

A Study on the Status of Ecotourism Development in the Binh-Tri-Thien Region, Vietnam

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

The main goal of this thesis was to evaluate the potential for ecotourism development in the Binh-Tri-Thien (BTT) region by assessing its current conditions, identifying key influencing factors, and proposing sustainable development strategies.

Objectives

To achieve above goal, the study sets out the following specific objectives, including:

- 1) To diagnose and assess the current state of ecotourism development in the BTT region by analyzing both direct and indirect factors influencing its potential.
- 2) To identify and evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis of the region's ecotourism development.
- 3) To propose strategies and solutions for the sustainable development of ecotourism in the BTT region based on the principles of balancing economic benefits, conserving natural resources, and ensuring community involvement.

Methodology

The research employed a triangulation-based methodology combining theoretical, secondary, and primary data approaches. The theoretical foundation for ecotourism was developed through content and bibliometric analysis using reputable databases including Web of Science, Scopus, and tools such as Mendeley and VOSviewer (Le *et al.*, 2023). Secondary data from books, journals, online sources, and official records – particularly from the BTT region – were organized in Excel and analyzed through descriptive, content, and comparative techniques to provide an overview of Vietnam's tourism context. Primary data were gathered through three field surveys (2022–2024), complemented by observations and semi-structured interviews, and analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS, with the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) applied to assess tourist satisfaction (Le *et al.*, 2025b). Qualitative data were thematically analyzed to capture local insights (Le *et al.*, 2025a). The findings were integrated into SWOT/TOWS analyses to evaluate internal and external factors and propose development strategies for ecotourism in the BTT region. Additionally, Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis supported spatial assessment and mapping, identifying areas with ecotourism potential based on geographic and environmental indicators.

Results

The dissertation results demonstrate that the research objectives were successfully accomplished and that they collectively contributed to achieving the overall research goal. Firstly, the assessment of the current state of ecotourism development in the BTT region indicated that, although the region possesses considerable natural and cultural resources and a relatively stable socio-political context, ecotourism development remains constrained by infrastructural deficiencies, management limitations, and uneven levels of community participation. Second, the SWOT analysis further provided a structured and comprehensive evaluation of internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats, emphasizing the influence of climate change, competition among destinations, and global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on these empirical findings, the study formulated a set of realistic and context-specific strategies aimed at promoting sustainable ecotourism development through a balanced integration of economic efficiency, environmental conservation, and social inclusion. Overall, the findings confirm the significant ecotourism potential of the BTT region while clearly identifying the key conditions required for its sustainable and effective development.

Theoretical conclusions

The dissertation contributes to ecotourism theory by systematizing key concepts of sustainable development, sustainable tourism, and ecotourism through content and bibliometric analysis, thereby clarifying their relationships and core components. It advances methodological theory by applying a triangulation approach that integrates quantitative, qualitative, and GIS-based spatial analyses, offering a comprehensive and replicable framework for assessing ecotourism potential. The study also provides empirical evidence on how natural resources, socio-cultural factors, governance, and stakeholder perceptions interact to shape ecotourism development, thus strengthening theoretical understanding of the determinants of sustainable ecotourism.

Practical Applications of the Dissertation

The research delivers practical tools and insights to support ecotourism planning and management in the BTT region. Its assessment of current conditions and SWOT/TOWS analysis guides policymakers and managers in identifying priorities, challenges, and strategic directions. GIS-based spatial mapping helps authorities and investors locate areas with high ecotourism potential. The PLS-SEM findings on visitor satisfaction provide actionable guidance for improving service quality and destination competitiveness. Finally, the proposed strategies – grounded in real regional conditions – offer feasible pathways for sustainable development, enhancing community participation, resource conservation, and long-term management effectiveness.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of Chapter 1

Chapter 1 lays the philosophical, conceptual, and methodological foundation for the entire dissertation. It explains the ontological assumptions about the nature of ecotourism phenomena and the epistemological stance that guides the researcher's approach to knowledge generation. By adopting a pragmatist orientation supported by triangulation, the chapter justifies the integration of quantitative, qualitative, and spatial analytical methods (Butowski, 2024). It clearly formulates the research problem, main hypothesis, working hypotheses, and detailed research questions, establishing the logical pathway of the study. The chapter also specifies the geographical scope and identifies practical limitations such as climatic constraints, accessibility challenges, and restrictions in data availability. Furthermore, Chapter 1 describes the research design, sampling framework, data collection procedures, reliability – validity measures, and ethical considerations.

Abstract of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 develops the theoretical framework for the dissertation by synthesizing key concepts of sustainable development, sustainable tourism, and ecotourism. Through systematic content analysis, it clarifies definitions, core principles, and thematic components – such as conservation, environmental education, socio-economic equity, and community involvement – that underpin ecotourism models worldwide (Fennell, 2020; Honey, 2008; Bramwell & Lane, 1993). The bibliometric analysis maps global research trends, identifies influential authors and institutions, and reveals conceptual clusters that have shaped ecotourism scholarship over the past two decades. The chapter highlights a notable increase in research focusing on biodiversity conservation, community-based ecotourism, and climate-change adaptation.

Abstract of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provides a historical and analytical overview of the development of Vietnam's tourism sector – from its early formation, through the renovation period, to its emergence as a key economic sector.

The chapter divides tourism development into six historical stages, each characterized by distinct economic, political, and social transformations. It analyzes how tourism policies, technological adoption, and market integration have contributed to Vietnam's rapid tourism expansion.

