

Researching the Challenges Tour Guides Face in Ensuring Sustainable Tourism Development

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Abstract

Tour guides have been equipped with knowledge to understand their important role in sustainable tourism development. However, in practice, they are facing many difficulties in trying to perform behaviors and implement specific actions in this role. Based on the process of contributing to sustainable tourism development by tour guides, the paper conducted a survey on 5 issues: (1) Searching for and updating information; (2) Serving as role models for tourists; (3) Incorporating information about sustainable tourism development into presentations; (4) Advising tourists on appropriate behavior; (5) Accepting the reduction of personal benefits to contribute to local economic development to determine the level of difficulty tour guides encounter in performing this process.

Keywords— *Tour guides, sustainable development, the role of tour guides*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the tourism industry, guiding and escorting are not just economic sectors but also powerful entities responsible not only for organizing and guiding tourists but also for shaping tourism trends (Manh, N. V., Chuong, P. H. 2006). Therefore, it is accurate to say that guiding and escorting play a crucial role in promoting the sustainable development of the tourism industry. Among various factors such as qualifications, work environment, and accessibility, tour guides play a pivotal role in influencing, guiding, and supervising tourism activities at destinations with the aim of building a sustainable tourism industry. Tour guides not only help tourists understand the impacts of tourism on the environment, culture, and local community but also guide them to participate in environmental and cultural protection activities and support local products.

Many studies have indicated that individual behavior depends on perceptions of behavioral control, attitudes, and personal standards (Ajzen, 1991). Chartrand and Bargh (1999) also mentioned the intimate relationship between behavior and perception. However, during the execution of behavior, even with clear perceptions, activities may be influenced by various environmental factors.

Currently, sustainability and related issues are emphasized in tourism training organizations. This has provided knowledge and changed the perception of tour guides, helping them realize their important role in the sustainable development strategy of the tourism industry. However, the reality shows that many tour guides are still not fully prepared or face difficulties in fulfilling their roles in the development of the tourism industry.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH MODEL

2.1. Theoretical framework

Tour guide

The term "tour guide" is one of the job positions in the tourism industry. According to the Oxford dictionary, a tour guide is defined as someone who directs others (Ludowyk & Moore, 1996). According to the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (2005), a tour guide is someone who guides tourists using their chosen language and explains the cultural and natural heritage of an area. Although there are various definitions, the essence of this term is relatively consistent. In 1998, the International Association of Tourism Managers (IATM) and the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations

(EFTGA, 1998) provided a definition: "A tour guide is a person who guides groups or individual tourists, both domestic and foreign, to specific historical sites or landmarks and promotes the cultural and natural heritage of the tourist destination in an entertaining manner and in the language chosen by the tourists."

In Vietnam, tour guiding is an activity that provides information, connects services, guides tourists, and assists tourists in using services according to the tour program. Tour guides are individuals licensed to work as tour guides (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2017).

The role of tour guides

Cohen (1985) and Urry (1990) emphasized two important roles of tour guides: as leaders and as mediators. Pond (1993) summarized the basic roles of tour guides, including leadership, education, public representation, hosting, and performing all these roles professionally and effectively.

Research by Macdonald illustrates the role of tour guides as intermediaries to enrich tourists' experiences. Tour guides not only provide directions and organize trips but also create profound experiences with tourist destinations and spaces. They also act as intermediaries between tourists and the local community, facilitating effective communication and conveying cultural and environmental information (Macdonald, S., 2006).

The Tourism Law 2017 stipulates the duties of tour guides, including guiding tourists, complying with laws, providing information and assistance to tourists, ensuring safety, and playing an important role in the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

The role of tour guides is not only to provide guidance but also to create experiences, communicate culture, protect the environment, and contribute to the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Sustainable tourism development

The concept of "sustainable tourism" emerged in 1996 and has been supported by many countries and major tourism associations worldwide. It is understood as tourism conducted responsibly with respect for the environment and local culture, benefiting both tourists and the local community. Researchers such as Hens. L (1998) and Machado (2003) have contributed to defining and researching sustainable tourism. In Vietnam, this topic has also received attention from researchers and is mentioned in the Tourism Law 2017. It is a comprehensive approach, combining economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects to ensure the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

2.2. Research model and Research methodology

Research model

For the perception of the difficulty level in performing tasks contributing to sustainable tourism development by tour guides, it was investigated through the variables (1) Searching, updating information; (2) Setting an example for tourists; (3) Integrating information about sustainable tourism development into presentations; (4) Advising tourists on appropriate behavior; (5) Accepting to sacrifice personal benefits to contribute to local economic development using a 5-point Likert scale: (1) very difficult, (2) difficult, (3) neutral, (4) easy, and (5) very easy.

Challenges faced by tour guides	Searching for and updating information	Vietnam Tourism Occupation Standards: Tour Guide (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2015)
	Serving as role models for tourists	
	Incorporating information about sustainable tourism development into presentations	
	Advising tourists on appropriate behavior	
	Accepting the reduction of personal benefits to contribute to local economic development	Author proposes

Research Methodology

Sample size

The sample size for survey-related studies often varies. Hair (2009) and his colleagues suggest that the minimum sample size should be between 100 – 150. According to Erin (2018).

