



Buddhist Heritage and Tourism Symposium

BUDDHIST TOURISM IN VIETNAM
- *ISSUES OF COMMODIFICATION AND COMMODITIZATION*

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1. Introduction

Spiritual tourism is recognized as one of *the fastest-recovering forms of tourism*, especially after the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic (Olsen and Timothy, 2022).

- ❖ Increasing tourists' motivation and demand for '**healing, quest, experiment, retreat, and collective**' (Norman, 2012; Nguyen Tien Sy, 2023), for self-understanding, authentic selves, and enhancing their psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being
- ❖ Improving accessibilities to sacred places (Pagoda, temples and shrines, sanctuaries, tombs, darkness sites...)
- ❖ Other pull-factors: marketing and promotion (destination and tour operators)

What exactly are we “sustaining” and “developing” within the spiritual tourism market niche? (UNWTO, 2015)

2. An overview of Buddhist heritage in Vietnam

✓ History

- Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam directly from India in the early AD period (Nguyen Lanh, 1992).
- According to the Encyclopedia of Dai Viet history, during this time Vietnam was under Northern-dominated period, the culture (also Buddhism in particular) had been influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, (Le Manh That, 1999).
- Buddhism in Vietnam has two major sects: Theravada Buddhism or Southern Buddhism (*the Hinayana sect*) and Northern Buddhism (*the Mahayana sect*). Each of these sects is divided into many different sects and schools.
 - ❖ Each sect has a philosophy of doctrine, concept, culture, and practices
 - ❖ Buddhism in Vietnam has one thing in common, that is based on the morality of compassion and filial piety, leading people in the direction of good
 - ❖ Buddhist teachings also direct people in relationship with people and with nature in a harmonious and peaceful way, without harming the surrounding nature and sentient beings.

2. An overview of Buddhist heritage in Vietnam

✓ Buddhist heritages – Living culture

- Buddhism in Vietnam embeds huge and invaluable heritages, going along with the process of building and defending the country of the Vietnamese people through thousands of years of history.
- Buddhism in Vietnam has the large number of believers: accounting for more than 90 per cent of the population practicing one form or another of this religion (Nguyen Van Tuan, 2015).
- Influences on the conception, culture and way of life of Vietnamese people at all social strata
- Boundless vitality, surpassing the barriers of geography, culture, religion, time, space,...(Thich Nguyen Tang, 2012).

2. An overview of Buddhist heritage in Vietnam

- *Tangible Buddhist heritages*

- According to the data of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, in 2007 there were 14,755 pagodas in the whole country and this increased to 18,491 pagodas and temples in 2020.
- Many ancient temples/pagodas dated back centuries and are home to various valuable artefacts that are well-preserved to date, e.g. **Hung Temple (Phu Tho province), Yen Tu, Ba Vang (Quang Ninh), Huong Pagoda (Ha Noi), Ba Den Mountain (Tay Ninh), Bai Dinh Pagoda (Ninh), Ba Chua Xu Temple (An Giang), etc.**
- Extended landscapes of Buddhism heritage in Vietnam: Hundreds of Buddhist-related monuments that draw the increasing interest of tourists such as sanctuaries, towers, steles, tombs, darkness sites...

2. An overview of Buddhist heritage in Vietnam

Intangible Buddhist heritages

- The cultural space of Buddhism in Vietnam combines cognition and emotion, giving people a sense of happiness, full of humanity and holiness
- The Buddhist heritage is always associated with the Vietnamese people's daily life, with culture, literature and arts, and harmonious relationship of "heaven-earth-people".
- Buddhist festivals are venues that integrate rich and diverse intangible cultural values and exchanges linked to spirituality and religions, e.g. Vesak, Hung Kings' Temple Festival (in Phu Tho), Vu Lan Festival (a dedication to mothers), Te Ca Ong Festival in many coastal provinces (Sacrifice to the Whale, considered the God of the South Ocean), etc.

