

GREEN TOURISM - THE KEY TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Green tourism is a form of tourism that has gained increasing attention in many countries recently, especially in developing nations like Vietnam. This type of tourism is considered to bring significant benefits to society, with a focus on sustainable development, minimizing environmental impact, positively contributing to biodiversity protection, using renewable energy, promoting natural and cultural heritage, developing eco-friendly products, and contributing to the overall socio-economic development of the country. Vietnam is a country with great potential for developing green tourism, thanks to its rich and diverse resources, beautiful landscapes, and historical sites, all of which are conducive to the development of this type of tourism to adapt to new trends post-COVID-19. Using methods of information collection, analysis, and theoretical selection, this paper focuses on researching and systematizing some basic theoretical issues regarding green tourism, providing experiences in building green tourism models, and drawing lessons for Vietnam.

Keywords: Green tourism, sustainable tourism, development experiences, Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Green tourism is increasingly becoming a strong global trend, capturing the attention of many tourists, travel businesses, and the wider community. This tourism model not only contributes to environmental protection but also reflects the shift of the tourism industry towards sustainability. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the mindset of travelers. According to the World Tourism Organization, global tourism trends are changing, gradually moving away from traditional tourism in enclosed spaces to new types of travel, such as green tourism. There is a growing preference for choosing nearby destinations, domestic travel experiences, and nature-based destinations with spacious, open, and fresh environments. Many people are inclined to return to simpler, peaceful values, seeking to escape the noise and chaos of urban life. They prioritize green tourism products, not only to enhance their travel experiences but also to contribute to environmental protection and embrace a lifestyle in harmony with nature [1]. In the post-COVID-19 era, the demand for less crowded destinations and the need to reconnect with open spaces and nature are increasing [2]. The number of tourists using the internet to arrange their trips has risen significantly, reducing their dependence on travel agencies (Tour Operators - TO).

In recent years, Vietnam's tourism sector has achieved positive results in terms of both visitor numbers and revenue from domestic and international markets. However, the rapid growth of tourism has placed significant pressure on landscapes and culture, especially in

destinations experiencing “hot” development. Given that the industry primarily relies on the exploitation of natural and cultural resources, if Vietnam’s tourism sector aims to become a leading economic industry, it must develop in a green, environmentally responsible, and socially conscious manner. In the post-COVID-19 era, there has been a noticeable increase in public awareness of the value of the living environment and the importance of sustainable development. According to a survey by the Green Destination organization, more than 60% of tourists are willing to pay more for green and responsible tourism experiences. This represents a significant opportunity for Vietnam to promote this type of tourism while meeting the growing demand of travelers in the new context. Over the past few years, the trend of developing green tourism has been implemented in several localities with promising results, including Da Nang, Quang Nam, Khanh Hoa, and Kon Tum. However, there are still challenges in the development of green tourism in Vietnam, which affect the sustainability of the tourism sector. Issues such as inefficient resource use, environmental protection measures (such as waste management, water conservation, and ensuring proper planning) have not been fully implemented. These limitations require a shift in perspectives and approaches to the development of green tourism in Vietnam. Developing green tourism requires addressing many aspects, including creating new, sustainable models. Therefore, examining the experiences of countries in the region and globally is essential. This article focuses on studying the experiences of various countries in building green tourism models and spreading effective practices, in order to draw lessons for Vietnam in the near future.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In recent decades, the tourism industry has witnessed extraordinary growth, becoming one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy [4]. With this development, the serious environmental issues caused by tourism have garnered significant public attention [5-7]. Growing concerns about sustainability in the tourism sector have led to the emergence of a new form of tourism, known as eco-tourism. This type of tourism promotes sustainability and the conservation of natural resources [7, 8]. Green tourism plays an essential role in protecting natural environments and preserving pristine areas. Although the concept of green tourism was introduced in the 1980s, it was not widely embraced at the time. As environmental issues and sustainable development have gained increasing global attention, green tourism has gradually become an important trend, closely associated with the awareness of nature conservation, reducing the negative impacts of tourism activities, and promoting a harmonious balance between economic, social, and environmental development. According to the International Tourism Association, green tourism refers to responsible travel to natural areas, focused on environmental conservation and maintaining the well-being of local communities. Eco-tourism often involves activities such as education, recreation, and adventure within natural environments [7].

Green tourism is a form of travel rooted in the principles of a green economy. It encompasses sustainable tourism activities that take into account the collective needs of ecosystems, the environment, local communities, businesses, and tourists. This approach allows for the establishment of management and development frameworks that cater to both current and future demands, with the primary goal of minimizing the negative environmental and social impacts of tourism [9]. Green tourism represents a vital component of sustainable tourism, emphasizing the conservation of natural areas, land, and wildlife [10, 11]. It can be argued that the development of green tourism is the key to promoting responsible tourism practices and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the industry. Green tourism not only serves as a crucial foundation for ensuring the sustainable development of the tourism industry, but it also provides an effective solution to attract high-spending tourists who are conscious

and respectful throughout their travel experiences [12]. According to the Vietnam Institute of Tourism Development Research (2020), green tourism is defined as a form of tourism based on the rational and efficient exploitation of resources, developed alongside environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, greenhouse gas reduction, and climate change adaptation. Doods and Joppe (2001) conceptualize green tourism as a multidimensional framework for sustainable tourism development, encompassing four interrelated pillars. Firstly, it underscores a profound commitment to environmental stewardship, emphasizing the protection, conservation, and enhancement of natural and physical ecosystems to ensure ecological integrity over the long term. Secondly, green tourism serves as a catalyst for the sustainable advancement of local economies by fostering the growth of community-based enterprises, supporting local entrepreneurship, and reinforcing indigenous economic systems, thereby promoting socioeconomic resilience and equity. Thirdly, it advocates for the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, highlighting the necessity of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and fostering intercultural respect. Finally, green tourism seeks to enhance the quality of the tourist experience by encouraging immersive engagement with natural landscapes, facilitating authentic interactions with local communities, and cultivating a deeper appreciation of the cultural distinctiveness of the host destination. Green tourism brings numerous significant benefits to communities and localities [13, 14], contributing to both sustainable development and environmental preservation.

