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Developing Tourism in Hoa Binh Province in the Context of International Economic Integration

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ABSTRACT

According to a report from the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, in the first 6 months of 2023, the total number of tourists coming to Hoa Binh is about 2,360,000, increasing by 28.8% compared to the same period last year, reaching 67.4% of the year plan. Of which, there were 240,000 international visitors, an increase of 336% compared to the same period last year, reaching 53.3% of the year's plan; 2,120,000 domestic visitors, an increase of 19.3% compared to the same period last year, reaching 69.5% of the year's plan. Total revenue from tourists reached 2,300 billion VND, an increase of 16.2% compared to the same period last year, reaching 59% of the year plan. The above impressive recovery results after the COVID-19 pandemic are thanks to the province's tourism industry having synchronously deployed many groups of tasks and solutions to develop destinations, building tours, and attractive tourism product groups and organize a variety of activities to attract the attention of domestic and foreign tourists, creating a premise for tourism to recover and maintain operations in the last months of the year and the following years. The article focuses on analyzing and evaluating the current status of Hoa Binh tourism development in the period 2018 - 2022 and proposes some solutions to promote the development of the province's tourism industry in the context of international economic integration.

Keywords: Hoa Binh tourism, tourism development, international economic integration.

INTRODUCTION

Hoa Binh is adjacent to Hanoi, as the gateway to the Northwest region, imbued with the cultural identities of the Muong, Thai, Tay, Dao, and Mong ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has a unique

cultural identity in housing architecture, folk festivals, dance, singing, poetry, costumes, cuisine, and traditional crafts. Especially the famous "Hoa Binh Culture", the origin of the Epic "Land and Water", along with many relics, landscapes, and many unique traditional festivals are preserved. The province has many attractive places for tourists with the Hoa Binh hydroelectric lake bed and diverse biological system. Hoa Binh has been taking advantage of those potential advantages to focus on developing tourism in an effective and safe direction.

Hoa Binh province has invested in the tourism infrastructure system and accommodation facilities synchronously and modernly to become a key economic sector. By 2022, the whole province has 67 investment projects in the tourism sector; 448 accommodation establishments were appraised, including nine three-star hotels, 26 two-star resorts, and hotels, six one-star hotels, six standard apartments; 401 motels and stilt houses for community tourism; nine local tourist attractions, one provincial tourist area. In particular, there have been eight community tourism destinations in districts: Mai Chau, Cao Phong, Tan Lac, and Da Bac that have been digitized on the Hoa Binh province Tourism Information Portal. The connection and cooperation activities in tourism development, image promotion, and tourism information promotion have been enhanced, contributing to promoting tourism development. (Hoa Binh Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2022).

In reality, Hoa Binh tourism has not developed commensurate with its potential and strengths because the traffic structure is not synchronous, and there are no strategic investors in the tourism sector in the area. The work of propaganda and promotion of investment in tourism development has not been given due attention, and tourism links with major tourism centers of the country have not been expanded. The coordination between levels, sectors, and localities in directing the management, exploitation, and development of tourism is still limited. Socialization of investment in tourism development is not effective, there is a lack of mechanisms and solutions to encourage investment attraction and tourism business, especially in building high-quality tourism products (Bui Thi Chinh, 2017).

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The issue of regional integration in tourism has been addressed by many studies in the context of changes in the tourism industry as well as the development of information technology, the internet, and the travel needs of new consumers.

According to Mills and Law (2004), the Internet is changing the structure of the tourism industry by changing barriers to entry, revolutionizing distribution channels, facilitating price transparency and competition, and improving business efficiency.

Referring to tourism as an important economic sector that needs investment and development, especially for countries with natural landscapes or unique cultures, Martin Mowforth and Ian Munt (2001) said that in order for tourism to truly bring a large source of income to the country as well as to the locality, the decisive issue is to pay attention from the beginning to develop this industry according to sustainable standards. Pham Trung Luong (2014) has set a long-term goal in tourism development of effectively exploiting and promoting the potential and strengths of each region; short-term goals are to prioritize investment in important areas such as

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infrastructure development, "destination" connection, tourism product development, and human resource training.

The development goal of the tourism industry is to contribute to improving the quality and diversity of tourism products and services at destinations in order to increase the number of tourists, foreign exchange earnings, and employment (Ofronov, Bogdan, 2018). Tourism development cannot be carried out spontaneously, it requires direction, creating conditions to promote development, and control the level of development from management agencies at all levels.

Truong Dien Thang (2010) and S. Medlik (1995) believe that state management of tourism must create an environment for the tourism industry to develop and create a common awareness of the benefits of this industry in the community; the important issue of state management of tourism is to build an environment of political security and social safety, along with economic factors, achievements of other economic sectors and tourism development guidelines.

