MANAGEMENT

THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF GREEN TOURISM ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN TRA VINH PROVINCE OF VIETNAM

Phuong Lam¹, Cuong Nguyen², Khuong Tran³

Abstract: This study aims to find out how green tourism positively impacts the local community in Tra Vinh province of Vietnam. The paper uses the questionnaire method to survey the awareness of the local community in Tra Vinh province about the benefits of green tourism, along with statistical and analytical methods to clearly identify the level of impact on tourism. The green calendar brings the community together here. The results show that from a resource and cultural advantages perspective, green tourism has positively impacted the community's environment, socio-culture and economy, but most notably the overall awareness of local green tourism. This study shows that the local community values the environmental, cultural and heritage conservation more than the economic benefits reaped, in promoting and maintaining green tourism activities in the local areas.

Key words: Green Tourism, Positve Impacts, Local Community, Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam.

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Introduction

The significant contributions of tourism to global economic growth, job creation, and infrastructure development have led to adverse environmental and social impacts. This has fostered the emergence of green tourism, characterized by responsible tourism activities that prioritize environmental conservation, cultural and social sensitivity, and economic sustainability (Baloch et al., 2023). The role of local communities is increasingly recognized in promoting tourism, particularly green tourism. Active participation of local communities in planning and management is essential for successfully implementing green tourism activities aimed at cultural preservation, environmental protection, job creation, and generation. The engagement of local communities depends on their awareness, economic and social benefits, and involvement in the decisionmaking processes (Barbieri et al., 2020). Located between the Tien and Hau rivers, Tra Vinh is bordered by the East Sea, featuring numerous islets and riverine and coastal sandbars, along with specialized fruit orchards. These characteristics position Tra Vinh as a prime location for developing beach tourism, riverine eco-tourism, and garden-resort tourism. Its natural environment, still largely unspoiled due to limited exploitation, is well-suited for international tourists seeking discovery and experiences—distinctive traits of the Northern region of Vietnam (Van et al., 2024). Furthermore, Tra Vinh is home to a convergence of three cultural traditions from the Kinh, Khmer, and Hoa ethnic groups, creating unique indigenous cultural values. These constitute significant potential and advantages for Tra Vinh to develop various forms of tourism, especially green garden-community tourism associated with cultural-historical tourism, with a prominent focus on the cultural elements of the Khmer ethnic community. The local people are noted for their honesty, hospitality, and preservation of the Southwestern Vietnamese character. Their vibrant and diverse culture includes unique languages, traditions, and beliefs. Despite challenges such as poverty and illiteracy, the local community has opportunities to preserve and promote their cultural heritage through education, tourism, and collaboration with other ethnic groups. Achieving this goal requires recognizing the importance of developing green tourism as a means to generate income, create green jobs, and lay the foundation for economic environmentally-friendly development within Tra communities, thereby promoting green growth and poverty alleviation (Nguyen, 2018). Developing green tourism at the local level will help protect the natural landscape and biodiversity of conservation areas. The findings of this study will provide insights into the positive impacts of green tourism on the local communities of Tra Vinh province. The significant contributions of tourism to global economic growth, job creation, and infrastructure development have led to adverse environmental and social impacts. This has fostered the emergence of green tourism, characterized by responsible tourism activities that prioritize environmental conservation, cultural and social sensitivity, and economic sustainability (Baloch et al., 2023). The role of local communities is increasingly recognized in promoting tourism, particularly green tourism. Active participation of local communities in planning and management is essential for successfully implementing green tourism activities aimed at cultural preservation, environmental protection, job creation, and income generation. The engagement of local communities depends on their awareness, economic and social benefits, and involvement in decision-making processes (Barbieri et al., 2020). 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Literature Review

Green tourism

According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), green tourism can be defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves education." Green tourism, also referred to as ecotourism, is a form of tourism based on two main pillars: nature and culture. It integrates environmental education with the active participation of local communities to promote conservation and sustainable development of natural resources and ecosystems (Font & Tribe, 2001). The implementation of green tourism can vary depending on the location and context. The overarching goal of green tourism is to achieve a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the need for environmental conservation, as well as the preservation of local culture and communities for future generations (Pan et al., 2018).