Buddhist heritages and tourism in Vietnam





Phổ Quang pagoda, Australia



Plum village, France











In Texas, USA

The Buddhist heritage is always associated with the Vietnamese people's daily life,

HOME THERAVĀDA THƯ VIỆN PHÁP HÀNH SỬ LIỆU THÔNG TIN PHẬT GIÁO CĂN BẢN TỪ ĐIỂN

online, các khóa học Pháp bào, học Kinh điển, học tụng Kinh Pāli, khóa học ngữ pháp Pāli, các sự kiện Pháp hội, từ điển Pāli, ứng dụng Mobile, kho thông tin tiểu sử, chùa, trung tâm thiền, liên kết hữu ích, kho ảnh Phật, ảnh Chùa, ảnh Chư Tăng, cập nhật nhiều tin tức thiện Pháp mới...

 15.000 VIDEOS ++	 19.000 AUDIOS ++	 3.000 EBOOKS ++	 30.000 ẢNH ++
 18 NGÔN NGỮ ++	 722.806 NGƯỜI THEO DÕI ++	 504.466 TỪ PALI ++	 10.000 LƯỢT TẢI ++

May the Merit and virtue, accrued from this work, adorn the Buddhas pureland,
Repay the four great kindnesses above, and relieve the suffering of those on the three paths below,
may those who see or hear of these efforts generates Bodhi Mind, spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Quang Duc Buddhist Welfare Association of Victoria

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KHÁCH VIẾNG THĂM

110,220,567

....No matter where and when, visitors and pilgrims in particular come to Buddhism anywhere, find their place in harmony in the Buddhist world (Thich Nguyen Tang, 2012).





Phuc Khanh Pagodas - Hanoi, on full moon day



Huong Pagodas – Hanoi, during Tet



**Ba Den mountain
Tay Ninh**

3. Buddhist tourism in Vietnam – mass vs. niche tourism

Buddhist tourism products – a marketing perspective

- ✓ What kind of products?
- ✓ Scale?
- ✓ Impacts and concerns of sustainable development
- ✓ Branding?