Hoa Binh is only 76 km from the center of Hanoi's capital along Highway 6 with a favorable geographical location at the gateway to the Northwest region of Vietnam, this is a counterweight area in terms of economic and tourism development in the West of Hanoi Capital. Therefore, the province has much potential to develop eco-tourism, resort tourism, rural tourism, and spiritual tourism (Le Thac Can, 2010). Hoa Binh province has implemented many solutions to attract investment capital in tourism such as reforming administrative procedures, building tourism infrastructure, developing typical tourism products, training, and fostering tourism human resources to create a breakthrough and become a key economic sector (Bui Ngoc Tu, 2018).

However, Hoa Binh tourism has not yet developed commensurate with its inherent potential. The cause of this situation is due to poor infrastructure, not focusing on synchronously exploiting the province's tourism potential, and not creating a synchronous mechanism between the economy and tourism with relevant sectors to attract investment in tourism development. Many projects are slow to be implemented, and the percentage of items put into operation is low. In particular, Hoa Binh tourism lacks synchronous and sustainable development and has not created a process of regional connection to develop, complement, and support each other (Vu Lan Huong, 2022).

Therefore, the study "Developing Tourism in Hoa Binh Province in the Context of International Economic Integration" is an extremely important requirement and urgent task.

RESEARCH METHODS

Based on the dialectical materialist and historical materialist methodology, the main research method used in the article is the qualitative research method: descriptive statistics, and comparative statistics to analyze and evaluate the current status of tourism development in Hoa Binh province in the period 2018 - 2022 in the context of international economic integration.

The Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Hoa Binh province provides the secondary data system.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Potential and Advantages for Tourism Development of Hoa Binh Province

Geographical Location and Topography:

Hoa Binh province is located at the gateway to the Northwest region of Vietnam, 76 kilometers from the center of Hanoi along Highway 6, to the east adjacent to Hanoi, to the north adjacent to Phu Tho province; the west borders Son La provinces, the southeast borders Ha Nam and Ninh Binh provinces. Hoa Binh not only has the opportunity to develop tourism independently but also has many opportunities to connect tourism development with other localities. This province has a relatively developed road and waterway transportation network, including important national routes such as Ho Chi Minh Road, National Highway 6, National Highway 12B, and Hoa Binh to Hoa Lac Expressway (Hanoi), etc. The transportation system is evenly distributed, connecting Hoa Binh with other provinces in the region and localities in the province conveniently.

As a result, Hoa Binh can develop many types of tourism such as tourism combined with seminars, conferences, and weekend tourism, and as a place to connect tours and travel routes between the Northwest provinces and the midland and Northern Delta provinces of Vietnam. Outstanding features of Hoa Binh province's terrain are hills and high mountains, complex separation, and steep slopes, in the northwest-southeast direction, divided into two distinct regions: the northwest (highlands) and southeast (lowlands) with many cave systems that attract tourists such as Hoa Tien cave, Thac Bo cave, Thien Long cave, Da Bac cave, etc.

Hoa Binh's soil is extremely favorable for the development of forestry and agriculture and is considered an ideal condition for the development of agricultural tourism, rural tourism, and farm-stay accommodation. Regarding hydrology, Hoa Binh has 4 main river systems: Da River, Boi River, Buoi River, and Ma River. Among them, Da River Lake (Hoa Binh Lake) is very economically valuable, both helping the province's tourism development and serving many economic and defense goals. Since 2017, Hoa Binh province has implemented Resolution No. 14-NQ/TW of the Provincial Party Standing Committee on developing the Hoa Binh Lake tourist area into a national tourist area. By 2025, this place will become a national tourist area and typical tourism products are to learn and experience the national culture associated with the ecosystem of Hoa Binh lake bed.

Climate, Environment:

Hoa Binh is located in the tropical monsoon climate zone with characteristics of hot, humid, and cold winters. The average temperature during the year is 23°C; the average rainfall is 1,800 millimeters/year; the relative humidity is 85%; the average annual evaporation is 704 millimeters. The year's climate is divided into two distinct seasons: summer starts in April and ends in September; the average temperature is above 25°C, some days up to 43°C; the average monthly rainfall is over 100 millimeters, the highest time is 680 millimeters (1985); rain usually concentrates in July and August; the total seasonal rainfall accounts for 85 - 90% of the yearly rainfall. Winter begins in October of the previous year and ends in March of the following year; the average temperature during the month ranges from 16 - 20°C; rainfall in October is

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20 millimeters. Due to topographical characteristics, Hoa Binh also has northwest climate types with dry and cold winters and hot and humid summers (in the high mountains in the northwest); the Northern Delta climate type has milder weather (in low mountainous areas). Hoa Binh's climate and environmental characteristics have many advantages for developing agriculture and tourism. In particular, large lake beds are good conditions for aquaculture and ecological tourism development.

