



Responsible tourism at SMEs in Vietnam- Opportunities and Challenges joining ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

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Astract

In recent years, tourism and particularly responsible tourism is the concern of many countries in the process of international economic integration. Responsible tourism is a key for the implementation of policies for sustainable tourism development in each country and help the country develop its tourism industry not only meet current needs, but do not affect the ability to meet the needs of future generations. The contents of this article go on to present the basis issues related to the analysis of the opportunities and challenges of responsible tourism at SMEs in Vietnam to join the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

Keywords: tourism, responsible tourism, SMEs, AEC

Overview responsible tourism

The term “responsible tourism” began to appear in 2002 and disseminated through publication of a number of studies as DEAT (2002), Spencey (2002). In particular, according to Cape Town’s declaring (South Africa) in 2002, *Responsible tourism* is understood as the way which approach to tourism management, in order to maximize economic benefit, society, environment and cost minimization to destinations. This way have been built on the foundation of sustainable tourism principles, using resources in a sustainable way, to respect, preserve and promote the authenticity in society cultural, to ensure the long-term economic benefits and feasibility for the participation components, ensure fairness in resources allocation related them.

Many researches of (Goodwin (2002), Spenceley et al (2002, 2004, 2012), Dimitrios Diamantis (2004) agreed that Responsible tourism has been not only minimizing the negative impact on the economy, environment and society; but also creating greater economic benefits and improve the welfare for local people, improving working conditions and engaging in tourism activities, encourage local people to take part in decisions that affect their lives; positive contribution to preserve the natural heritage and culture in order to maintain a diversified world; providing enjoyable experiences for tourists through linkages between tourists and local people, creating knowledge of cultural issues, social and environment local; furthermore providing opportunities for defect people and disadvantaged; respecting local culture, encouraging mutual respect between tourists and locals; building trust, nation pride for the community.

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The principle of developing responsible tourism in each country has been the tourism development satisfy current needs without compromising the ability of the next generation on 3 primary key (VNAT, 2013) :

- For the environment : responsible tourism has to use environmental resources optimally, maintain and conserve necessary ecosystems, preserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- For society : Responsible tourism have to respect and protect of authenticity society cultural and heritage, beside traditional values, contribute to increased the knowledge and respect for other cultures.
- For the economy : Responsible Tourism has to perform securing practical and long-term economic interests for all, ensuring the allocation of economic benefits evenly including social services, contribute to reducing poverty.

The problems described above, indicating that responsible tourism has been a necessary approach in the process of international economic integration of every business, every country, every sector general including Vietnam and other countries in the ASEAN community. Because of the development process, any other country would also towards sustainable development including tourism's.

Actual state of responsible tourism in the reside temporarily and travel tourist in small and medium enterprises in Vietnam.

According to statistics from The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC), The Sports and Tourism Ministry so that the Vietnam tourism has increased the position and prestige in the region and the world in recent years. Specifically, from 1995 to 2013, the Vietnam travel & tourism accounting for 8.2% Market penetration in the ASEAN region, 2.4% Market penetration in the Asia-Pacific and 0.68% Market penetration in global tourism (The World Travel & Tourism Council, 2014).

In Vietnam, Travel & Tourism is one of the careers has contributed greatly to the economic and social development. Figures in 2014 year, The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was VND182,066.0bn (4.6% of total GDP) in 2014, and is forecast to rise by 7.9% in 2015, and to rise by 6.6% pa, from 2015-2025, to VND370,902.0bn (4.8% of total GDP) in 2025. The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was VND367,238.0bn (9.3% of GDP) in 2014, and is forecast to rise by 8.0% in 2015, and to rise by 6.2% pa to VND721,805.0bn (9.4% of GDP) in 2025. In 2014 Travel & Tourism directly supported 1,963,500 jobs (3.7% of total employment). This is expected to rise by 3.6% in 2015 and rise by 1.8% pa to 2,433,000 jobs (4.0% of total employment) in 2025. In 2014, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 7.7% of total employment (4,088,500 jobs). This is expected to rise by 3.6% in 2015 to 4,236,000 jobs and rise by 1.3% pa to 4,842,000 jobs in 2025 (7.9% of total). (The World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015).

Travel & Tourism investment in 2014 was VND 96,452.7bn, or 10.0% of total investment. It should rise by 7.1% in 2015, and rise by 6.2% pa over the next ten years to VND 188,653.0bn in 2025 (9.0% of total). (The World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015).

Currently, Vietnam has about 46 national tourist area, 41 national tourist destination, 12 tourist cities and zone system, the other important local tourist. Not mention to the related workforce and unofficial labor, percentage of workers trained tourism



professionals and on-site training, professional training accounted for 40% in total over 1.9 million officially employed workforce (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2014).

