

# International Journal of Management and Organizational Research

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## Ecotourism Development in Hoa Binh Province: Current Situation and Solutions

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### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2583-6641

**Volume:** 03

**Issue:** 05

**September-October 2024**

**Received:** 28-08-2024

**Accepted:** 30-09-2024

**Page No:** 66-69

### Abstract

Hoa Binh is a province with many potentials and strengths to develop ecotourism. Recently, through the development of the eco-tourism model, this locality has turned those potentials to serve the process of socio-economic development, creating jobs and increasing income for local people. However, in recent times, Hoa Binh's ecotourism development has not been commensurate with its inherent potential. This article analyses the current ecotourism development status, proposing some basic solutions for ecotourism development in Hoa Binh province in the coming time.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Hoa Binh, current situation, solutions

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### Introduction

Ecotourism is increasingly recognized as a sustainable development model that leverages natural and cultural assets for socio-economic progress. Hoa Binh province, located at the gateway to Vietnam's Northwest region, possesses rich ecological diversity, unique cultural traditions, and historical significance. This region has the potential to be a leading destination for ecotourism. Despite its inherent strengths, the development of ecotourism in Hoa Binh has been uneven, and the sector has not fully capitalized on the province's capabilities. This paper analyzes the current status of ecotourism in Hoa Binh and presents strategic solutions to promote its future growth. By addressing infrastructural shortcomings, improving service quality, and enhancing local participation, Hoa Binh can transform ecotourism into a key driver of economic growth, community development, and environmental sustainability.

### Current status of ecotourism development in Hoa Binh province

Hoa Binh is located at the gateway to the Northwest region, 76 km from the centre of Hanoi's capital in the direction of National Highway 6, is the western counterweight area of Hanoi's capital, borders Hanoi capital to the East, borders Phu Tho province to the North; borders Son La and Thanh Hoa provinces to the West, borders Ha Nam and Ninh Binh provinces to the Southeast, the road and waterway traffic network is relatively developed, including important national routes passing through, such as Ho Chi Minh road, National Highway 6, National Highway 12B, Hoa Binh - Hoa Lac (Hanoi) expressway... The geographical location of the province is a favourable condition for Hoa Binh to expand cooperation and develop the economy. In the province, there are 173 managed and protected relics and scenic spots, many caves containing archaeological sites of the famous "Hoa Binh Culture". The province has 4 nature reserves (Ngoc Son - Ngo Luong, Thuong Tien, Pu Canh, Hang Kia - Pa Co) with diverse ecosystems; hot mineral water sources in Kim Boi, Lac Son, Yen Thuy districts... Hoa Binh Lake has a water surface area of 8,000 hectares, a capacity of 9.5 billion m3 with many islands, creating a charming landscape, considered the pearl of the province and has been approved for development into a national tourist area. In particular, Hoa Binh has a unique culture of the Muong, Tay, Thai, Dao, and Mong ethnic groups. The ethnic communities still retain their own identities. Hoa Binh is also known as the cradle of the world-famous "Hoa Binh Culture" with a dense system of archaeological sites; a system of folk festivals, unique and distinctive customs and practices. The cultural diversity has created great attraction for the development of humanistic tourism in Hoa Binh province.

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In 2022, the highlight of Hoa Binh province's tourism is that tourism activities have recovered comprehensively and effectively. Tourism activities have flourished in most localities in the province such as Mai Chau, Kim Boi, Luong Son, Da Bac districts... and Hoa Binh City with many types such as community tourism, eco-tourism, resort, discovery, experience... Those results are shown:

**Firstly, the number of tourists participating in ecotourism has increased, and the tourist market has expanded.**

In general, in the whole province, in 2022, Hoa Binh tourism welcomed about 3 million visitors, reaching 203% over the same period last year. Of which, 100 thousand international visitors, reaching 206% over the same period, fulfilling 100% of the annual plan; 2.9 million domestic visitors, reaching 202.9% over the same period, fulfilling 116.9% of the annual plan. Total revenue from tourism is about 3,100 billion VND, reaching 204.9% over the same period, fulfilling 129.3% of the annual plan. The number of tourists coming to the province has increased rapidly, especially on weekends and holidays. The results of tourism business activities have contributed to promoting economic recovery, creating many jobs and sustainable income for workers.