Benefits of green tourism

Economic Benefits: Green tourism generates job opportunities in areas such as hospitality services, ecotourism tour-guides, and environmental education (Amerta et al., 2018). By creating environmentally responsible employment, green tourism stimulates economic growth and supports local businesses and agriculture. It promotes local food consumption, reducing carbon emissions from food transportation, while preserving culinary traditions and cultural heritage, thereby driving economic development (Sims, 2009).

Environmental Benefits: Green tourism contributes to the conservation of natural and cultural resources while supporting environmental preservation efforts. Through sustainable practices and low-impact activities, green tourism minimizes negative environmental impacts. It also promotes cultural heritage by safeguarding historical sites and monuments, and enhances environmental awareness and conservation efforts (Edgell, 2019).

Cultural and Social Benefits: Green tourism fosters cultural exchange, respect for traditions, and mutual understanding between tourists and local communities. It enhances diversity, bridges cultural gaps, and promotes local products while supporting traditional practices. These activities contribute to sustainable tourism benefits for both visitors and local populations (Barna et al., 2021).

Local community awareness of green tourism

The level of awareness about green tourism among local communities varies depending on factors such as education, exposure to tourism, and cultural and social norms. Some communities actively participate in sustainable tourism activities, recognizing the importance of environmental protection and cultural heritage preservation (Li and Hunter, 2015). However, others may have limited awareness due to a lack of information, education, or involvement in tourism development. Cultural and social norms that prioritize economic growth can also hinder the promotion of sustainable tourism. Raising awareness through education, outreach programs, and community participation is essential to foster sustainable green tourism (Okazaki, 2008).

Commitment of local communities to green tourism models

The commitment of local communities to green tourism is influenced by fundamental factors such as awareness of the benefits of sustainable tourism and the limitations of traditional practices. Active involvement of local communities in decision-making processes and ownership of sustainable tourism initiatives enhances commitment. Economic benefits, including job opportunities and support for local businesses, also contribute to stronger engagement (Hassan, 2000). The alignment of cultural and social values further reinforces commitment. Overall, engaging local communities, considering their values, and providing tangible benefits encourage their commitment to green tourism (Barbieri et al., 2020).

Relationship between awareness and commitment to green tourism

The relationship between awareness and commitment to green tourism among local communities is complex. Greater awareness of the benefits of green tourism can lead to increased likelihood of active participation in sustainable tourism activities. Conversely, if local communities perceive that engaging in sustainable tourism initiatives does

not provide significant economic benefits or if they face other economic challenges, their participation may decline (Aref, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial not only to raise local community awareness about the benefits of green tourism but also to actively involve them in decision-making processes and ensure they experience tangible benefits from their participation.

Potentials for developing green tourism in Tra Vinh province

Tra Vinh boasts rich potential for cultural, historical, coastal, and riverine garden tourism, with its specialized fruit orchards, coastal sandbars, and the unique cultural identity of its local communities. Additionally, Tra Vinh is home to numerous national historical sites, architectural landmarks, and intangible cultural heritage. The Khmer pagodas of Southern Vietnam, such as Hang Pagoda, Nodol Pagoda, Ang Pagoda, and Vam Ray Pagoda, stand out with their ancient and unique architecture. Ang Pagoda, one of the oldest in the Mekong Delta, is a prominent attraction frequently visited by tourists and locals alike (Van Chat, 2024). Among Tra Vinh's ecological tourism highlights, Ba Om Pond is a key destination, chosen by many visitors. This area features a collection of ponds and centuries-old trees, with a cool climate year-round. Ba Om Pond itself is a clear water body approximately 500 meters long and 300 meters wide. The surrounding landscape includes rolling sand dunes and hundreds of ancient trees such as dipterocarps and hopeas, with massive exposed roots forming intriguing shapes. The Rung Duoc Eco-Tourism Area (in Long Khanh commune, Duyen Hai district) is another must-visit destination, forming part of the protected mangrove ecosystem along the Southern Vietnamese coast. The pristine forest is rich in biodiversity, featuring a variety of mangrove trees like mangroves, thorn palms, and phoenix palms, with the predominant species being mangroves. It is also home to diverse flora and fauna. Visitors to the Mangrove Forest can choose to explore via forest trails or by boat through the dense mangroves. With its vast natural area and unspoiled beauty, this destination offers fresh air, breathtaking landscapes, and captivating local folklore. Chim Islet, covering an area of approximately 60 hectares, offers a rustic charm with half of its land dedicated to rice cultivation and the remainder to vegetables and fruit trees. Visitors to Chim Islet can immerse themselves in rural life and enjoy seasonal local dishes. Its unique approach, "appointment-only seasonal tourism," ensures visitors can experience local production activities by scheduling their visit in advance. Another notable destination is Ho Islet, a "hidden gem" of Tra