From some general figures above to review that SMEs have great importance in the process of contributing to the tourism sector development in particular and Vietnam economic in general. Especially in recent years, the current situation of responsible tourism in travel businesses, tour operators in Vietnam in general and SMEs in particular are summed by some positive aspects as follows:

- The First, awareness about responsible tourism and its importance at the SMEs development in Vietnam were attended and changed by the managers-oriented the more increased, the more positive through active propagation, organization of conferences, seminars, professional training courses on the issue of responsible tourism. Because they know that the tourists 's knowledge and desire always directed using the tourism product enterprise which have business ethics policy good, employee salaries worthy, respected local cultural and not harmful to the environment. Especially from 2011 until now, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism has been funded by the European Union, Project implementation "*Capacity Development Program responsible tourism with the environment and society*" this project have been done with a common goal: *bringing the responsible tourism principles in Vietnam to tourism industry in order to increase competitiveness and contribute to the country's society economic development plan*, follow specific objectives: promote provision responsible tourism service for the environment and society, contributing to the Vietnam tourism Development Strategic. Thus, in comparison with the previous period, responsible tourism is no longer as a concept unknown toward the reside temporarily tourists businesses, tour operators at SMEs in Vietnam.
- The Second, in recent year, tourism business SMEs in Vietnam has focused on the deployment about its tourism products oriented with environmental, social, economic responsibility, and considered as a new business policies to help enterprises highly the reputation and credibility, increase competitive opportunities compared with competitors in the sector; create support from population communities where the enterprise has headquartered and implemented tourism products. Many companies such as travel companies have implemented ecological tourism products, traditional craft village tourism, MICE ... in the tourism product that provides market DN associated with specific responsibilities can, guide and encourage customers to use their products meet the standards and criteria set responsibilities that businesses built according to international standards and regional. Currently in Vietnam, the Vietnam Tourism Administration has carried out green Lotus labeling for accommodation establishments have achieved environmental protection and sustainable development standards. SMEs that have been granted " Green Lotus Label" which means businesses have made efforts to protect the environment, efficient use of natural resources, energy, contributing to the protection of heritage, economic development, local social-cultural, economic development and sustainable tourism development.

This brand has 5 levels, from the lowest level 1 to the highest level as 5 green Lotus. Green Lotus number recognizes level of accommodation establishments 's effort in environmental protection and sustainable development, regardless the category and type of establishments that have been recognized. For example, 2 star hotel



standard entirely possible 4 green Lotus if it get scores required for 4 Green Lotus Level. By 7/2015 has 33 hotels labeled this green Lotus (Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism, 2015).

Besides achieving positive aspects mentioned above, responsible tourism issues at the SMEs in Vietnam still exist some limitations as follows:

- The First, the responsible tourism problem at SMEs by particular manage with the form of owned mainly private enterprises, limited liability enterprises owners depend on a lot perception, executive management style at the unit. The fact that despite the propaganda, popularization and publicity of criteria, set standards for responsible tourism of the agencies and departments have been made in recent years but the application of a specific in the reconstruction of the business strategy, vision, mission have been still very slow, mostly based on a voluntary from the business itself. Condition many enterprises take profit target up top but ready to sacrifice the commitment to accountability for the tourists, for the environment, society and economy.
- The Second, the majority SMEs in Vietnam are enterprises with limited financial capacity, management team lacks, personnel training and professional retraining have not so much so that understanding of the work of implementing responsible tourism in each product, the business strategy of their enterprises is still limited.
- The Third, in Vietnam specialized and responsible agencies on the issue of monitoring and evaluation criteria and standards for responsible tourism in the enterprises in general and SMEs in particular have not been professional organization; citations and fines issue for companies performing well and not well in the commitments towards environmental responsibility, social, economic, unclear, publicity and transparency.

So, from the above analysis can find the status of responsible tourism issues of SMEs in Vietnam, although there were many positive aspects achieved there are still many limitations and shortcomings. In the context of integration with the international economy in general and the accession to the ASEAN economic community in particular in 2015, SMEs in Vietnam must know to take full advantage the follow opportunities and mitigate the fundamental challenges:

Some of the responsible tourism issues's opportunities and challenges fundamental in Vietnam SMEs joining AEC 2015

Opportunities

1. Responsible Tourism always gets the attention of government leaders of countries in the ASEAN region by sectors sustainable development goals in general and tourism in particular, is always consistent policy that countries pursue. Currently, there are documents and Mutual Recognition Arrangement – Tourism Professionals signed in Bali, Indonesia in 2012 (MRA-TP) particularly emphasized that: The ASEAN Common Competency Standards Tourism Professional (ACCSTP); The Common ASEAN Tourism program (CATC); The Common Basis capacity Assessment (CBA); mutual support mechanisms MRA on tourism between the countries; Thus businesses in general and SMEs in particular, not only in Vietnam but also in other countries in the ASEAN Economic Community activities in the field of tourism have the opportunity to share



common standards of responsible professional to toward the mutual recognition of professional certificates in the sector. Currently, ASEAN tourism profession there are 06 sets of standards in responsible professional about reception, rooms, kitchen, catering services, travel agents and tour operators with 32 profession office.