Natural Tourism Resources:

Hoa Binh province has very rich and diverse natural tourism resources, including rivers, lakes, mineral water springs, natural caves, nature reserves, and national parks. Especially, there is Hoa Binh Hydroelectric Lake with an area of over 8,000 hectares, a capacity of over nine billion cubic meters of water, and over 40 floating islands in the lake. This is a place with favorable conditions for developing fisheries, eco-tourism, sightseeing tourism, and sports resorts. With the beauty endowed by nature, the province has many beautiful caves with archaeological and aesthetic value such as the Tien Pagoda relic and scenic complex, Dau Rong Mountain scenic complex, Thac Bo cave, Dong Thech ancient tomb, etc. In the province, there are 4 nature reserves, majestic cave systems, and biodiversity creating beautiful natural landscapes. The mountainous terrain overlaps with a system of caves such as Bo Waterfall Cave, Ret Cave, Hoa Tien Cave, and Pu Nooc primeval tropical forest, opening up adventurous tourist routes for climbing, walking, hunting, and bathing in streams. Human power and nature have created for Hoa Binh a poetic Da River Lake area, allowing tourism development in the lake bed and lakeside with full bays and 47 large and small islands where rare flora and fauna are preserved.

Muong, Dao, and Tay villages are scattered along the lake and valley, creating a charming landscape painting that attracts tourists. The Hoa Binh Lake area has been planned as a national tourist area, focusing on exploiting the advantages of the lake water surface, landscape, ecosystem, and life of lakeside residents for sustainable development in the direction of green, clean, and preserving and promoting national cultural values, creating a difference to attract domestic and foreign tourists.

Hoa Binh has many hot mineral springs and mysterious wild valleys. A prominent example is Kim Boi Mineral Spring with water sprayed at a temperature of 36°C, qualified for drinking water, bathing, and medical treatment. Kim Boi spring water has been bottled as a beverage. This is the same type of mineral water as Thach Bich mineral water in Quang Ngai, Kum-dua in Russia, and Paven Barbia in Hungary. Therefore, Hoa Binh can exploit medical tourism.

In addition, districts such as Mai Chau, Da Bac, and Luong Son with stilt houses planned to be preserved for tourism, pristine and peaceful landscapes are very suitable places for ecological and cultural tourism development. In addition, the province also has natural reserves, including Hang Kia - Pa Co (Mai Chau), Thuong Tien, Phu Canh forest (Da Bac), Suoi Ngoc - Vua Ba (Luong Son), Ngoc Son - Ngo Luong (Tan Lac - Lac Son).

Cultural Tourism Resources:

Hoa Binh is a land where scientists have proven that ancient Vietnamese people lived. This place retains many traces of a brilliant culture through the discovery of 47 ancient bronze drums, including Da River bronze drums and Mieu Mon (places now in Hanoi bordering Hoa

Binh) which are beautiful and ancient. There are six ethnic groups living in the province, including Muong, Kinh, Thai, Tay, Mong, and Dao. Ethnic groups both retain their own cultural identities and preserve the cultural diversity of others in the community. The Tay and Thai people living in the province have many similarities in customs and activities. The Muong ethnic group has rich folk literature: Muong vi singing with bronze drum music, gong music, the epic song "Land and Water", etc. The Thai ethnic group has Thai folk songs with a high sense of community. A small number of Mong people in the province dance Khen, Umbrella, etc. Can wine products during holidays and festivals receive distinguished guests of the Muong and Thai people are a unique cultural feature that is indispensable in the identity of the people living on the land of the lower Da River.

Hoa Binh also has many festivals associated with the cultural life of indigenous people and can be exploited in tourism development such as Xen Ban Festival, Xen Muong Festival, Rain Praying Festival (Thai ethnic group), Cool Praying Ceremony, Muong Ban Blessing Ceremony, New Rice Ceremony, Praying Ceremony, Xec Bua Festival, etc. The cultural diversity of ethnic groups in Hoa Binh province creates the main attraction for tourists, especially international tourists. The uniqueness of the culture of ethnic minorities in Hoa Binh is expressed through the form of settlements and housing architecture, festivals, cuisine, art of dance and poetry, costumes, and traditional crafts. In Hoa Binh province, there are currently several villages operating for community tourism such as Giang Mo Village (Cao Phong District), Van Village, Lac Village, and Tong Village (Mai Chau District). Many famous temples and pagodas such as Tien Pagoda (Lac Thuy), Bo Temple (on Da River Lake), Hang Pagoda, and Bong Lai Temple are favorable places for spiritual tourism development.

Some Results Achieved by Hoa Binh Tourism in the Period 2018 - 2022

The Result of Attracting Tourists:

The period 2018 - 2022 was a special period for the tourism industry of the country in general and Hoa Binh province in particular when the COVID-19 epidemic officially appeared in Vietnam in the first months of 2020, making the tourism industry World and Vietnamese industry frozen due to the Government's social distancing and travel restriction policies. Before the COVID-19 epidemic, in the period 2015 - 2019, the average growth rate of Hoa Binh province's tourism industry reached 4.35% per year.

According to Table 1, in 2018 and 2019, the total number of tourists coming to Hoa Binh increased, however, in the next two years of the epidemic, 2020 and 2021, this data decreased significantly. Specifically, in 2020, the total number of visitors was 1,984,000, a decrease of approximately 1 million people compared to 2019. In 2021, the quantity continued to drop to 1,550,000.

However, starting from the second quarter of 2022, when the Vietnamese Government eliminated social distancing policies and opened up tourism development, the total number of tourists rose dramatically to 3,127,854, compared to the same period last year reached 211.6% and 121.2% of the year plan.