Vinh's tourism, with an area of 22 hectares and home to only 21 households. This islet captivates visitors with its lush greenery and the warm, genuine hospitality, characteristic of the Mekong Delta. A standout experience here is "night tourism without electricity," providing an authentic and memorable experience (Nguyen, 2022). Recognizing the vast potential of green tourism and its critical role in local socio-economic development, Tra Vinh province has implemented numerous mechanisms and policies to support tourism growth. These efforts include promoting and advertising tourism, developing state management frameworks for the sector, and focusing on training a skilled tourism workforce to enhance the quality of green tourism services and products. Key initiatives include river tourism (e.g., the Long Binh River and Lang The River routes), community-based tourism at Chim Islet, and agricultural tourism models in Con Ong Hamlet, Dan Thanh Commune, and Duyen Hai Town. Currently, the province is leveraging several green tourism routes, including: The ecological route: "Tra Vinh City - Khmer Cultural and Tourism Village - Ho Islet"; The cultural and ecological route: "Tieu Can - Cau Ke - Tra Cu": The coastal route: "Tra Vinh City - Cau Ngang - Ba Dong Beach" These flagship routes have been embraced by travel agencies both within and beyond the province, solidifying Tra Vinh as a vital destination in the Mekong Delta.

Research Method

This study employed a survey questionnaire method, with data collected through questionnaires targeting local residents living near tourist sites and attractions in Tra Vinh. The questionnaire was designed to gather insights into the positive impacts of green tourism on the "environment," "socio-cultural aspects," and "economy." Based on the survey results, the study focused on criteria related to socio-cultural, environmental, and economic dimensions. The questionnaire was structured into two parts: the first part collected demographic information, while the second part focused on economic, environmental, and socio-cultural indicators and the degree to which green tourism influences local communities. The research employed a random sampling method, targeting 200 local residents living near tourist sites. All 200 questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a 100% response rate.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

	Attribute	Age								
Variable		18-24		25-34		45-54		Above 56		
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Gender	Female	10	13,2%	32	42,1%	26	34,2%	8	10,5%	
	Male	15	12,1%	52	41,9%	41	33,1%	16	12,9%	
Education	Bachelor Degree	3	8,1%	17	45,9%	16	43,2%	1	2,7%	
	College	9	11,1%	36	44,4%	23	28,4%	13	16,0%	
	High School Graduate	7	14,0%	19	38,0%	18	36,0%	6	12,0%	
	Less than High School	6	18,8%	12	37,5%	10	31,2%	4	12,5%	

Results

The analysed results of the impact of green tourism on local communities clearly demonstrate that green tourism activities have brought environmental, socio-cultural, and economic benefits to the local population. These positive impacts have significantly shifted the local community's awareness of green tourism.