2. Joining AEC leads to opportunities strengthen the labor movement in the tourism sector between the ASEAN countries, balancing supply and demand for tourism profession. This means that the workers of Vietnam can work in the ASEAN countries and vice versa, ASEAN workers also can work in Vietnam. This not only creates the opportunity for SMEs attract highly qualified manpower to work for their businesses. This is synonymic a chance for the managers at enterprises improve management skills, learn experience from large-scale enterprises, multinational corporations to finalize the management and administration at enterprises, especially its ensuring objective.
3. Joining AEC in 2015 also has created opportunities for enterprises in general and Vietnam SMEs in the tourism sector in particular have the opportunity to reassess the whole capacity especially material foundations, workforce, customer marketing, business strategy and their products. On that basis restructuring based on orienting responsible tourism in which rebuilding the responsible tourism product, constructing responsible Marketing and Communication policies, using responsible employers, building responsible supply chain, responsible community action... are key issue.
4. Joining AEC bring opportunities to approach diversity of cultural identities, consuetude... habits of the countries in the ASEAN region for Vietnam SMEs in the tourism sector. Thereby help SMEs research, suggest new tourism services products to satisfy diversified demand of customers from multiple areas, difference territories in the world.

Challenging

1. Responsible Tourism needs many components's attention and participation, not just SMEs business in the tourism sector. Especially the people's consciousness where have tourism products, tourists and all levels of management. So that's the how to raise awareness about responsible tourism for all components involved including residential communities where tourism products, visitors enjoy tourism products, the State management agencies and tourism profession in Vietnam is basic challenge. In addition, training to raise awareness on the responsible tourism issue besides fostering to raise professional qualification of staff within SMEs is also a big challenge in SMEs units situation always have the financial capacity not abundant and management skills are not really professional.
2. In the process of integration into AEC, Vietnam in particular and ASEAN countries in general, sustainable growth issue are always conflicting with the speed urbanization, economic restructuring movement inappropriate, devastating environmental natural resources, destroying of ecological landscapes.
3. There are fundamental differences in political regime among The Countries in AEC so resonant with the complicated changes in recent times as the East Sea

situation, relations between ASEAN and the major powers as China, USA, Russia ... always brings potential challenge is the risk of instability on the political situation in the region, affecting policies, consistent agreement on responsible tourism between the countries. From which take affects and obstacles the process provide tourist products of the enterprises in general and SMEs in particular.

4. Engaging in the AEC brings great challenges for SMEs in particular, as well as large-scale enterprises in any profession does not just tourism that is: if workers in domestic businesses do not improve professional qualification, practice skills they will lose on the home market, with result in more people lost their jobs. On the other hand, ASEAN tourism businesses will have more opportunities to attract highly skillful workers from Vietnam. This also means that if SME domestic tourism is not renewed, not development to retain highly skillful labor, it is very easy to happen the "brain drain". Once the labor force not guarantee it is impossible to mention the maintenance and development of a team of responsible officers and employees .This is also the opinion of many authors agree through previous studies and recently as Mac(2015)

Conclusions and Recommendations

So, from the above analysis can be seen that joining AEC, SMEs in the tourism sector besides have a lot of opportunities, also facing many challenges on the issue of implementing tourism responsibility. In order to take advantage of opportunities and minimize challenges, require implementation and synchronous coordination multiple solutions in each country, not just ourselves on tourism SMEs. Specifically:

- **For SMEs provide responsible tourism products:** Need to build business strategies and policies to attract trained human resources fit principle of responsible; Research proposed responsible tourism products, comply with the responsible tourism development principles; have environmental protection policies in business, sustainable development; participation in activities highly accountable in the community, local ...
- **For the State management agencies and local:** Need to build policies and perspectives of responsible tourism development clear; strengthen the propaganda, raise the level of awareness of SMEs, residential communities where tourism products, tourists; establishment of rating agencies and supervision of compliance with the principles and commitments of national responsible, ASEAN.
- **For the local communities where tourism product:** Needing to have to protect environment and natural resources current policies; building and ensuring rational economic structure, stable culture and political; respectful and friendly behavior, supports guests...
- **For visitors:** There should be a sense environmental protection, local culture, search and comply, respect the characteristics and consuetude of local tourism; select responsible business; full implementation of the guidelines and principles committed when using responsible tourism products.



Joining the ASEAN Economic Community brings the Vietnam tourism sector in general, including in particular SMEs more difficult, challenging but no less opportunities, development potential. Responsible Tourism have created trend solid foundation for the sustainable development of Vietnam tourism in the future, to help Vietnam's tourism enhancing the position, trademark, on par with tourism sector of other countries in ASEAN and the countries in the world.

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