3. Buddhist tourism in Vietnam – mass vs. niche tourism

Buddhist tourism products – a marketing perspective

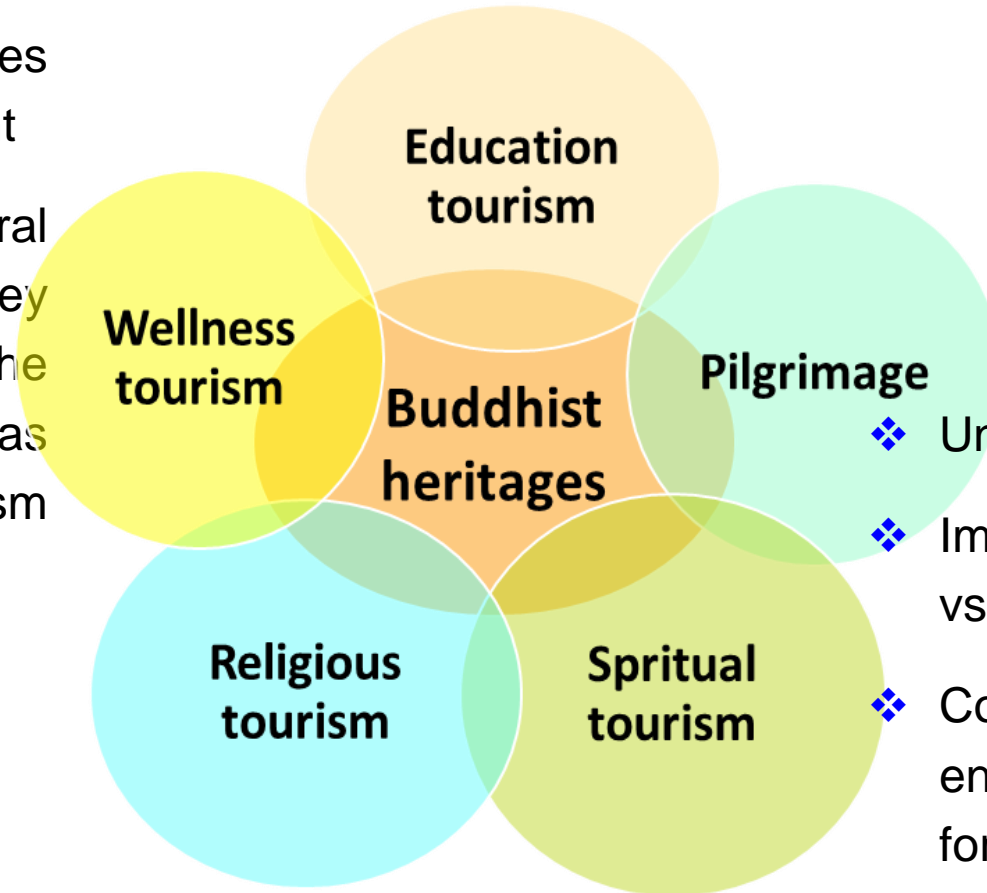
Product level	Nature of market	Key attributes	Activities
Core products			
<i>Spiritual and religious (esp. Buddhist festivals/events)</i>	Mass/niche	High seasonality Ritual may be more important than religious beliefs	Worshipping ancestors, forefathers, parents, relatives, showing gratitude to national heroes, predecessors, human deities... - Participating in Buddhism festivals
<i>Sightseeing cultural tourists</i>	Mass	Commercialized	Sightseeing, cultural and recreational pursuits
<i>Pilgrimage</i>	Niche	Religious value and identity	- Religious and faith-based activities
<i>Retreats, quest and experiment</i>	Niche	Spiritual and personal wellness	- spiritual, yoga, health, mindfulness: temple stays - sacred and mysterious elements, foods, and personal wellness
<i>Education</i>	Niche	Commercialized	- Learning Buddhism history and effects on personal wellness - Practicing Zen, yoga...
Supplementing and facilitating products	Mass	Commercialized	Event logistics Selling/renting means and ritual items; selling foods & drinks, souvenirs, religious items; performance of music, dance, story-telling, guidance services...
Augmenting products	Mass	Commercialized	Transportation services, pick up passengers according to the itinerary, on-site transportations (trams, cable cars, boats, canoes...)

4. Issues of commodification and commoditization

	Issues	Management and policy implications
Buddhist tourism product development (Commodification)	- Weak product development, solely profit-driven, less visitors' satisfying experiences	- improving core products: understanding market demand and segmentations (mass vs. niches) - ensuring visitors' experiences - human resource training (including language training)
	- Accessibility	- Improving infrastructure - Partnerships and obligations of stakeholders: religious organizations and their dignitaries, devotees, travel companies, local government and community
	- Low economic impacts	Improving involvement of local community
	- Destination marketing	USP and branding, integrated marketing
Commoditization (commercialization)	- Over-commodified spiritual values and Buddhist heritage, practicing superstition in some temples, trading in inappropriate goods. - Crowding and pollution - Harmful impacts on Buddhist heritages and surrounding natural landscapes	- Institutional & regulatory mechanisms for responsible Buddhist tourism development - Due attention on management of sacred sites - ICT for more efficient and effective management: all available forms of communication, esp. smart techs

4. Conclusion

- ✓ Many potentials and opportunities for buddhist tourism development
- ✓ Buddhist heritage, and cultural heritage in general as one of key elements **shaping** the **uniqueness of** destination (as indicated in Vietnam's tourism development strategy to 2030).



- ❖ Under-developed Buddhist tourism
- ❖ Impacts of Buddhist tourism: 'in-situ' vs. local, national destination
- ❖ Concerns of social, economic and environmental problems – the need for more responsible practices
- ❖ Need for more integrated planning for more sustainable Buddhist tourism development



Thank you very much for your listening!
Questions and comments are welcomed!

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