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Table 1: Total number of tourists coming to Hoa Binh province in the period 2018 - 2022

Criteria	Unit	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total tourist arrivals	**Arrival**	**2.695.185**	**3.111.275**	**1.984.000**	**1.550.000**	**3.127.854**
International visitors	Arrival	312.193	406.384	**259.000**	60.000	**137.537**
Domestic visitors	Arrival	2.382.992	2.704.891	**1.725.000**	1.490.000	**2.990.317**

Source: Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Hoa Binh

In 2020 and 2021, due to the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, the world and Vietnam tourism industry in general, and Hoa Binh province in particular, suffered great losses; the decline in the number of visitors and total revenue from tourism was inevitable, and did not accurately reflect Hoa Binh's tourism development efforts. However, the results of total visitor arrivals and revenue from tourism in 2022 proved the outstanding development of tourism in Hoa Binh province. After the COVID-19 pandemic, with the efforts of the entire tourism industry and the active participation of all levels of government, people, and businesses, tourism in Hoa Binh province has recovered and grown quickly, exceeding targets and annual plans. It can be said that Hoa Binh tourism has been near the level of 2019 when it was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Contribution of Tourism to the Province's Socio-Economic Development

Although Hoa Binh's tourism industry has just developed on a limited scale, it has had a fairly rapid growth rate in terms of number of visitors and revenue. During the period 2015 - 2019, the province's total revenue from tourism continuously increased over the years, and the average annual growth rate reached 10.7%. The results of total revenue from tourism in the entire province in the period 2018 - 2022 are shown in Table 2. 2019 was considered the golden age of Vietnam's tourism industry in general and Hoa Binh tourism in particular. Specifically, in 2019, total revenue from tourists was estimated to reach 2,075 billion VND, an increase of 2.4 times compared to 2015. In fact, in 2019, Hoa Binh province implemented many programs, large tourism development projects, and schemes, in which key solutions: continuing to improve infrastructure conditions, facilities, and quality of tourism services; pushing promotional and propaganda activities about tourist destinations in the area; developing diverse and unique tours and tourism products; connecting interprovincial tours with destinations in Hoa Binh province; training and enhancing community tourism skills in key localities and areas; improving the quality of tourism human resources; building a civilized and friendly tourism environment, creating attraction for domestic and international tourists, etc. Therefore, total revenue from tourism reached 2,075 billion VND, an increase of 36.51% compared to 2018.

Table 2: Total revenue from tourists in Hoa Binh province in the period 2018 - 2022

Criteria	Unit	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total revenue from tourists	**Million VND**	**1.520.815**	**2.075.759**	**1.886.000**	**1.513.000**	**3.614.000**
Revenue from international tourists	Million VND	521.658	605.000	-	-	-
Revenue from domestic tourists	Million VND	999.157	1.470.759	-	-	-

Source: Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Hoa Binh

With the growth rate of revenue and the contribution of tourism to GRDP, the province's economic structure has also changed towards increasing the proportion of services and reducing the proportion of agriculture and forestry. The development of Hoa Binh tourism contributes to creating jobs, improving the material and spiritual life of the community, and making an important contribution to hunger eradication and poverty reduction in the province. In addition to creating more jobs increasing income for local people, and improving living standards, tourism development also plays a role in enhancing people's knowledge thanks to expanding communication between people and tourists. Propaganda and promotion of tourism or festivals in the province will raise awareness about tourism for people in the province. This is one of the important benefits, consistent with the Party and State's social policies for mountainous ethnic minorities. Besides, the development of Hoa Binh tourism will help to preserve, conserve, and promote the province's landscape values, monuments, and cultural values in the international arena. In particular, the values of Muong ethnic culture and cultural heritage are preserved and promoted through propaganda, promotion, and interaction with tourists.

In summary, along with socio-economic development, Hoa Binh tourism has been attracting many domestic and foreign tourists to visit and cooperate in investment. The tourism industry's activities are increasingly vibrant and play an important role in the province's socio-economic development.

System of Service Facilities Serving Tourism

Regarding Accommodation Service Establishments:

The message "Hoa Binh, a safe tourist destination - a complete experience" spreads strongly not only to domestic tourists but also to international ones. The majestic natural landscape, diverse and rich cultural identity bearing the mark of Hoa Binh Culture, along with the activities of new and quality tourist areas and destinations have attracted a large number of visitors to enjoy and relax. It can be seen that in the period 2018 - 2022, the number of Hoa Binh accommodation establishments has increased significantly and the quality has also been increasingly improved. Only in 2021, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (from the beginning of 2020), affecting the hotel and motel business, the number of accommodation establishments had to stop operating up to 95%, many of them could not survive, so the number decreased compared to previous years.

