necessary to build a dynamic, enthusiastic, and professional local tourism service team; especially, it is necessary to encourage the active participation of local people, as this is also an attractive feature of community-based tourism. Therefore, there should be comprehensive recruitment and training programs for the tourism workforce in general and community-based tourism in particular:

- First, assess and classify the qualifications of the management and service workforce. From there, develop appropriate training and retraining plans to meet the development needs of tourism in general and community-based tourism in particular.

- Organize short-term and regular training programs for managers and the local community.
- At the same time, strengthen state management to support the local tourism industry in developing sustainably. Planning and investing in development, improving the quality of tourism human resources, are essential tasks and should be conducted regularly and systematically.

4.3.2.2 Develop Infrastructure and Technical Facilities for Community-Based Tourism

Infrastructure and tourism facilities significantly impact tourist satisfaction due to their capacity and convenience. In reality, this issue at community-based tourism sites in Can Tho remains weak. It is necessary to upgrade the road system, build clean water supply systems, and establish waste collection and treatment systems at community-based tourism sites.

In addition to investing in infrastructure improvement, it is essential to regularly inspect accommodation and dining establishments to ensure service quality and safety for tourists. This is one of the fundamental directions to create favorable conditions for exploiting local tourism potential and promoting investment in community-based tourism.

For tourism facilities such as entertainment areas and traditional games in the community, especially those with unique local cultural characteristics, they are necessary, like any other form of tourism. These factors significantly contribute to attracting, retaining, and increasing tourist spending. However, such facilities are currently lacking, requiring cooperation and investment from businesses, functional agencies, and the community.

However, given the unique nature of community-based tourism products, which aim to provide tourists with authentic experiences of local life, it is not encouraged to build modern, centralized accommodation and dining facilities. Instead, the participation of local households should be encouraged. Therefore, in investing in accommodation, dining, souvenir shops, and entertainment areas, priority should be given to projects led by local residents. Community-based tourism development means developing tourism economics right in their villages and homes, based on the natural and cultural potentials of the land. At the same time, it is important to note that construction projects should have specific planning to avoid disrupting the architectural balance of the local community and losing the essence of community-based tourism.

4.3.3 ST Solution (Strengths - Threats)

This solution utilizes the advantages of community-based tourism in Can Tho to minimize risks caused by external factors.

4.3.3.1 Attract Investment and Reform Policies

Investing in community-based tourism development is an investment for development, as these tourism activities aim for economic, social, and cultural conservation benefits.

Therefore, the state needs to mobilize resources to develop community-based tourism. Local authorities at all levels should integrate the development of this tourism model into their socio-economic development plans, especially in rural development and new rural construction programs.

Promote the socialization of tourism development, encourage and create favorable conditions for various economic sectors to participate in tourism business in different forms; implement socialized investment in the protection and restoration of relics, landscapes, festivals, folk cultural activities, and craft villages serving tourism development.

Continue to improve the management mechanism, create a transparent investment environment for tourism development, simplify administrative procedures, and develop investment support services to attract investors. Ensure equality between domestic and foreign investment, between private and state sectors; expand forms of attracting investment both domestically and internationally.

To boost community-based tourism development in the locality, there should be reasonable tax policies and initial capital support for communities participating in tourism services, and establish a mechanism for reinvesting in local community-based tourism development.

4.3.3.2 Promote Tourism Marketing

Enhance the promotion of community-based tourism in Can Tho, both domestically and internationally. To strengthen tourism promotion activities, the city needs to conduct surveys, especially at new tourist sites, to compile comprehensive information and data on the city's tourism resources. Research the preferences, habits, and consumption behaviors of different tourist segments to create appropriate advertising products that reach potential customers and provide relevant information to tourism businesses to meet tourist demands.

Tourism management agencies should organize seminars and discussions on community-based tourism in Can Tho to attract the attention of potential tourists. These activities can be conducted with the support of foreign organizations cooperating in community-based tourism development. At the same time, collaborate with tourism companies to develop plans and promotional materials for community-based tourism products.

Organize tourism promotion programs for Can Tho on local and national media. Publish tourism guidebooks, maps, picture books, shopping guides, and brochures with vivid and attractive images to introduce to domestic and international tourists.

Upgrade and regularly update Can Tho tourism information on tourism websites to promote the city's tourism image to tourists.

4.3.4 WT Solution (Weaknesses - Threats)

This solution maximizes the improvement of weaknesses in community-based tourism in Can Tho to avoid threats from external factors.

4.3.4.1 Conserve and Exploit Community-Based Tourism Resources

For community-based tourism, tourism resources are closely linked to the local community. The local community is both a labor source for the tourism industry and a factor that attracts tourists through their lifestyle, environment, and cultural traditions. Therefore, the development of community-based tourism largely depends on the participation and support of residents. To develop community-based tourism sustainably, the following issues need to be addressed:

- Complete the legal framework for managing and exploiting tourism resources, conserving cultural values, and protecting the environment; issue industry standards for designing and constructing tourism facilities that fit the local landscape; propose policies for reinvesting and protecting tourism resources through tourism revenue.
- Support the local community in participating in tourism activities to enrich tourism resources and products through specific activities, such as providing preferential loans to develop traditional handicrafts serving tourism.
- Educate and raise awareness among residents about the value of customs, traditions, festivals, and the significance of community-based tourism for their livelihoods. Through this, enhance their awareness and responsibility towards cultural and natural tourism resources in their locality.
- Develop detailed plans for community-based tourism development, ensuring the respect, preservation, and promotion of local cultural values while aligning with the development needs of the locality.

5. Conclusion

Community-based tourism in Can Tho City has great potential due to its advantageous geographical location, unique riverine landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and the active participation of the local community. Through SWOT analysis, it is evident that community-based tourism in Can Tho faces many development opportunities but also significant challenges related to infrastructure, tourism management, and competition from other destinations.

To develop community-based tourism sustainably, it is essential to focus on key solutions such as diversifying tourism products, upgrading infrastructure, applying digital technology, training human resources, and building a distinctive tourism brand. Additionally, the cooperation between the government, businesses, and local residents plays a crucial role in improving the quality of community-based tourism, contributing to the socio-economic development of the locality.

The implementation of the solutions proposed in this study will not only enhance the attractiveness of community-based tourism in Can Tho but also aim for a sustainable development model that preserves local cultural values and improves the livelihoods of the local community. However, this study only focuses on SWOT analysis and proposes solutions for community-based tourism development in Can Tho. For more effective

research, it is necessary to collect opinions from researchers, tourism managers, businesses, residents, and tourists participating in community-based tourism.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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