The participants in the study are tour guides who are currently or have previously collaborated with travel companies in Ho Chi Minh City. The survey was conducted from October to December 2023, with a total of 187 surveys collected. After removing invalid survey responses, there were 168 valid responses, meeting the minimum sample size requirement (165).

Survey method

The survey method is the primary methodology of this study. Based on the information obtained from the aforementioned methods, the author designed a system of

appropriate questions to collect information for the research. The survey aims to determine the role of tour guides in sustainable tourism development and the challenges they face.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Challenges tour guides encounter in performing their roles in sustainable tourism development

	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Average Value	Standard deviation	Evaluation
Searching for and updating information	2	5	3.35	.848	neutral
Serving as role models for tourists	2	5	3.53	.935	easy
Incorporating information about sustainable tourism development into presentations	2	5	3.43	.964	easy
Advising tourists on appropriate behavior	2	5	3.30	.983	neutral
Accepting the reduction of personal benefits to contribute to local economic development	1	5	3.35	.949	neutral

Based on the results of Table 1, it can be seen that there are no activities that make tour guides feel difficult. The activities of serving as role models for tourists (3.53) and integrating information on sustainable tourism development into presentations (3.43) are evaluated as relatively easy to perform. Steps such as searching for and updating information (3.35), accepting reducing personal benefits to contribute to local economic development (3.35), and advising tourists on appropriate behavior (3.30) all have average scores, indicating a normal level of difficulty in implementation. However, among tour guides, there is a difference in the level of difficulty they encounter in each step, as evidenced by high standard deviations and scores ranging from 1 to 5 on the scale.

Searching and Updating information:

Survey results on searching and updating information about sustainable tourism development show that tour guides perceive the difficulty level of this task as average (3.35), but there is still diversity among tour guides in how they perceive the difficulty. Some tour guides find this task very easy (score 5), while others find it challenging (score 2).

The complexity and multidimensionality of the sustainable tourism field make searching and updating information challenging for tour guides. This is not only an environmental issue but also involves various socio-cultural, economic, and other related aspects. The diversity in information requires tour guides to gather knowledge

from multiple sources, ranging from research reports to government policies and online news. This creates difficulties as information may not always be accurate. The next challenge is keeping up with rapid changes in the tourism and sustainable tourism industry, where policies and strategies may change due to climate change, global events, and economic developments. Lack of resources also poses challenges, reducing the ability to update new knowledge. To overcome these challenges, tour guides can seek support from reliable sources and continuously update information from credible sources to enhance understanding.

Setting an example for tourists and colleagues:

Survey results on tour guides serving as role models for tourists and colleagues, achieving an average score of 3.53, indicate that many tour guides find this task easy. However, among the surveyed tour guides, some still find it difficult (score 2) to serve as role models for tourists and colleagues.

Some tour guides face difficulties due to differences in perceptions of sustainable tourism. Some understand the issue well, while others lack information. The business environment often focuses on profit, creating conflicts between sustainable development and the demands of travel companies. Company policies can affect tour guides' motivation. Lack of policy support is also an issue, reducing their commitment. To set an example for others, tour guides need to enhance their knowledge and use

communication skills to promote positive changes in the tourism industry.

Integrating information on sustainable tourism development into presentations:

Presentations on each trip are not only an activity but have become an essential task for every tour guide. However, integrating information on sustainable tourism development into presentations remains a significant challenge for tour guides. Survey results show that the average score for tour guides' perceptions of this task is easy (3.43), although this score only slightly exceeds the normal level (3.40). While some tour guides rate this task as very easy (score 4) or even extremely easy (score 5), others still find it difficult (score 2) to incorporate scientific information on sustainable tourism development into emotionally charged presentations.

A significant challenge is the difference in tourists' understanding of sustainable tourism. Some tourists may not fully comprehend the negative impacts of tourism, requiring time and patience to understand and change their behavior. However, some tourists may not be willing to change their behavior due to personal comfort and convenience. In the tourism business environment, profit goals can create pressure, diverting attention from sustainable behaviors. Tour guides need extensive knowledge and communication skills to promote positive awareness and actions from tourists, through open negotiation and discussion.

Advising tourists on appropriate behavior:

Based on survey results, the average perception score of tour guides regarding advising tourists on appropriate behavior is 3.30, indicating significance at the normal level. This is the step with the lowest average score, meaning that it is considered the most challenging for tour guides. Among tour guides, there is also a difference in perception of the difficulty level in performing this task. While some tour guides find this task very easy (score 5), others still feel difficulty (score 2) in advising tourists on appropriate behavior.

For tour guides, a significant challenge is the inconsistency in tourists' perceptions of sustainable tourism. Some tourists may not fully realize the negative impact of tourism, requiring time and patience to understand and change their behavior. However, some tourists may not be willing to change their behavior due to personal comfort and convenience. In the tourism business environment, profit goals can create pressure, diverting attention from sustainable behaviors. Tour guides need extensive knowledge and communication skills to promote positive awareness and actions from tourists, through open negotiation and discussion.