One of the most significant advantages of green tourism is its role in environmental protection. Green tourism focuses on minimizing the negative impacts on natural resources such as land, water, forests, and wildlife, thereby safeguarding precious ecosystems. Moreover, green tourism also plays a key role in preserving local culture and heritage. It encourages respect for and the maintenance of the unique cultural values of each community, while also protecting tangible and intangible cultural heritage from the threat of extinction. Another important benefit is the generation of income and employment for local communities. Green tourism often involves the participation of local residents in various tourism-related activities, ranging from providing services and producing local handicrafts to working as tour guides or engaging in educational tourism programs. Furthermore, green tourism significantly stimulates local economic development by driving demand for domestic products and services, such as accommodation, dining, purchasing handmade crafts, and participating in experiential travel activities. Green tourism also plays a vital role in raising awareness and educating the public about environmental protection. Tourists participating in green tourism activities are provided with opportunities to engage directly with conservation projects, interact with local communities, and gain a deeper understanding of the significance of preserving natural resources and cultural heritage. This not only enhances awareness of sustainability but also encourages a shift in tourism behavior toward more positive and responsible practices. Moreover, green tourism offers unique and profound travel experiences. Visitors have the chance to immerse themselves in the wilderness and explore local cultures in a more intimate and authentic way, creating memorable and long-lasting experiences. These encounters not only enrich their understanding of nature and heritage but also foster a deeper connection with the places they visit.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To conduct this research, the authors employed a qualitative methodology, integrating three primary techniques: secondary data collection, content analysis, and case study analysis.

First, data were gathered from reliable secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic research papers, books, reports from international organizations, specialized journals, and official information from the websites of government bodies and

tourism organizations in the relevant countries. These sources were selected according to the following criteria: (1) direct relevance to green tourism and sustainable development, (2) academic credibility, and (3) the recency of the publications, focusing primarily on sources published within the last decade.

Second, content analysis was employed to systematically organize and synthesize the theoretical foundations and practical applications of green tourism globally. The collected materials were categorized into key themes such as green tourism management policies, operational models of tourism activities, the role of local communities, green tourism marketing strategies, and criteria for evaluating effectiveness. This process aimed to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework pertinent to the study's context.

Third, a case study approach was applied to conduct an in-depth analysis of green tourism development models in three Asian countries: Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia. These countries were selected based on two primary criteria: (1) their natural, social, and cultural similarities to Vietnam, and (2) their relative success in implementing green tourism models, as demonstrated by specific policies, socio-economic-environmental outcomes, and tourist satisfaction levels. Each case study was analyzed with a focus on the following factors: (1) the contextual background of green tourism development in each country, (2) the models and strategies implemented, (3) the roles played by government, businesses, and local communities, and (4) the outcomes achieved and the challenges encountered.

Based on a comparative analysis across these countries, the authors extracted key lessons for Vietnam, focusing on three main criteria: (1) the feasibility of adapting these models to the Vietnamese context, (2) the sustainability of these models in terms of environmental, economic, and social impacts, and (3) the adaptability and scalability of these models in regions of Vietnam with potential for green tourism development.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Global experience in developing green tourism models

In recent years, green tourism has evolved from a novel concept into a robust and widely embraced global trend. This movement is expanding rapidly across a broad spectrum of countries, from advanced economies to developing nations, attracting growing interest from tourists, tourism enterprises, and local communities alike. Green tourism is no longer merely the preference of nature enthusiasts; it has emerged as a symbol of sustainable and responsible living, reflecting a global shift in awareness regarding the imperative to protect the environment. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, green tourism has further solidified its position as a vital and promising trajectory for the recovery and future development of the tourism industry.

However, for Vietnam to effectively adopt and integrate this trend, it is essential to establish a clear and comprehensive comparative framework of prominent green tourism models as implemented in Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia. Such a comparison should focus on key dimensions, including: similarities and differences in strategic approaches; policy support and planning frameworks; levels of community involvement and benefit-sharing; environmental and economic impacts; as well as the specific strengths and limitations inherent to each model.

Singapore stands out for its eco-urban tourism model, which harmoniously integrates high-tech infrastructure with expansive green spaces in the heart of the city. Thailand, on the other hand, emphasizes eco-tourism rooted in indigenous culture and active rural community participation. Meanwhile, Indonesia capitalizes on its abundant pristine natural resources-

particularly marine reserves and tropical forests-as core attractions to draw international tourists.

A thorough analysis and comparison of these models not only elucidates the distinctive characteristics of green tourism in each national context, but also provides valuable and practical insights for Vietnam. These lessons can inform the formulation of a strategic framework for the development of green tourism tailored to Vietnam's specific natural conditions, socio-cultural context, and economic priorities, thereby contributing to a more sustainable and responsible national tourism sector.