**Secondly, the infrastructure for ecotourists is increasingly improved.**

Hoa Binh is a province with many favourable potentials to promote the development of ecotourism. With 6 main ethnic groups living together, including Muong, Kinh, Tay, Thai, Mong, and Dao, of which the Muong ethnic group accounts for 64%, Hoa Binh currently has 786 recognized intangible cultural heritages, with 4 intangible cultural heritages including Mo Muong, Muong gong art, Khai Ha festival and bamboo calendar knowledge of the Muong ethnic group listed in the list of national intangible cultural heritages. Along with that, there are over 100 relics that have been ranked at the national and provincial levels. In recent years, Hoa Binh province has regularly paid attention to renovating and embellishing historical relics, and scenic spots, and restoring traditional festivals... to serve tourism development.

To soon turn tourism into a key economic sector, the tourism infrastructure system and accommodation facilities have also been invested in relatively synchronously and modernly. The whole province has 67 investment projects in the tourism sector; 448 accommodation facilities have been appraised, including 9 3-star hotels, 26 resorts and 2-star hotels, 6 1-star hotels, 6 standard apartments; 401 motels, community tourism stilt houses; 9 local tourist spots, 1 provincial tourist area. In particular, 8 eco-tourism spots in the districts of Mai Chau, Cao Phong, Tan Lac, and Da Bac have been digitized on the Hoa Binh Provincial Tourism Information Portal. Activities of linking, cooperating in tourism development, promoting images, and promoting tourism information have been enhanced, contributing to promoting tourism development.

**Thirdly, total revenue from ecotourism is increasing, contributing to local economic growth.**

In 2022, after the COVID-19 pandemic was controlled, with the efforts of the entire tourism industry and the active participation of authorities at all levels, people and businesses. Tourism in Hoa Binh province has recovered and

grown rapidly, exceeding the annual target and plan.

Total tourist arrivals reached 3,127,854, up 211.6% over the same period last year, reaching 121.2% of the annual plan. Of which: International visitors 137,537, up 283.3% over the same period last year, reaching 137.5% of the annual plan; domestic visitors 2,990,317, up 209.2% over the same period last year, reaching 120.6% of the annual plan. Total revenue from tourists: reached 3,614 billion VND, compared to the same period last year, reaching 239%, reaching 150.6% of the annual plan. It can be said that Hoa Binh tourism has recovered almost to the level of 2019 when it was not affected by the Covid 19 pandemic.

**Fourthly, contributing to promoting the transformation of the ecotourism business model towards modernity.**

In reality, ecotourism destinations have combined all types in a comprehensive model, tourism business entities are no longer separate households but have been linked in the direction of cooperatives, associations and established enterprises. Specifically: The ecotourism model operates according to the cooperative model in Ban Lac, Mai Chau district; operates in the form of an ecotourism association in Mu, Khuong, Mon, and Sat Thuong hamlets of Lac Son district; The ecotourism model operates as a joint stock company in the hamlets: Ke, Duc Phong (old Da Bia), Sung, Da Bac district; The most ecological tourism business model shares profits with households operating community tourism in Ai hamlet, Phong Phu commune, Tan Lac district. This shows that the transformation of the ecotourism business model in Hoa Binh province is gradually developing towards modernity.

**Fifthly, providing and bringing about job opportunities and income generation for local people.**

In the recent period, tourism in general and ecotourism in Hoa Binh province have been contributing to creating job opportunities for local people. The demand for human resources for ecotourism is increasing rapidly in professional service activities. In recent years, Hoa Binh province has always paid attention to and created conditions for developing human resources in tourism. Every year, the province always has hundreds of cadres, employees, and leaders of tourism units participating in tourism training courses for accommodation establishments, restaurants, travel agencies, and tourist transportation; business leadership skills. Along with that, the province also prioritizes the development of local human resources, focusing on training necessary skills for people participating in community tourism, and direct tourism, especially communication skills and foreign language proficiency.

In 2022, Hoa Binh Province organized training courses on knowledge of tourism accommodation management, English and communication skills in rural tourism services (OCOP) for Hoa Binh City and Lac Son district. State management of vocational education has been strengthened. The province's vocational education institutions have recruited vocational training targets, including tourism training, contributing to improving the quality of ecotourism products in Hoa Binh province. Up to now, vocational training institutions registered to train in tourism, hotel, catering services, embroidery, brocade weaving, and bamboo and rattan weaving have recruited 2,834 people. Specifically, 987 people have been trained at an intermediate level, 180 people have been trained at the elementary level and 1,676 people

have been trained regularly for less than 3 months. In addition to organizing training courses, Hoa Binh province has organized working groups to study tourism experiences outside the province. The working group of the Tourism Steering Committee of Hoa Binh Province has studied tourism management and development experiences in Binh Thuan Province.