Accepting reducing personal benefits to contribute to local economic development:

Accepting reducing personal benefits to contribute to local economic development may be the most distinctly different task in terms of perceived difficulty among tour guides. In the survey results, although some tour guides rate this task as very easy, others find it very difficult (score 1). However, the average perception score of the difficulty level of this task for tour guides is 3.35, significant at the normal level.

Accepting a reduction in personal benefits to support local economic development is a significant challenge for tour guides. This reduction may pose risks to their personal lives and comfort. Travel companies often do not factor shopping commissions into profits, so changing shopping points can affect tour guides' income. They also have to comply with company business regulations; however, support and education from tourism organizations and governments can help them better understand their roles and support local economic development.

Other challenges faced by tour guides:

Tour guides face many challenges in participating in sustainable tourism development. Lack of environmentally friendly products, limited funding, and difficulties in collecting feedback from tourists are the top obstacles. They also struggle to convey feedback from tourists and face a lack of financial resources to promote the use of environmentally friendly products. Their work requires them to address a range of challenges, from searching for information to persuading customers about sustainable tourism and even sacrificing personal benefits. This creates considerable pressure for tour guides.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the process of contributing to sustainable tourism development, tour guides encounter certain challenges. According to the survey results, the difficulty level of the steps increases in the following order: being a role model for tourists; integrating information about sustainable tourism development into presentations; searching and updating information; accepting personal sacrifices to contribute to local economic development; advising tourists on appropriate behavior. Additionally, some tour guides also indicated that issues related to tourists, local communities, and environmentally friendly products are causing difficulties in fulfilling their roles in sustainable tourism development.

The research results in this study provide a basis for the article to propose some recommendations to create

conditions for tour guides to enhance their knowledge and behavior, thereby making better contributions to the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

For stakeholders

In the process of sustainable tourism development, stakeholders such as government agencies, local authorities, local communities, and tourism businesses play important roles in the activities of tour guides. These stakeholders, besides influencing the activities of tour guides, can also provide support to create favorable conditions, helping tour guides perform their intermediary role in sustainable tourism development better.

Government agencies, Local authorities

Government agencies and local authorities can undertake several activities to support tour guides in sustainable tourism development. Firstly, they can organize training programs and in-depth workshops on sustainable tourism, focusing on conveying knowledge about environmental protection, local cultural preservation, and promoting responsible economic development at destinations. Secondly, they can establish specialized information channels providing guidance and information for tour guides about sustainable tourism destinations, as well as activities in line with sustainable principles. Thirdly, they can organize events, conferences, and workshops to create opportunities for tour guides to exchange, share experiences, and learn from each other about methods and skills in promoting sustainable tourism development. Lastly, they can propose policies to cooperate with non-governmental organizations, local communities, and tourism businesses to promote sustainable tourism, creating favorable conditions for tour guides to fulfill their tasks.

Local communities

Local communities play an important role in supporting tour guides in sustainable tourism development. They can create favorable conditions by respecting and closely cooperating with tour guides, contributing together to the sustainable development of the tourism industry. Additionally, receiving feedback from tourists and tour guides is very important, as it will help improve the quality of services and increase tourist satisfaction with destinations. For this reason, building good relationships and maintaining communication with tour guides will also contribute to enhancing the quality of the tourism experience. Finally, efficiently exploiting the tourism potential of the locality and promoting sustainable development through the production of unique tourism products, cultural value preservation, and environmental protection is an essential part of the comprehensive development of the tourism industry.

Travel companies, Tourism businesses

To support tour guides in contributing to sustainable development, travel companies and tourism businesses can take several measures as follows: Firstly, they can develop a company development strategy with a clear focus on sustainable tourism, aiming at the benefits of the community and society. Secondly, they can organize periodic training courses and workshops for tour guides on issues related to sustainable tourism. These courses may revolve around topics such as promoting economic development at destinations, socio-cultural aspects, and the environment. Thirdly, they can establish and maintain close relationships with local communities to create sustainable tourism products. Companies can collaborate with local producers to develop high-quality, interesting, and environmentally and socially responsible tourism tours, thereby creating favorable conditions for tour guides to perform their roles well. Lastly, to alleviate economic pressure on tour guides in supporting sustainable development of the tourism industry, travel companies need to implement incentive policies and special mechanisms for guides who strive to protect the environment, culture, and support local economic development. Additionally, companies should recognize and honor ideas contributing to building sustainable operation models for tourism businesses proposed by tour guides.

For tour guides

To enable tour guides to positively contribute to sustainable tourism development, the topic proposes some recommendations as follows: Firstly, tour guides need to have a deep understanding of the importance of building a sustainable tourism industry and understand their important role in this process. They need to adhere to principles and regulations to become ideal role models for tourists. Secondly, continuously updating knowledge about sustainable tourism development through reliable sources of information and participating in courses, workshops will help tour guides enhance their awareness and understanding of this issue. Tour guides also need to integrate information about sustainable tourism development into their presentations, creating opportunities for tourists to better understand their impact and encourage positive actions. Lastly, close collaboration with stakeholders such as local communities, government agencies, and tourism businesses will create favorable conditions for tour guides to fulfill their roles and contribute to the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

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