4.1.1. Green tourism development in Singapore-key experiences and insights

Despite its relatively small land area of around 728 km², Singapore has made a significant global impact by developing a thriving tourism sector while adhering to sustainable development principles. The country has successfully attracted substantial investments in tourism infrastructure, including luxury resorts, modern hotels, state-of-the-art convention centers, and world-renowned attractions such as Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa. These iconic landmarks have not only bolstered the tourism industry but also become symbols of Singapore's economic and cultural prominence. In 2024, Singapore's tourism sector saw impressive growth, with international arrivals reaching 16.5 million, marking a 21% increase compared to the previous year, and tourism revenue rising to SGD 22.4 billion, representing a 10% increase from 2023. These outcomes reflect the country's ability to leverage tourism as a significant economic driver.

In parallel with this rapid growth, Singapore has placed a strong emphasis on green tourism, ensuring that its tourism development is aligned with environmental sustainability. The country has made significant strides in promoting eco-conscious tourism through initiatives such as the "Singapore Green Plan 2030," which focuses on energy, transportation, resource management, and sustainable tourism. The plan is structured around five strategic pillars: City in Nature, Sustainable Living, Renewable Energy, Green Economy, and Resilient Future, all of which are coordinated by multiple government agencies. As a result, Singapore has maintained its status as one of the world's greenest cities, with more than 40% of its land area covered in green spaces, despite being one of the most densely populated urban areas globally.

The country's achievements in green tourism are not solely attributable to its natural resources but rather to strategic urban planning and significant investments in green technologies. For instance, Singapore's "One Million Trees" movement aims to plant one million trees over the next decade to enhance urban green spaces, promoting green tourism while improving the overall urban environment. Projects like Gardens by the Bay, which integrate advanced technology with ecological design, further exemplify Singapore's commitment to incorporating green spaces into urban landscapes.

In comparison, Vietnam, with its abundant natural resources and diverse landscapes, has immense potential for green tourism. Major tourist destinations such as Ha Long Bay, Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, and the Mekong Delta provide ample opportunities for ecotourism and nature-based tourism. However, a significant challenge for Vietnam lies in balancing tourism development with environmental conservation. Unlike Singapore, where urban planning and green technologies have been prioritized, Vietnam has yet to fully capitalize on sustainable tourism infrastructure. While the government has made strides in implementing policies for environmental protection and green tourism, there remains a gap in the cohesive and coordinated implementation of sustainable tourism strategies across the country.

A key difference between the two nations lies in the integration of green practices into urban planning. Singapore has effectively incorporated green spaces into its urban areas, utilizing artificial green structures when necessary. In contrast, Vietnam's urban centers face challenges such as overcrowding, pollution, and insufficient green spaces. Furthermore, Vietnam's tourism sector often emphasizes mass tourism, which can lead to resource depletion and environmental degradation. In contrast, Singapore's commitment to sustainable growth ensures that the expansion of the tourism industry remains both eco-friendly and economically viable.

Both countries can draw valuable lessons from each other. Singapore's emphasis on urban green tourism, its innovative application of technology, and its commitment to sustainability provide a useful model for Vietnam. With its rich cultural and natural heritage, Vietnam has the potential to develop a distinctive green tourism model that prioritizes environmental preservation while leveraging its natural and cultural assets. By promoting responsible tourism practices and ensuring that local communities are engaged in decision-making processes, Vietnam can adopt a more holistic approach to sustainable tourism development.

While Singapore is a global leader in green tourism development, its approach is tailored to its urban context and limited natural resources. In contrast, Vietnam's rich biodiversity and diverse landscapes offer a unique opportunity to create a green tourism model that emphasizes environmental preservation while utilizing its natural and cultural resources. By adapting best practices from Singapore to its specific context, Vietnam can move toward a more sustainable and eco-friendly tourism future.

4.1.2. Experiences in developing green tourism in Thailand

Thailand has firmly established itself as a leading tourism hub in Southeast Asia, consistently ranking among the world's top ten countries for international tourist arrivals. According to the Thai Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, the nation welcomed over 35 million international visitors in 2024, surpassing the pre-pandemic benchmark of 31 million in 2019. Tourism revenue exceeded 1.8 trillion baht (approximately USD 52.81 billion), underscoring the sector's robust recovery and continued expansion. China remained the largest source market, contributing 6.7 million visitors, followed by Malaysia with 4.93 million. Emerging markets such as India, South Korea, and Russia also demonstrated significant growth.

Thailand's appeal lies in its remarkable ecological diversity, encompassing tropical rainforests, pristine beaches, and rich marine ecosystems. National parks such as Khao Yai, Erawan, and the Similan Islands serve not only as prime destinations for nature enthusiasts but also as vital conservation areas that protect endangered species and maintain ecological balance. In parallel, the country's rich cultural tapestry—particularly within ethnic minority communities in the northern provinces of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai—forms the backbone of its ecotourism and community-based tourism initiatives. Tourists are invited to engage in immersive activities such as mountain trekking, visits to elephant sanctuaries, and participation in traditional agricultural practices in villages like Mae Kampong, where environmental sustainability is seamlessly integrated with local cultural heritage.

Moreover, Thailand has successfully capitalized on its coastal and island resources to develop marine ecotourism in southern destinations like Koh Samui and Koh Tao. These islands are renowned not only for their natural beauty but also for active conservation initiatives, including coral reef restoration, ocean clean-up efforts, and environmental education. Complementing these initiatives, Thailand has cultivated a high-end sustainable tourism sector, exemplified by luxury eco-resorts such as Soneva Kiri and Six Senses Yao

Noi. These establishments combine premium hospitality with strong environmental ethics, utilizing renewable energy, implementing waste reduction systems, and fostering ecological awareness among visitors.