Table 3: Statistics on the number of tourist accommodation establishments in Hoa Binh Province period 2018 - 2022

Year / Type	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Hotel	37	39	39	36	41
Motel	233	234	238	230	251
Stilt house, homestay	142	148	157	132	170
Total	**412**	**421**	**434**	**398**	**462**

(Source: Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Hoa Binh province)

Hoa Binh's tourist accommodation facilities are also a strength of the province, imbued with the essence of national culture, for example, a system of stilt houses is associated with

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community tourism activities in Mai Chau, Da Bac, Lac Son districts and the quality is relatively good, stable in both facilities and service style. Community tourism destinations are highly appreciated by tourists and operate effectively, contributing to increasing people's income. From 2016 up to now, Hoa Binh province is one of the few localities that has continuously received ASEAN awards for homestays and community tourism areas. The establishments that received the ASEAN homestay award are Lac village community tourism site, Chieng Chau commune (Mai Chau); homestay cluster in Hich 2 hamlet, Mai Hich commune (Mai Chau); Suoi Mu homestay cluster, Tu Do commune (Lac Son). Facilities that won the ASEAN community tourism award are community tourism sites in Pom Coong hamlet, Mai Chau town (Mai Chau), and Da Bia community tourism area, Tien Phong commune (Da Bac). The accommodation system has exploited the cultural identities of ethnic groups in the layout, design of facilities, staff uniforms, and the production of souvenirs for guests. The employees are friendly and hospitable.

During the COVID-19 pandemic that took place in 2020 and 2021, all tourist accommodation establishments in the province always proactively cleaned and disinfected the system of rooms and means of transporting tourists. Tourist areas, attractions, and restaurants recommended and distributed masks to visitors. It required visitors, officials, and employees to wear masks by the Ministry of Health. It organized the flow of tourists to avoid crowding in one location. In particular, tourist accommodation establishments seriously implemented the declaration of tourists' personal information to the authorities. It committed to not accepting visitors from epidemic areas. It proactively reported suspected cases of COVID-19 infection to authorities to take measures to quarantine and manage guests according to regulations.

However, the system of tourist accommodation establishments in the province is mainly small in scale, with a quality of three stars or less, and also exhibits some limitations in quality. For instance, some establishments lack professionalism in design, layout, and decoration; the qualifications of service staff are not uniform in foreign languages and information technology; creativity and leadership capacity are still limited. The facilities of many hotels are degraded and not upgraded promptly; service is at an average level, not yet diverse. Some do not pay attention to environmental protection issues. On the province's electronic information channel, the comprehensive database of quality accommodation facilities is not regularly updated in English and Vietnamese; the system has not been designed to interact with tourists (reservations, inquiries, comments, scoring, etc.).

Regarding Travel and Transportation Service Establishments:

Not only the accommodation service business, but the travel service business in Hoa Binh province also has many limitations. Specifically, up to now, only a few domestic travel units are operating on a small scale without international travel services and mainly depend on other units from big cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The total number of travel business units in the province by the end of 2022 was 12 units. Regarding intra-provincial passenger transport services, the number of tourist cars with over 30 seats and ground transport units has increased but not much; only the quantity of ships and boats in the Hoa Binh Lake tourist area and the number of electric vehicles serving tourist attractions and golf courses have increased significantly. This also shows that the development of tourism is still focused mainly on the Hoa Binh Lake tourist area.

Table 4: Statistics on the number of travel businesses and tourism transport units in Hoa Binh province in the period 2018 - 202

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Business Travel	12	13	14	12	12
Ground transport unit	10	12	12	11	13
Tourist cars with over 30 seats	25	28	29	22	30
Ships	230	261	278	250	295

(Source: Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Hoa Binh province)

Regarding Food Service Businesses:

These facilities are concentrated mainly in Hoa Binh City. Among them, there are several branded restaurants such as Manh Ngan Restaurant, Bep Muong Restaurant, V'Star Restaurant, AP Plaza Hotel Restaurant, Quan Ngon Restaurant, Happy Gold Wedding Restaurant, Restaurant Diamond Palace, Huong Cau Palace Restaurant with a scale of 200 to 1,500 seats. In addition, there are also food service establishments on the Da Giang dike route (Hoa Binh City), restaurants in tourist areas, and destinations such as Mai Chau, Kim Boi, and Lac Thuy that can accommodate from 50 to 500 guests. In general, food service establishments have met the needs of tourists; some large-scale establishments can serve large groups of tourists or organize big events. However, in order to meet the needs of visitors and tourist attractions, food service establishments need to improve and diversify their products, adding unique and highly competitive products and services.