However, in addition to the above successes, in the process of developing ecotourism in Hoa Binh province, there are still some shortcomings, specifically:

- The human resources working in the field of ecotourism are increasing, but the quality is very limited because they have not been trained in professional skills.
- The traffic infrastructure system is not synchronous, the routes connecting to ecotourism destinations are still difficult, causing obstacles for tourists when travelling to ecotourism destinations in Hoa Binh.
- The planning and orientation of tourism development have not received due attention, so many places in the province still have a situation of spontaneous ecotourism development.
- The development of ecotourism products is still monotonous, not creating many products to meet the needs of tourists, leading to a shortened stay of tourists, and reducing the income of local people.
- The role and coordination of the government in supporting the formation of linkages between entities participating in the provision of services for ecotourism are not effective; management is not strict, leading to many places developing ecotourism causing damage to the environment and the appearance of distorted services, causing negative impacts on traditional indigenous cultural values.

All of the above problems, if not promptly resolved, will not only not ensure a stable and long-term life, but also cause unpredictable consequences in protecting the environment and preserving the cultural identity of local people in developing ecotourism.

## **2. Some solutions to be implemented to develop ecotourism in Hoa Binh province in the coming time**

Through research and practice of existing problems and limitations in the process of developing ecotourism in Hoa Binh province, to ensure the promotion of potential and strengths in developing tourism and services and becoming a key economic sector of the province, authorities at all levels and the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Hoa Binh need to implement the following solutions:

*Firstly*, strengthen the leadership and direction of Party committees and authorities in implementing the goals, tasks and solutions set out in the Resolution, which are: By 2025, basically meet the criteria to become a National Tourist Area. By 2030, become a National Tourist Area, with a relatively synchronous and modern technical infrastructure system; high-quality, diverse, branded tourism products, imbued with the cultural identity of ethnic groups; become the largest tourist centre of Hoa Binh province, one of the 12 key tourist areas of the Northern Midlands and Mountains region.

*Secondly*, continue to prioritize and integrate State budget sources to invest in and complete technical infrastructure, especially the road system and ports and marinas connecting tourist destinations; attract official foreign aid (ODA), non-governmental organization (NGO) capital and socialized

sources to invest in developing tourism infrastructure.

*Thirdly*, promote the attraction of investment projects to develop tourism that meet 3-star standards or higher with high-quality entertainment and resort services, ensuring that by 2025 there will be enough accommodation facilities that meet 4-star standards according to regulations to meet the conditions for the National Tourist Area; continue to strongly develop community tourism and create many complementary products and services for tourists to create jobs and bring income to local people.

*Fourthly*, it is necessary to have preferential policies and support the development of ecotourism business entities, such as policies to support the production of handicrafts, clean agricultural products, local agricultural products to serve ecotourism destinations, investment in infrastructure, technical facilities for tourism (public toilets, parking lots, minimum equipment to serve guests); create mechanisms for households and individuals of ethnic minorities in hamlets with tourism development potential to directly or indirectly participate in tourism service activities at ecotourism destinations. This is an issue that needs to be addressed immediately because the tourist destinations themselves must be seen as an on-site export gateway for goods, thereby causing spillover effects to other sectors and promoting production and generating income for local people.

*Fifthly*, quickly establish economic links between business entities and ecotourism destinations throughout the province. Establish integrated tours to experience different types of ecotourism to diversify tourism products to satisfy the needs of many types of tourists, while forming a closed and professional tourism value chain. Do a good job of promoting ecotourism products for domestic and international tourists.

*Sixthly*, improve the quality of training and foster human resources for ecotourism. Open training courses to foster professional knowledge, skills, communication skills, foreign languages, and explanations to improve the quality of service and communication. It is important to note that 100% of tour guides and those serving in local tourism activities must be local people. They will be initially trained, but then each individual will improve themselves to be able to serve tourists in the best way, and this team will be attached to their homeland for a long time.

*Seventhly*, it is necessary to establish a Provincial Ecotourism Business Management Board. This is the focal point to strengthen the management of ecotourism production and business activities, monitor and inspect the protection of tourism and cultural resources and environment, and punish violations. It is necessary to integrate programs with funding sources, such as new rural programs, poverty reduction support programs, and non-governmental projects to have resources to support infrastructure, technical facilities, and vocational skills to promote ecotourism development.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Hoa Binh province stands at a pivotal moment in its ecotourism development journey. With its vast natural resources, rich cultural heritage, and growing infrastructure, the province is well-positioned to harness the benefits of ecotourism. However, achieving long-term success requires concerted efforts to address current challenges, such as limited service quality, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for professional training for local communities. By implementing the recommended solutions—enhancing leadership, increasing investment, fostering human resource

development, and promoting cooperative tourism models - Hoa Binh can elevate its ecotourism sector to a national level, driving socio-economic growth and preserving its natural and cultural assets for future generations.

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