At the policy level, Thailand has adopted a comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy, which aims to strike a balance between economic growth and ecological preservation. Coastal communities like those in Krabi and highland villages in Chiang Mai have embraced green tourism practices, including the adoption of clean energy, sustainable waste management, and community-led conservation efforts. A cornerstone of this national vision is the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economic Model, rooted in King Rama IX's "Sufficiency Economy Philosophy" This model was introduced as a key post-pandemic recovery strategy, leveraging Thailand's rich biodiversity in conjunction with science, technology, and innovation to promote sustainable agriculture, healthcare, bioenergy, and green tourism.

In addition, Thailand has introduced several national programs to reinforce its sustainability agenda. The Green Tourism Certification encourages environmentally responsible practices in accommodations, restaurants, and other tourism services, focusing on water and energy conservation, waste reduction, and the use of eco-friendly materials. The Zero Waste Campaign promotes recycling, the reduction of single-use plastics, and sustainable consumer behavior, especially in popular tourist destinations. To further mitigate environmental impacts, the government enforces strict regulations within protected areas, including visitor caps and penalties for ecological violations.

Green transportation is another key focus area. Thailand actively promotes the use of electric vehicles, bicycles, and low-emission public transport in tourist zones, coupled with public awareness campaigns and training programs aimed at fostering environmentally responsible behavior among both residents and visitors.

Thailand's green tourism model represents a holistic and forward-looking strategy that harmonizes economic development, environmental protection, and cultural preservation. By integrating national policy frameworks with local-level implementation and private-sector participation, Thailand has constructed a multi-dimensional approach to sustainable tourism. This model serves as a valuable reference point for neighboring countries, particularly Vietnam, as they navigate the transition toward eco-conscious, inclusive, and resilient tourism systems tailored to their own unique ecological and cultural contexts.

Table 1. Comparison between Thailand and Vietnam’s green tourism models

Criteria	Thailand	Vietnam
Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both regions are endowed with abundant natural resources, including forests, coastal areas, and diverse ecosystems. - The region is characterized by its cultural diversity, shaped by the presence of various ethnic minority groups, thereby offering significant potential for the development of community-based tourism. - The governments are committed to promoting sustainable tourism through national policies and strategic frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Similar to Thailand, Vietnam benefits from abundant natural resources and indigenous culture, providing a strong foundation for the development of green tourism. - The government has implemented policies such as the Green Tourism Development Strategy, emphasizing the role of the environment and local communities.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The BCG model is highly integrative, connecting tourism with agriculture, biotechnology, and creativity. -A clear and widely applied certification for green tourism has been established. -Marine ecotourism has been heavily promoted, integrating coral reef conservation and island protection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The green tourism model remains fragmented, with development primarily occurring on a small scale and lacking regional integration. - There is no established certification system or standardized criteria for green tourism establishments. - Marine ecotourism has yet to be effectively developed and lacks well-structured conservation programs.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The policy is well-coordinated, involving collaboration across multiple ministries and local authorities. - There is strong integration between local communities, businesses, and government agencies. - The approach effectively combines high-end resort development with environmental conservation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It holds significant potential due to its diverse ecosystems and rich cultural heritage. - Several community-based tourism models have initially yielded positive outcomes, as seen in destinations such as Sa Pa, Mai Châu, and Cu Lao Cham.
Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over-tourism and environmental degradation remain challenges in some high-traffic areas (Phuket). - Uneven implementation across regions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a lack of effective coordination mechanisms among stakeholders. - The infrastructure for green tourism remains underdeveloped, particularly in remote and rural areas. - Community and visitor awareness of sustainable tourism is still limited.

(Source: Author’s compilation, 2025)

4.1.3. Indonesia's experience in green tourism development

Indonesia, as the world's largest archipelagic nation with over 17,000 islands, offers one of the most diverse ecosystems in Southeast Asia. From tropical rainforests and mangrove swamps to volcanic terrains, inland rivers, lakes, and unspoiled coastlines, the country supports a wide range of endemic and rare species, including the Komodo dragon and Bornean orangutans. Well-known destinations such as Bali, Komodo, Raja Ampat, Borneo, Sumatra, and Lombok not only showcase breathtaking landscapes but also function as critical conservation areas.

A flagship initiative in marine conservation is Indonesia's large-scale coral reef restoration project in Nusa Dua, recognized as the world's largest of its kind. With the deployment of nearly one million artificial reef structures, the initiative not only revitalizes marine ecosystems but also provides jobs for over 1,000 local residents affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This integrated approach aligns ecological rehabilitation with socio-economic recovery and public awareness.

Bali, in particular, is regarded as a trailblazer in green tourism in the region. The island has developed an extensive network of eco-resorts, sustainable tourism villages, and grassroots-led environmental campaigns. Renowned eco-lodges such as Bambu Indah and Sarinbuana Eco Lodge employ renewable energy and sustainable materials to minimize environmental impact. Community-based tourism is exemplified by Tenganan village, which follows the Tri Hita Karana philosophy-promoting balance among humans, nature, and spiritual life. Here, visitors can immerse themselves in authentic Balinese culture through local handicrafts, herbal collection, and culinary practices, with profits reinvested in local development and environmental preservation.

A hallmark of Bali's sustainability efforts is the "Bye Bye Plastic Bags" campaign, initiated in 2013 by two local teenagers. This youth-led movement catalyzed a regional ban on single-use plastics, underscoring the power of community and youth engagement in shaping policy. Additionally, Bali implemented a tourist fee of 150,000 IDR (approximately USD 15) in 2024 to support infrastructure and cultural heritage preservation. While compliance remains a challenge, ongoing cooperation with airlines aims to ensure effective fee collection.