In addition to the historical perspective, the chapter examines the internal and external factors shaping national tourism development, using both primary sources and statistical datasets. Internal factors include biodiversity, cultural richness, environmental management practices, infrastructure readiness, and workforce capacity. External influences include competition within ASEAN, the impacts of climate change, natural disasters, regional geopolitical dynamics, and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter concludes by identifying major opportunities and challenges that influence Vietnam's future trajectory in sustainable tourism development.

Abstract of Chapter 4

The chapter focuses on the BTT region and presents a detailed assessment of factors influencing its tourism development. The chapter analyzes geo-spatial characteristics, levels of accessibility, demographic distribution, and the socio-economic structure of the three provinces. It highlights the region's comparative advantages, including internationally recognized natural heritage sites, dense river systems, mountain landscapes, coastal zones, and a wealth of intangible cultural heritage.

The chapter discusses how the region's climate – characterized by long rainy seasons, storms, and floods – creates constraints for tourism operations. Environmental degradation, erosion, and pollution are also evaluated as emerging challenges. Statistical data on arrivals, revenues, accommodation capacity, workforce indicators, and tourism investment levels are presented to illustrate overall trends (Lipscombe & Thwaites, 2003). These quantitative findings are supported by qualitative commentary from local experts, revealing disparities between provinces and identifying structural weaknesses that hinder tourism diversification and ecotourism expansion.

Abstract of Chapter 5

The chapter examines the organizational, legal, and business structures governing ecotourism activities within the BTT region. The chapter provides a detailed analysis of relevant laws, regulations, and administrative procedures that influence ecotourism licensing, land-use planning, conservation management, and community participation. It identifies inconsistencies across legal documents and evaluates how these complexities impact private-sector investment and operational efficiency.

The chapter also categorizes existing ecotourism business models – including entrance-fee collection, concession-based operations, forest land-lease systems, community-managed ecotourism, and public-private partnerships. It demonstrates how community-led ecotourism offers notable advantages in terms of cultural preservation and equitable benefit-sharing but requires capacity-building and stronger institutional support.

Additionally, the chapter includes statistical analyses from national parks and community-based ecotourism sites, assessing visitor flows, revenue patterns, marketing strategies, and conservation outcomes. The findings reveal strong concentration in several flagship destinations but limited diversification across the region.

Abstract of Chapter 6

Chapter 6 presents the GIS-based spatial analysis that evaluates ecotourism suitability in the BTT region. Using multiple environmental and geographical indicators – such as elevation, slope, vegetation,

hydrology, proximity to protected areas, accessibility to transport networks, and distance to cultural sites – the chapter constructs suitability maps that classify areas into four categories: highly suitable, suitable, moderately suitable, and marginal.

Based on these spatial findings, four representative case-study sites – Phong Nha–Ke Bang, Bach Ma National Park, A Nor Waterfall, and Ngu My Thanh Village – were selected for in-depth field research. The chapter details the three-phase fieldwork structure: pilot testing and refinement of survey instruments; large-scale survey implementation to validate hypotheses; and qualitative inquiry through interviews and community consultations. The chapter provides methodological justification for sampling, data triangulation, and the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence, ensuring that the research model meets scientific rigor.

Abstract of Chapter 7

The chapter presents the empirical results from the field surveys and qualitative interviews. Quantitative findings describe tourist demographics, behavior patterns, motivations, and satisfaction indicators across the selected sites. The PLS-SEM analysis validates the relationships among destination attributes, service quality, perceived value, and overall satisfaction, identifying the factors that most strongly influence visitor experiences in ecotourism settings.

The qualitative results offer deeper insights into ecotourism management, community engagement, environmental challenges, and operational constraints. Interviews with destination managers reveal concerns regarding data monitoring systems, workforce limitations, and the need for improved interpretation services. Community interviews highlight both positive impacts (income diversification, cultural revitalization) and challenges (seasonality, uneven benefit-sharing). These findings allow the dissertation to integrate human perspectives into the ecological and economic assessment of ecotourism potential.

Abstract of Chapter 8

The chapter develops a comprehensive set of ecotourism development strategies using the SWOT/TOWS analytical framework. Internal strengths and weaknesses are systematically paired with external opportunities and threats to derive four types of strategies: aggressive, conservative, competitive, and defensive. The chapter further synthesizes these strategies into four strategic pathways designed specifically for the BTT region:

- 1) Sustainable ecotourism linked to resource conservation, ensuring that development aligns with ecological carrying capacity.
- 2) Digital transformation and AI-supported ecotourism, enhancing marketing, management, and visitor interpretation.
- 3) Diversification of ecotourism products grounded in local culture, enabling more equitable distribution of tourism benefits.
- 4) Regional connectivity and international collaboration, strengthening the region's competitiveness within the global nature-based tourism market.

These pathways are supported with practical recommendations, policy implications, and proposed pilot initiatives.

Abstract of Chapter 9

Chapter 9 synthesizes the major findings, demonstrating how the research goals, objectives, and hypotheses were achieved. It reflects on the coherence of the methodological approach and reiterates the scientific and practical significance of the dissertation. The chapter then examines research limitations related to geographic scope, data availability, seasonal variability, methodological constraints, and the complexity of translating strategies into real-world policy. Finally, the chapter outlines future research directions, recommending broader spatial comparisons, longitudinal studies, advanced digital mapping tools, and deeper integration of climate-change modeling and emerging global tourism trends.

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