Regarding Entertainment Facilities:

Currently, Hoa Binh has some facilities to serve the relaxation and entertainment needs of tourists at Tuoi Tre Park (Hoa Binh City, opened in September 2020), Hoa Binh Square, Water Park at Hoa Binh Lake tourist area (invested by businesses), the Heritage Center of Vietnamese Scientists in Cao Phong. Entertainment services are integrated in tourist areas such as the Thang Thien Waterfall eco-tourism area and, the Cuu Thac Tu Son tourist area, etc. Hoa Binh has 2 famous golf courses, Hilltop Valley Golf Club and Phuong Hoang Golf Course - Phoenix Golf Resort, which are popular with domestic and foreign golfers, contributing to the creation of the title of "Best Golf Destination in the World and Asia" for Vietnam in 2019 and 2021. In addition, there are also ethnic performance teams in community tourism villages, and more than 250 karaoke establishments, scattered across districts and cities but most concentrated in Hoa Binh city. In general, entertainment facilities in the province are lacking in quantity, activities are monotonous and do not meet the entertainment needs of local people as well as tourists when visiting Hoa Binh. In the province, there are currently several shopping destinations serving tourists such as Vincom Hoa Binh Supermarket, AP Plaza Supermarket, Vi Hoa Binh Supermarket, and Hoa Binh Market. In addition, there are other shopping facilities in tourist areas, tourist attractions, rest stops, and homestays. At these shopping locations, the products are mainly popular items serving people's daily lives; products serving tourists such as souvenirs, local specialties, etc. are limited.

Tourism Products

Since its formation, the Hoa Binh tourism industry has always focused on exploiting and developing various types of tourism and implementing programs to diversify tourism products. The main types of tourism in the province today include:

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Sightseeing and Resort Tourism:
Sightseeing tourism products exploited by travel companies all year round are tours to the Hoa Binh Hydroelectric Plant and sightseeing cruises on Hoa Binh Lake. These tours usually last from one to three days with destinations such as Hoa Binh Hydroelectric Plant, Thac Bo Temple and Cave, Muong Cultural Museum, and Coi Xay Gio Island. Besides, resort tourism is developed at mineral spring tourist areas in Kim Boi district; hot water mine in Lac Son district, and high-end weekend resorts such as Mai Chau Hideaway, Serena Kim Boi, Mai Chau Ecolodge, V Resort Hoa Binh, Vit Co Xanh, Beverly Hill Luong Son, Sunset Villas & Resort, etc.

Spiritual Tourism:
There are Tien Pagoda festivals, in Lac Thuy district; Thac Bo Temple Festival, in Cao Phong - Tan Lac district; Muong Bi Khai Ha Festival, in Tan Lac district; Xen Muong Festival, in Mai Chau district; and folk festivals in the historical sites, temples, and pagodas in the province, etc. Among them, Thac Bo Temple is the province's main spiritual tourism destination, attracting a large number of people every year, especially during the first 3 months of the lunar year. However, tours to Thac Bo are mainly day tours. Services consumed are mainly cruise and food services at local restaurants. Currently, in addition to pure spiritual tourism products, travel companies also combine sightseeing, destinations including spiritual sites with community tourism sites in the area. Accordingly, the number of days on the tour will be longer and there will be a greater expansion of services that tourists use while traveling, thereby bringing in greater revenue.

Community Cultural Tourism:
This is a strongly developed tourism product in Hoa Binh with stilt houses for accommodation, meals with Northwest mountain and forest specialties (pork, stream fish, fresh bamboo shoots, and hill chicken), accompanied by local cultural and artistic activities such as stall dancing, campfires of Thai ethnic people in Ban Lac, Poong Com, Ban Van in Mai Chau district; Muong ethnic people in Mo hamlet, Cao Phong district, Ai hamlet, Tan Lac district; Mong ethnic people in Hang Kia and Pa Co communes, Mai Chau district, etc. However, community tourism products still have many similarities with other localities and have not yet made a difference.

Ecotourism:
It develops mainly at tourist destinations of Dao Dua, Dao Xanh, Coi Xay Gio in Hoa Binh Lake area; Ngoc Son - Ngo Luong special-use forests, Lac Son - Tan Lac district; Pu Canh, Da Bac district, Thuong Tien - Kim Boi.

Discovery Tourism, Recreational Sports:
Tourism products explore ecological landscapes, and caves in Hoa Binh Lake area and recreational sports tourism in areas such as Phuong Hoang golf course, Luong Son district; paragliding sports tourism in Ngoc Son commune, Lac Son district; mountain climbing and boating in Hoa Binh Lake; cycling tourism in Hoa Binh City, walking tourism (trekking) with Da Bac walking tours, Mai Chau walking routes. Although it has appeared, this type of exploration tourism and recreational sports are only at a basic level and have not been invested in yet, so the products are still substandard and not attractive to tourists.

Evaluation of tourism development in Hoa Binh province for the period 2018 - 2022

Achievements Have Been Reached:

2018 - 2022 is an extremely difficult period for Vietnam's tourism industry in general, and Hoa Binh province's tourism industry in particular. Although there are still many difficulties, Hoa Binh province's tourism development activities have had many positive changes and achieved some successes, including:

- Firstly, the province has maintained a connection among units in the tourism industry, between tourism and other industries such as agriculture, transportation, and construction. In addition, Hoa Binh also maintains cooperative tourism relationships with other provinces and cities nationwide such as Hanoi, Hoa Binh, Son La, Dien Bien, Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Ha Giang, Phu Tho, etc.
- Secondly, in recent times, the province has done a good job of coordinating tourism promotion and organizing events in each province. It enhances information exchange, shares difficulties, and cooperates in building tourism products that both have local characteristics and common strengths of the entire Northwest region. It also focuses on developing branded, high-quality tourism products and builds tourist routes, spots, and resorts in each locality, creating highlights to improve the effectiveness of connections between localities.
- Thirdly, the province has focused on investing in synchronous construction of tourism infrastructure such as transportation, accommodation facilities, and entertainment attractions; especially, inter-provincial transportation infrastructure and roads connecting intra-provincial tourist destinations and areas in each locality.
- Fourthly, the province's human resource training and development work is carried out effectively, gradually creating a quality workforce to meet the province's connection tourism development.
- Fifthly, the organization of national tourism development strategies, plans, and policies is implemented with appropriate, instant, and timely methods. The province pays attention to building and promulgating according to its authority legal documents on tourism appropriate to the province's characteristics based on the legal document system of ministries, departments, and superior branches; legal documents have stable, long-term application value and are connected to the province's socio-economic development policies.

Limitations Still Exist:

Besides the successes that have been achieved, tourism development in Hoa Binh province still has some limitations as follows:

- Firstly, the implementation of strategies, planning, projects, and policies for tourism development still faces many difficulties and obstacles, especially resources that are still limited to serve the plan such as investment capital, and the province's human resources.
- Secondly, the province's legal document system on tourism development is not complete, there is still a lack of legal document system related to issues such as management of homestay and farm stay accommodation types; regulations on cave exploitation management in the tourism business; code of conduct in tourist activities; coordination regulations among relevant departments, branches, and sectors in supporting tourists; regulations related to exploitation and ensuring safety for tourists

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when participating in adventure tourism activities as well as ensuring hygiene and safety for tourists and local communities.

- Thirdly, the human resources team is still weak in foreign languages and management ability and does not meet domestic and international human resource quality standards as well as the requirements of tourism development trends in the new competitive context.
- Fourthly, promotional activities do not have a long-term strategy, especially for key international markets; investment resources for this activity are limited. Hoa Binh province does not invest in research and providing orientations for the tourist market; it does not promptly contribute information and create conditions for businesses to participate in domestic and international conferences and seminars on tourism development to introduce tourism products. The annual State budget allocated for propaganda, advertising, and tourism investment promotion is still small and has not mobilized resources from domestic and foreign businesses and investors to participate in this field.
- Fifthly, tourism products lack diversity, and uniqueness, and do not meet quality standards. There is no database to serve market research and strategic tourism product development in the province. Tourism business units are small in scale, focusing mainly on motel and hotel accommodation services; there are not many high-quality service areas, tourist attractions, or entertainment areas. There are no international travel businesses, agents, branches, or international travel representative offices operating in the province. Currently, there are only a few small-scale domestic travel businesses.
- Sixthly, there is no effective coordination of tourism destination management activities. Unification and coordination among authorities in tourism management have not been created, leading to the limitation to fully exploit the potential of tourism businesses in the province. There is no effective combination between resource exploitation and conservation with poor pollution and waste management.
- Seventhly, the technical infrastructure for tourism is not synchronized, especially the transportation system. Capital sources from the State budget to invest in building infrastructure, and technical facilities to serve tourism and the propaganda and promotion of tourism investment are still limited; many projects have been licensed for investment but have not been implemented on schedule, causing a waste of resources.

The Cause of the Limitations:

Subjective Reasons:

- Firstly, like many localities nationwide, the overdevelopment in the tourism sector has put Hoa Binh province in a situation of "forced development" while many conditions are lacking. Therefore, although the province has made many efforts in tourism development, it has not achieved the desired goals and effectiveness.
- Secondly, the management staff in state management agencies in tourism is still insufficient in strength, young, and lacks management experience, leading to low work efficiency.
- Thirdly, the infrastructure system and facilities serving tourism still have many weaknesses.
- Fourthly, poor awareness of some individuals and organizations leads to mistakes in the process of implementing connection tourism development.

Objective Reasons:

- Firstly, the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in the period 2020-2021 has caused serious impacts on the province's socio-economic and tourism development, leading to stagnation in many economic and management activities.
- Secondly, the 4.0 industrial revolution has created major changes in the tourism industry. The way tourists consult, choose, order, and experience trips has many changes and is increasingly oriented towards electronic communication. This requires businesses and state management agencies in tourism to update. However, for a new province on the rise, with many limitations in human and material resources like Hoa Binh, this is a relatively big difficulty and needs to be actively improved for development.

Solutions For Tourism Development in Hoa Binh Province in The Coming Time

Innovating Awareness and Thinking About Tourism Development:

It is important to clearly define tourism as a comprehensive service economic sector, with inter-sectoral, inter-regional, highly socialized, and profound cultural content; capable of making important contributions to the socio-economic development of each locality. It creates many jobs, transforms economic structure, and makes motivation for other industries and fields to develop. Moreover, it also brings efficiency in many aspects of politics, economics - society, foreign affairs, and defense-security. The province continues to innovate thinking on tourism development according to the rules of the market economy, ensuring consistency in perspectives, goals, and action programs and having breakthrough mechanisms and policies to meet the requirements of developing into a key economic sector in the coming period. It raises awareness at all levels and sectors about innovating tourism development thinking.