Indonesia's green tourism model extends beyond local activism. The government collaborates with global institutions such as UNEP and UNDP to implement sustainable development in ecologically sensitive zones, including Komodo Island and Raja Ampat. Focus areas include carbon emission reduction, the adoption of renewable energy in hospitality services, expansion of green transport, and implementation of a national "Green Tourism Certification" program to incentivize environmentally responsible practices.

Indonesia's comprehensive model demonstrates that sustainable tourism hinges not solely on natural abundance but also on cohesive policies, community participation, and innovative initiatives. Its experience offers valuable insights for Vietnam, which is also striving to develop a greener, more community-centered tourism industry.

Table 2. Comparison between Indonesia and Vietnam's green tourism models

Criteria	Indonesia	Vietnam
Similarities	- Rich Natural Resources: Both countries boast a wealth of natural resources, including ecosystems such as forests, coasts, and diverse wildlife, which are vital for green tourism. For instance, Vietnam's natural resources, like Ha Long Bay and Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, echo Indonesia's rich biodiversity in areas like Komodo and Raja Ampat.	

	<p>- Community-Based Tourism: Both nations emphasize community-based tourism, encouraging local communities to participate in and benefit from tourism activities. Bali's Tenganan village and Vietnam's ethnic minority villages, such as those in Sapa, are examples where tourists engage directly with the local culture and contribute to community development.</p> <p>- Government and Policy Support: Both governments are actively involved in promoting sustainable tourism. Indonesia's support for green tourism through the green certification program is paralleled by Vietnam's national strategies and policies that support eco-tourism and sustainable practices.</p>	
Differences	<p>-Indonesia's green tourism approach largely focuses on large-scale conservation projects, such as coral reef restoration and national park protection</p> <p>- Indonesia has a well-established green tourism certification system, which encourages tourism businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices.</p>	<p>-Vietnam's model has been more regionally centered with a growing emphasis on rural tourism, community engagement, and environmental education.</p> <p>-In contrast, Vietnam's certification and standardization for green tourism are still in development, with fewer businesses formally certified for sustainable practices.</p>
Strengths	<p>- Indonesia's green tourism model integrates government policies, community participation, and business practices, creating a more holistic approach to sustainability.</p> <p>- The coral reef restoration project and Bali's sustainable tourism practices have garnered international attention, positioning Indonesia as a leader in green tourism in Southeast Asia.</p> <p>- Initiatives such as the employment of locals in the reef restoration project have created tangible economic benefits for the community, especially in the wake of the pandemic.</p>	<p>-Vietnam's emphasis on integrating local culture into tourism, particularly in ethnic minority regions like Sapa and Mai Chau, presents an opportunity for authentic and sustainable tourism experiences.</p> <p>-With a growing focus on eco-tourism, Vietnam has significant untapped potential to develop its green tourism sector, especially in natural landmarks like Ha Long Bay and Phong Nha-Ke Bang.</p> <p>-Vietnam has shown strong political will through policies supporting sustainable tourism, which can be further strengthened with more emphasis on infrastructure development and certification systems.</p>
Limitations	<p>- While Bali and Komodo attract international attention, the influx of tourists can sometimes lead to environmental degradation, particularly in heavily visited areas.</p> <p>-The tourism fee in Bali, though well-intentioned, faces challenges with low compliance rates, which may undermine the sustainability goals if not adequately enforced.</p>	<p>- Vietnam's green tourism infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote areas, lags behind Indonesia's more developed eco-resort networks.</p> <p>- Vietnam still lacks a comprehensive certification system for eco-tourism, making it difficult for travelers to identify truly sustainable businesses.</p> <p>- While community-based tourism exists in some regions, Vietnam's efforts to engage the broader population in sustainable tourism practices are less widespread than in Indonesia.</p>

(Source: Author's compilation, 2025)

While both Indonesia and Vietnam are rich in natural and cultural assets conducive to green tourism, Indonesia's model is marked by broader institutional support and deeper community integration. Vietnam, although still evolving its green tourism strategy, has shown promising developments in rural ecotourism and environmental education. By learning from Indonesia's coordinated efforts and leveraging its own local strengths, Vietnam can move toward a more inclusive and sustainable tourism framework that aligns with global standards.

4.2. Overview of green tourism development in Vietnam

4.2.1. The potential for developing green tourism in Vietnam

Vietnam's tourism sector serves as a critical engine for economic development, heavily reliant on the country's abundant natural resources. To ensure long-term sustainability, the industry must transition from short-term growth strategies to green tourism models that emphasize environmental preservation and responsible resource management.

Vietnam is endowed with remarkable natural assets, including a 3,260-kilometer-long coastline-one of the longest globally-and more than 2,360 rivers, forming a rich and diverse ecosystem. These features offer a robust foundation for tourism development aligned with conservation goals. As global trends increasingly favor environmentally responsible travel, green tourism emerges as a viable and attractive option for both domestic and international visitors.

The country is home to numerous unspoiled natural landscapes such as Ha Long Bay, Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, Cat Ba, the Ca Mau mangrove forests, and islands like Phu Quoc and Nha Trang. These destinations not only possess high aesthetic and recreational value but also function as habitats for rare and endangered species, thus fostering eco-tourism that supports biodiversity and ecological stability.

In addition to its natural endowments, Vietnam's cultural diversity-particularly among ethnic minority and rural communities-presents opportunities for community-based tourism. Such initiatives foster cultural preservation while enabling authentic interactions between visitors and local traditions.

Agricultural tourism is also gaining traction, offering immersive experiences such as farm tours, crop harvesting, and local food processing. Provinces like Ha Giang, Moc Chau, Lam Dong, and the Mekong Delta illustrate strong potential for integrating ecological conservation with rural economic development.