Table 2 Indicators and Levels of Impact of Green Tourism on Local Communities

Criteria	Mean	Impact level
1. Environment	4.35	Positive
Security in the area	4.40	Positive
Environmental hygiene in the area	4.38	Positive
Waste collection methods in the area	4.31	Positive
Visitors from other regions	4.23	Positive
Social conditions in the area	4.41	Positive
2. Socio-Cultural	4.38	Positive
Spiritual life	4.34	Positive
Cultural preservation	4.32	Positive
Cultural exploitation	4.42	Positive
Social life	4.45	Positive
3. Economic	4.33	Positive
Personal income	4.35	Positive
Family income	4.33	Positive
Employment of local residents	4.30	Positive
Expenses for leisure and entertainment	4.35	Positive
Other taxes and fees	4.31	Positive

Statistical survey results indicate that green tourism has had a positive environmental impact (4.35) on the awareness of the local community. The green tourism model, linked to community responsibility, is being actively adopted by businesses in the area. Local households and service providers have ceased generating plastic waste. The province has implemented measures to remind and encourage all tourists not to bring plastic bags or single-use plastic items to eco-tourism sites. It also calls upon residents, business owners, and tourism enterprises at these sites to reject single-use plastic products, replacing them with environmentally friendly alternatives, sorting waste at the source, and participating in waste collection and treatment efforts. The local community in Tra Vinh has benefited from the socio-cultural advantages of green tourism (4.38) by encouraging residents to engage in green tourism models through community-based tourism activities. These activities allow tourists to interact directly with the local community, learn about their customs and traditions, and participate in traditional and local cultural events. This cultural exchange fosters mutual benefits, enabling both tourists and local communities to learn from one another, share experiences, and gain a deeper understanding of each other's cultures (Chan, et al., 2021). Several green tourism and agricultural tourism models have emerged in the locality, showcasing unique characteristics contribute that distinctiveness of green tourism in the region. These models include activities such as reenacting the traditional process of pounding "côm dep"—a traditional Khmer dish—or enabling each household to offer a specific type of service using locally produced goods made on-site. These services include homestay rentals, cooking and baking lessons for tourists, crab fishing, setting traps for shrimp, engaging in folk games, and recreating traditional rural markets. These initiatives have not only helped stabilize the local economy, improve livelihoods, and alleviate poverty for many households, but also preserve and promote the traditional cultural values of the ethnic communities. The local community has increased its awareness of the benefits of green tourism, which has encouraged their involvement in the decision-making process, ensuring they receive tangible benefits from their participation. Doing so can enhance their commitment to implementing sustainable tourism and actively support and promote these initiatives within their communities (Choi, 2013). Finally, statistical evidence from the average scores of the indicators reveals that the economic benefits of green tourism (4.33) have had a lower impact on the local community compared to environmental (4.35) and socio-cultural benefits (4.38).

households only receive a modest share of the economic benefits, primarily from ticket sales, lodging, food services, and employment opportunities during the agricultural off-season. This indicates that the local community in Tra Vinh still prioritizes the preservation of their environment and cultural heritage over economic gains.

Discussion

To continue fostering the positive impacts of green tourism on local communities, Tra Vinh province should implement the following solutions:

Environmental protection:

To sustain and develop green tourism activities, it is essential to consistently emphasize environmental protection and the preservation of natural ecosystems at tourism sites. Environmental protection is a critical responsibility in planning and implementing green tourism projects and strategies within the province, as well as at specific tourism zones and destinations. Therefore, it is necessary to install signs, banners, posters, and other visual aids around green tourism sites to remind and encourage tourists and local residents to adopt green consumption practices in tourism. This includes implementing environmental protection measures in tourism activities, reducing the use of non-biodegradable plastic bags and single-use plastic products, and ensuring proper waste management to prevent littering on streets and waterways.

Enhancing the contribution of green tourism to local communities:

Sharing the benefits of green tourism with local communities has increasingly become a key objective to ensure social equity and optimize tourism's advantages. This can be achieved by providing greater and more targeted benefits to local residents, such as: offering professional training in tourism services; conducting surveys to gather local opinions and needs for tourism development projects; and investing in infrastructure development. Additionally, supporting households participating in green tourism models to develop unique and distinctive products can attract tourists by leveraging cultural and regional specialties. This approach moves beyond the limited economic benefits previously gained from ticket sales, lodging, and food services, empowering local residents to play a more active and rewarding role in green tourism initiatives.