Restructuring The Tourism Industry Towards Professionalism, Modernity, and Sustainable Development According to The Rules of The Market Economy and International Integration:

It is necessary to focus on investing in infrastructure construction, attracting strategic investors and the whole society, effectively exploiting potentials and advantages, and developing tourism into a key economic sector. It arranges and restructures the organization and staff of the tourism industry from the province to the grassroots, giving priority to tourism development in the overall economic development. The province leads the effective implementation of the Master Plan for Tourism Development, Hoa Binh Lake National Tourism Area, Mai Chau National Tourist Site, and the Project of localities up to the year 2020, vision to 2030. It focuses on prioritizing capital allocation from the State budget to invest in synchronous construction of tourism infrastructure, including Hoa Binh Lake tourist area and Mai Chau district tourist destination soon to meet the criteria of national tourist areas and destinations; It promotes the development of tourist attractions such as Tien Pagoda (Lac Thuy district), Kim Boi mineral water, and Lac Son, Tan Lac, Yen Thuy districts and ecological tourism development in nature reserves. It is a good idea to attract investment to develop high-end branded and competitive cultural, spiritual, ecological, community, resort, and entertainment tourism products.

Continuing To Supplement and Perfect Mechanisms and Policies on Tourism Development:

It should develop mechanisms and policies to prioritize promoting tourism development into a key economic sector, suitable and meeting the requirements and nature of the general

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economic sector, operating according to market mechanisms. In addition, it makes mechanisms and preferential policies to support site clearance, infrastructure construction, propaganda, human resource training, and community tourism development at Hoa Binh Lake tourist area, Mai Chau district tourist destination to soon meet the conditions become a national tourist area and destination.

Investing in Developing Infrastructure and Technical Facilities:
It is important to invest in the construction and upgrading of road traffic infrastructure systems, stations, parking lots, stops and rest stops for tourists on National Highway 6, Ho Chi Minh Road, Hoa Lac Road - Hoa City City; It builds inland waterway ports in the Hoa Binh Lake area and waterways to create favorable conditions for connecting tourist areas and destinations in the province with other ones in the region. The province mobilizes capital sources from the State budget, development assistance (ODA), non-governmental organizations, and socialization in order to invest in building infrastructure for tourism and improving traffic connectivity to tourist areas and destinations inside and outside the province.

Strengthening Tourism Promotion and Promotion:
It innovates methods of investment promotion activities and attracts potential investors to create high-quality tourism products and types suitable to the province's potential and strengths. At the same time, it builds product development strategies, making Hoa Binh province's tourism brand associated with typical and unique images bearing the cultural identities of ethnic groups, especially the Muong ethnic cultural identity. The authorities strengthen industrial socialization advertising and promote tourism, taking advantage of capital and technical support from organizations and businesses. It exploits and promotes the effectiveness of propaganda and advertising on the Internet as well as expands domestic and international connections and cooperation in promoting tourism products.

Creating A Favorable Environment for Businesses and Communities to Develop Tourism:
State management is innovated in the direction of serving businesses and the people; it implements administrative reforms and creates a favorable, fair, and transparent business environment for organizations, units, businesses, and households providing tourism services. There is a policy to support start-up businesses in the field of tourism services, especially Hoa Binh Lake Tourist Area, and Mai Chau District Tourist Site. Priority is given to strategic investors in key tourist areas and plans to support and create favorable conditions for them.

Developing Tourism Human Resources:
It is necessary to improve the professional capacity of tourism management staff from the province to the grassroots level. It focuses on training and developing on-site human resources to transfer to service jobs at tourist areas, attractions, hotels, restaurants, and passenger transportation, especially Hoa Binh Lake Tourist Area and Mai Chau district tourism. It promotes socialization in training and fostering to improve the quality of human resources. It prioritizes the development of human resources in a professional, civilized direction, improving competitiveness to attract tourists.

Enhancing the Effectiveness and Efficiency of State Management of Tourism:
It focuses on researching, arranging, and strengthening the organization of the state management apparatus from the provincial level to districts and cities in a synchronous, professional, effective, and efficient manner, meeting the requirements of inter-sectoral and inter-regional management of tourism activities. It pays attention to investing in preserving and promoting the cultural values of ethnic groups in Hoa Binh province; it takes care of preserving and exploiting the values of Mo Muong and Chieng Muong culture to create typical tourism products as well as promote linkage activities, cooperation, and development.

CONCLUSION

The study "Tourism Development in Hoa Binh Province in the Context of Economic Integration" is conducted by the research team in the period 2018-2022. As the results of this research, the authors hope to contribute to improving the efficiency of tourism development in Hoa Binh province and making Hoa Binh tourism a key economic sector, promoting the socio-economic development of the province. Despite research efforts, due to limited time and knowledge and the issue of tourism development being a broad issue, within the framework of this topic, the research team has only proposed and given general solutions to promote tourism development activities in Hoa Binh province. Detailed problems and solutions need to be further studied in subsequent research works.

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