Approximately 70% of Vietnam's 1,300 locally managed tourism sites are situated in rural areas. Agricultural green tourism has notably contributed to increased tourist engagement while highlighting regional agricultural identities. Noteworthy examples include rice terrace experiences in Mu Cang Chai and Sa Pa, tea plantations in Moc Chau, vegetable farming in Tra Que (Quang Nam), and fruit harvesting activities in Bac Giang, Lang Son, and Binh Thuan. The Mekong Delta further enhances tourism offerings through floating markets, garden tours, and traditional cultural expressions such as cai luong and Khmer heritage activities.

The Vietnamese government has enacted various policy frameworks aimed at promoting sustainable tourism, including the National Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy, environmental protection regulations, and targeted support for eco-tourism initiatives within national parks and rural settings.

As global demand for environmentally conscious travel continues to rise, Vietnam stands at a strategic juncture. By developing and promoting eco-friendly tourism products, the country can safeguard its natural resources, preserve its cultural legacy, and secure long-term economic benefits for both local communities and the broader tourism sector.

4.2.2. The current state of green tourism development in Vietnam

Amid rapid urbanization and the proliferation of modern lifestyles, green tourism has emerged as a global trend. In Vietnam, the development of green tourism is regarded as a strategic direction to foster sustainable economic growth and enhance resilience to climate change. Various models—such as community-based tourism, eco-tourism, agricultural tourism, rural tourism, and island tourism—have been actively implemented in destinations including Cat Ba, Phu Quoc, Hoi An, and the Central Highlands. These initiatives contribute to the conservation of natural resources, promote environmental awareness, and support the preservation of local cultural heritage.

In Hue City, community-based tourism has made significant progress, with successful examples including the Thanh Tra garden in Thuy Bieu, hydroponic vegetable farms, sunflower fields in Thuy Thanh, and organic farms in A Luoi District. The province receives approximately 300,000 visitors annually at its community tourism sites, generating around 50 billion VND in revenue and providing stable employment for hundreds of rural workers. Furthermore, eco-friendly accommodations have implemented energy-saving measures, waste reduction practices, and the use of environmentally sustainable materials.

Despite these advancements, Vietnam’s tourism sector continues to face several challenges, including inefficient resource use, environmental pollution, inadequate planning in coastal and island tourism development, conflicts of interest among stakeholders, and short-term development strategies. These issues adversely affect local ecosystems, degrade the tourism environment, and undermine long-term sustainability goals. Addressing these challenges requires integrated resource management, enhanced environmental education, and the implementation of comprehensive, long-term policy frameworks

Table 3. SWOT analysis of green tourism development in Vietnam

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear strategic orientation at both national and local levels: Green tourism is identified as a key development direction that aligns with sustainable growth and climate change adaptation policies. -Active participation of local communities: Community-based tourism models in provinces such as Hue City, Cat Ba, Hoi An, and Phu Quoc have expanded significantly, contributing to cultural preservation and improving local livelihoods. -Diverse natural and cultural resources: Vietnam possesses a rich variety of ecosystems-forests, coastlines, deltas, highlands-as well as a vast cultural heritage, forming a strong foundation for eco-tourism, agricultural tourism, garden tours, and rural tourism. -Notable growth in visitor numbers and revenue from green tourism: For example, Thua Thien Hue welcomes approximately 300,000 visitors annually to community and agricultural tourism sites, generating about 50 billion VND in revenue. - Implementation of eco-friendly practices in accommodation models such as homestays, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism development remains insufficiently integrated with resource management, resulting in the inefficient and often wasteful utilization of tourism-related natural and cultural assets. - Environmental protection considerations have not been adequately incorporated into tourism planning, with many projects continuing to prioritize economic gains over ecological sustainability. - A lack of consistent infrastructure and environmental engineering at tourism sites has led to inadequate waste management and wastewater treatment, contributing to environmental pollution. - Environmental awareness remains limited among certain segments of tourists, tourism enterprises, and local communities, posing challenges to the implementation of sustainable tourism practices. - There is a shortage of advanced technologies for the exploitation, management, and monitoring of tourism resources, hindering the

<p>farmstays, and eco-resorts: These initiatives incorporate energy-saving technologies and environmentally responsible materials, creating distinctive tourism products and increasing economic benefits for local communities.</p>	<p>ability to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience.</p>
<p>Opportunities</p>	<p>Threats</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The global preference for green and responsible tourism is steadily increasing, as international tourists increasingly prioritize immersive experiences that foster connections with nature and local communities. - There is considerable potential to attract investment in high-quality green tourism models, such as eco-resorts, nature reserves integrated with tourism services, and tourism initiatives based on smart agriculture technologies. - The Vietnamese government is actively promoting green transition, green growth, and a strong commitment to sustainable development, which together establish a solid policy and institutional foundation for advancing green tourism. - Enhancing environmental awareness among local communities and tourists through strategic communication, education, and environmental protection campaigns serves as a critical driver for the long-term sustainability of green tourism initiatives. - International cooperation in training, financial support, technology transfer, and knowledge exchange-particularly with countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia-presents valuable opportunities to strengthen Vietnam's green tourism capacity and competitiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental pollution at tourist destinations is becoming increasingly severe: Issues such as untreated waste, wastewater, traffic congestion, and air pollution directly impact the quality of tourist experiences. - Uncontrolled tourism development on islands without proper planning: This has led to coastal erosion and the destruction of marine ecosystems. - Conflicts of interest among stakeholders and short-term development thinking: These factors contribute to the unsustainable exploitation of resources, undermining long-term sustainability in green tourism. - The influence of foreign cultures and the imbalance in preserving indigenous cultural heritage: This results in the dilution of cultural identity within community-based tourism products. - Climate change and natural disasters: These pose significant risks to destinations that rely heavily on natural resources, threatening the viability of green tourism initiatives.