Enhancing the quality of human resources with knowledge of green tourism:

Encourage businesses to organize on-site training programs for local human resources to support green tourism sites and destinations. Training sessions for residents at green tourism locations should include knowledge about environmental protection in tourism, green tourism principles, and communication skills. These topics should be integrated into educational and awareness-raising programs for the local community during the development of green tourism. Fostering a cultured, civilized, polite, friendly, and welcoming approach to tourism is essential, as the quality of tourism products largely depends on the attitude and competency of the workforce at tourism destinations.

Enhancing the quality of human resources with knowledge of green tourism:

Collaborate with businesses within and outside the province to develop new inter-regional tourism spaces, such as green urban tourism areas, coastal eco-tourism spaces, and garden eco-tourism spaces integrated with ethnic culture. Additionally, enhance the landscape by improving greenery along transportation routes and destinations, and develop plans for green transportation systems. Design programs and plans to develop tourism products that are aligned with ecosystem protection, biodiversity conservation, and the preservation of traditional cultural values. Encourage large-scale tourism investment projects to create standout green tourism products, thereby increasing the number of visitors to the local area.

Conclusions

The results illustrate that from resource and cultural advantages, green tourism has positively impacted the community's environment, socio-culture and economy, but most notably is the increase in awareness of local green tourism. The local communities value the environment, culture and heritage conservation more than the economic benefits in promoting and maintaining green tourism activities. Green tourism is a form of tourism that operates with the goal of minimizing environmental impacts, contributing positively to biodiversity conservation, utilizing renewable energy, and promoting natural and cultural heritage, while developing eco-friendly products. Compared to other provinces in the Mekong Delta region, Tra

Vinh faces challenges in tourism development due to limitations in road infrastructure and geographic location. However, by overcoming these difficulties, Tra Vinh has strategically focused on eco-community tourism linked to indigenous culture as its primary product, aiming to sustainably develop a "green" tourism economy. This study explores the positive impacts of green tourism on local communities in Tra Vinh. The findings highlight the significance of environmental and socio-cultural benefits in shaping the community's awareness and commitment to green tourism development. Cultural exchange has been shown to benefit both tourists and locals, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation of diverse promoting natural resources, and cultures, protecting sustainable environmental conservation. Additionally, the study reveals that local communities prioritize the preservation of natural resources, cultural heritage, and traditional customs over economic gains. This emphasizes the importance of involving communities in the decision-making process and ensuring that they derive tangible benefits from their participation. In doing so, their commitment to sustainable green tourism activities can be strengthened, leading to the promotion and support of these initiatives within their communities. Eco-community tourism models have significantly transformed the lives of local residents in Vietnam (Anh et al., 2024). The study further demonstrates how changes in awareness and actions among the local community regarding green tourism help them recognize its necessity for development, aligning with the advantages and potential of Tra Vinh's local tourism resources. These findings can inform policymakers and tourism stakeholders in developing strategies to actively engage local communities, ensuring their meaningful participation and mutual benefits in the evolving context of modern tourism.

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CONTENTS

MANAGEMENT practice

THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF GREEN TOURISM ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN TRA VINH PROVINCE OF VIETNAM Phuong Lam, Cuong Nguyen, Khuong Tran	5
THE IMPACT OF TAXATION ON INVESTMENT FINANCING: THE CASE OF MOROCCAN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES	
Toufik Marmad, Ritahi Oussama, Echaoui Abdellah	19
COMMUNICATION FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CREATION AND INTRODUCTION OF INNOVATION IN BULGARIAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES	
Yanica Dimitrova	44
DEVELOPING AN EQUILIBRIUM MODEL FOR ASSESSING HOUSE PRICE DEVIATION	
Dragomir Stefanov, Yana Stoencheva, Petar Ivanov	69
INSURANCE and Social Security	
FINANCIAL EFFICIENCY OF THE BULGARIAN GENERAL INSURANCE COMPANIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FINANCIAL CONTROLLING	
Lydmil Krastev, Marin Marinov, Valentin Milinov	87
INFORMATION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS Technologies	
IMPACT OF BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE ON THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMES): EVIDENCE FROM THE LIMA PLAZA CASE	
Dino Quinteros-Navarro, Alfredo Quinteros,	
Victor Muñoz, Williams Ramirez	105