4.3. Suggestions for the development of green tourism models in Vietnam

Building on the experiences of developed countries in establishing green tourism models, we can derive several suggestions to promote the growth of green tourism in Vietnam in the near future:

(1) Strengthening the legal framework for green tourism in Vietnam

Vietnam has the opportunity to enhance its green tourism sector by adopting a coherent and enforceable legal framework, drawing on successful practices from countries such as Indonesia and Singapore. Indonesia's collaboration with international organizations (UNEP, UNDP) to establish environmental standards, and Singapore's clearly defined governance structures, provide valuable models for policy localization and adaptation. To promote sustainable tourism development, Vietnam should integrate green tourism policies into national planning instruments such as the National Green Growth Strategy and the Master Plan for Tourism Development. Cross-sectoral coordination-particularly between the Ministry of

Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment-is essential to align tourism with urban planning, infrastructure, and environmental management.

A revision of the current Tourism Law is recommended to incorporate definitions, principles, and obligations related to sustainable tourism, including mandatory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for projects in sensitive ecosystems. The establishment of binding environmental responsibilities for tourism businesses and tourists is essential, supported by both penalties for non-compliance and incentives such as tax benefits or access to green financing.

A National Green Tourism Certification System should be developed based on measurable criteria, including energy efficiency, waste reduction, and community engagement. An independent body, under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, should oversee certification in collaboration with international standards.

A nationwide system for monitoring, evaluation, and digital reporting-such as a Green Tourism Dashboard-will be crucial in tracking compliance and performance. Capacity-building programs and legal training for stakeholders will ensure proper implementation and enforcement.

Legal awareness should also be promoted among tourists through educational materials and mandatory “green conduct” guidelines included in service packages. In parallel, public-private partnerships (PPPs) should be encouraged to invest in green infrastructure, with legal guarantees to reduce investment risks.

By implementing these targeted recommendations, Vietnam can create a robust legal foundation that not only mitigates environmental impact but also enhances the competitiveness and international appeal of its tourism sector.

(2) Developing green tourism experience products

Vietnam and Indonesia possess significant potential for green tourism development due to their rich natural resources and diverse cultural identities. Indonesia has effectively integrated its natural beauty with indigenous culture to create distinctive green tourism products. For instance, Bali offers not only picturesque beaches but also cultural village tours, local festivals, and spiritual retreats. Destinations like Raja Ampat and Komodo attract visitors with coral diving, marine biodiversity exploration, and community-based conservation programs. Vietnam, with over 30 national parks, biosphere reserves, extensive mangrove forests, and a coastline stretching more than 3,200 km, is well-positioned to develop various green tourism products. Examples of potential green tourism products in Vietnam include Cuc Phuong National Park, which offers opportunities for forest trekking, wildlife observation, and educational visits to the Endangered Primate Rescue Center. In the southern province of Ca Mau, tourists can engage in mangrove ecosystem exploration, participate in traditional fishing activities with local communities, and contribute to reforestation efforts. Meanwhile, the island destinations of Phu Quoc and Con Dao provide experiences such as coral reef snorkeling, marine biodiversity education, and involvement in sea turtle conservation initiatives. These activities not only enhance visitor engagement with nature but also promote environmental awareness and community participation in sustainable tourism practices.

(3) Developing green and environmentally friendly infrastructure

Singapore serves as a model for integrating sustainable infrastructure into tourism, with investments in green transport systems, renewable energy, and efficient waste and water management. Notable developments, such as Marina One and Oasia Hotel Downtown,

demonstrate how green architecture can combine environmental performance with tourism appeal. Vietnam can adopt similar strategies to foster environmentally responsible tourism.

To promote sustainable tourism, Vietnam should prioritize investments in eco-friendly transport, such as electric buses and bicycle infrastructure, and align transport planning with tourism routes. Updating building codes to include green standards and offering financial incentives for sustainable construction will promote environmentally friendly tourism infrastructure. Expanding renewable energy use in accommodations and tourist centers, especially in sunny regions, is also essential. Additionally, integrating green spaces into urban planning, converting underutilized land into green tourism attractions, and establishing closed-loop systems for waste and water management will enhance the sustainability of major tourist areas. Incorporating green urban design principles into master plans, requiring Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), and launching public awareness campaigns will further support sustainable development. By adopting these measures, Vietnam can align its tourism sector with global sustainability trends, improving environmental resilience and positioning itself as a leader in green tourism in Southeast Asia

(4) Building strong collaborations among tourism enterprises, NGOs, government agencies, and local communities

Establishing strong collaborations among tourism enterprises, NGOs, government agencies, and local communities is essential for advancing green tourism in Vietnam. These partnerships facilitate the exchange of resources, knowledge, and best practices, promoting sustainable tourism development. A national green tourism network could further connect stakeholders, fostering cooperation and supporting the growth of eco-friendly tourism across the country.

Key strategies for Vietnam include fostering public-private partnerships by offering incentives such as tax reductions and financial grants to businesses that adhere to sustainable tourism standards. Additionally, the creation of a national green tourism platform for stakeholders to share best practices, along with financial support for eco-friendly tourism businesses, will incentivize further sustainable development. Capacity-building programs for businesses, government agencies, and local communities will ensure effective implementation of green tourism practices, while encouraging community involvement will ensure local economies benefit from these initiatives. By adopting these measures, Vietnam can strengthen its green tourism sector, ensuring both environmental sustainability and economic growth, positioning the country as a leader in responsible tourism development.

(5) Enhancing public awareness and community engagement in green tourism

Raising public awareness and fostering community engagement are essential for advancing green tourism in Vietnam. Effective communication strategies, including media campaigns, social networks, and digital platforms, can educate the public on the environmental and socio-economic benefits of sustainable tourism. Initiatives promoting responsible behaviors, such as waste reduction and resource conservation, can significantly increase participation in sustainable tourism. Vietnam can draw inspiration from Bali's "Bye Bye Plastic Bags" campaign, which successfully engaged local communities and youth in environmental advocacy.

To replicate this success, Vietnam could implement several strategies: launching nationwide awareness campaigns focusing on responsible tourism behaviors; incorporating environmental education into schools and youth organizations; supporting community-driven environmental initiatives; establishing educational programs at tourist sites; involving local communities in green tourism projects; and creating recognition systems for responsible

tourism behaviors. These initiatives would help build a culture of sustainability at the grassroots level, fostering environmental awareness and community participation, while supporting the development of a responsible and sustainable tourism sector.

(6) Encouraging local community participation

A key factor in Indonesia's green tourism success is the active participation of local communities in both tourism development and management. As cultural custodians and environmental stewards, local residents play a vital role in ensuring tourism sustainability. Vietnam can adopt this model in areas such as Sa Pa, Ha Giang, and Quang Binh, promoting community-led initiatives over large-scale corporate dominance.

Thailand also offers valuable insights through its support for community-based tourism among rural and ethnic minority groups, effectively combining cultural preservation with local economic development. Drawing from these experiences, Vietnam should implement the following strategies: (1) promote local participation in tourism planning and governance; (2) offer training in tourism management, environmental protection, and hospitality; (3) expand community-based models such as homestays and craft village tours; (4) provide financial incentives for sustainable practices; and (5) support the growth of small-scale, locally owned tourism enterprises.

These measures will help Vietnam build a green tourism sector that is both environmentally responsible and socially inclusive, fostering long-term sustainability and equitable development.

5. CONCLUSION

Vietnam is endowed with a wealth of remarkable advantages for developing green tourism, thanks to its lush ecosystems, stunning natural landscapes, and a rich tapestry of cultural and historical heritage that spans the length of the country. From the breathtaking natural wonders of Ha Long Bay, the Trang An Landscape Complex, and Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, to tranquil nature reserves, lush mangrove forests, pristine islands, and vibrant ethnic minority villages brimming with cultural authenticity- each of these elements contributes to creating an exceptional foundation for tourism that harmoniously blends ecological, cultural, and community values. In particular, in the post-COVID-19 era, with global tourism trends shifting significantly toward health-focused, nature-based experiences and the search for clean, peaceful retreats, green tourism is not merely an option but an essential element in strategies for sustainable tourism development. Green tourism offers not only economic value but also social and environmental benefits, enhancing community awareness, protecting natural resources, preserving cultural identities, and creating sustainable livelihoods for local communities.

In this context, the development of green tourism in Vietnam represents not only a solution for the tourism industry's recovery after the pandemic but also an opportunity to restructure tourism products toward higher quality, uniqueness, and environmental friendliness. However, to implement this effectively, Vietnam needs to actively learn from successful green tourism models in the region, such as those in Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia - countries that have made significant progress in integrating ecological, community, and green technology elements into their tourism strategies.

By studying and adapting international best practices while tailoring them to local contexts, Vietnam can develop distinctive green tourism models suited to the characteristics of each region. This approach will not only enhance the competitiveness of Vietnam's tourism

sector in the new era but also contribute to the long-term goal of achieving sustainable economic development while protecting the environment and preserving cultural heritage.

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TÓM TẮT

DU LỊCH XANH- CHÌA KHÓA CHO SỰ PHÁT TRIỂN DU LỊCH BỀN VỮNG: KINH NGHIỆM QUỐC TẾ VÀ GỢI Ý CHO VIỆT NAM

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Du lịch xanh là loại hình du lịch ngày càng được nhiều quốc gia quan tâm trong thời gian gần đây, đặc biệt là ở các quốc gia đang phát triển như Việt Nam. Loại hình du lịch này được đánh giá là mang lại lợi ích to lớn cho xã hội, hướng đến phát triển bền vững, giảm thiểu tác động đến môi trường, đóng góp tích cực vào bảo vệ đa dạng sinh học, sử dụng năng lượng tái tạo, phát huy di sản thiên nhiên và văn hóa, phát triển các sản phẩm thân thiện với môi trường, đóng góp vào sự phát triển kinh tế - xã hội chung của đất nước. Việt Nam là quốc gia có tiềm năng lớn để phát triển du lịch xanh, nhờ nguồn tài nguyên phong phú, đa dạng, cảnh quan tươi đẹp, nhiều di tích lịch sử, tạo điều kiện thuận lợi cho loại hình du lịch này phát triển, thích ứng với xu hướng mới sau đại dịch COVID-19. Sử dụng phương pháp thu thập thông tin, phân tích, chọn lọc lý thuyết, bài viết tập trung nghiên cứu, hệ thống hóa một số vấn đề lý luận cơ bản về du lịch xanh, đưa ra một số kinh nghiệm trong xây dựng mô hình du lịch xanh và rút ra bài học kinh nghiệm cho Việt Nam.

Từ khóa: Du lịch xanh, du lịch bền vững, kinh nghiệm phát triển, Việt Nam.