# SOLUTIONS FOR ATTRACTING TOURISTS TO VINH LONG PROVINCE WITH THE LOCAL MARKETING APPROACH

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**Abstract:** In the globalized economic environment, marketing activities are not just limited to a specific business, industry, field, or certain product, but they are being increasingly and vigorously developed in a locality, region, or country. Vinh Long possesses some competitive advantages in developing local tourism. Therefore, the province needs to conduct assessments and seek solutions for attracting tourists based on the local marketing approach to be able to develop tourism with a reasonable strategy in the context of localities working together to promote tourism.

**Keywords:** *Local marketing, attract tourists, tourism*

## 1. Introduction

In the globalized economic environment, marketing activities are not limited to specific businesses, industries, fields, or products, but they have been developing strongly in areas, regions, localities (provinces and cities) as well as the whole country. Many countries have succeeded in attracting tourists to their countries, but there are also some countries where tourism development has not met the expectation. A view mutually agreed upon by many policymakers in terms of localities is that each locality should be considered a brand, or a local brand, to be marketed.

According to Philip Kotler, "The future of local development does not depend on geographical location, climate, or natural resources. The future of local development depends on the expertise, skills, and quality of local people and organizations." Today, localities are required to act on their own as a market-oriented enterprise. Leaders need to know how to build their locality into an attractive product, and simultaneously know how to effectively promote the characteristics of this "product" to their target markets.

Vinh Long is one of 13 provinces in the Mekong Delta, known as a province with a more special geographical position compared with other provinces. Vinh Long is located in the lower Mekong basin, between Tien Giang and Hau Giang rivers, connecting the two major rivers in the north-south direction by Mang Thit River. Taking advantage of the Mekong River, Vinh Long's tourism industry is associated with rivers and fruit orchards, creating a special product of eco-tourism (Homestay). Besides, Vinh Long is also known as "a sacred land with extraordinary people". Despite possessing many potential advantages for development, over the past time, the ability to attract tourists to Vinh Long has not been commensurate with the province's tourism potential, and the image of tourism products is still fuzzy and overlaps with those of some other provinces in the region. From a local perspective as a "product", the question raised is how to improve and promote the product to suit the target market based on

the existing capacity. Therefore, the research problem is to discover the advantages and tourist attractions of the locality to use local marketing tools in attracting tourists to Vinh Long.

## 2. Research purpose and methods

*Purpose.* The research purpose is to survey and analyze the situation of tourist attraction and local marketing in Vinh Long province, thereby proposing solutions for attracting visitors to Vinh Long according to the local marketing approach.

*Methods*

Qualitative research: The theory of tourist attraction factors and research models related to the topic were used as the basis for proposing research models, designing survey questionnaires, and collecting experts' opinions. The questionnaire was modified for the second time and a pilot survey was conducted to determine the final questionnaire.

Quantitative research: The research was conducted through a survey using a questionnaire for 166 having used tourism services in Vinh Long. A 5-point Likert scale (1- Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Agree, 5 - Totally agree) was applied to each question in the questionnaire finished from qualitative research results. The scale was then tested using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient to eliminate the garbage variables. Variables with item-total correction < 0.3 would be removed and the scale was accepted in the case of Cronbach Alpha >= 0.6 (Nunnually & Burnstein, 1994). Next, the convergence of the scale was tested and variables were reduced with EFA factor analysis: According to Hair & ctg (2006), the extraction method of "Principal Component" is used together with the perpendicular rotation "Varimax" to be able to extract as many variances from the measured variables with the smallest number of components.

According to Hair & ctg (2006), the correlation between the measured variables can be tested by the Barlett test. The scale is accepted when the coefficient is $0.5 < KMO < 1$. Criteria for choosing the number of factors is based on the Initial Eigenvalues index>1 and the suitability of the model is tested in case of the total variance extracted (Cumulative) > 50%. The convergence value of factors is tested when the variables have a factor loading >= 0.5; variables with a loading coefficient < 0.5 will be excluded. The group of factors was named according to the results and the proposed research model.

After the scale was processed, linear regression analysis was conducted to identify the relationship between the impact components of the X and Y scales. The expected regression model:

$$Y = A + A1X1 + A2X2 + A 3X3 + \ldots + AiXi$$

The multicollinearity test with VIF<2 did not have multicollinearity and Durbin - Watson from 1.5 - 2.5; independent variables had no sign of autocorrelation.

## 3. The situation of attracting tourists to Vinh Long according to the local marketing approach

*Research sample*

The survey sample was officially collected at some tourist attractions such as Vinh Sang, An Binh, Chin Rong and hotels such as Tai Nguyen, Cuu Long, Vinh Sang, and Ngu Long.

According to Hair et al (2006), to use EFA analysis, the sample size should be at least 50, preferably 100, and the ratio of observations to the measurement variable (items) is 5:1, which means that 1 measurement variable needs a minimum of 5 observations. It is because the factor analysis model has 31 variables (criteria) measuring the attractiveness of Vinh Long's tourism.

Therefore, the minimum sample size of the research was 31 x 5 = 155 observations. In this research, 166 subjects were surveyed by random sampling and 166 satisfactory results were collected. Data were processed using SPSS 16.0.

*Research results*

Information about the research sample: The results of processing 166 survey questionnaires showed that, in terms of gender, the number of females was 94 (56.6%), males 72 (43.4%). In terms of occupation, the sample includes 46 civil servants and public employees (27.7%), 72 students (43.4%), 14 workers (8.4%), 16 persons in the business sector (9.6%), 10 farmers (6%), and 8 persons of other occupations (4.8%). The sample was consistent with the reality, because the majority of tourists visited Vinh Long on weekends, and they were students, civil servants, and public employees.

Regarding the tourist age, the majority of tourists coming to Vinh Long were young people from 20 to 35 years old, 125 people (75.3%), and the lowest number of visitors was 50-60 years old (4.2%). Domestic visitors to Vinh Long residing in the South were 93 people (56%), the North 54 people (32.5%), and the Central region 19 people (11.4%).

Tourists to Vinh Long mostly traveled on tours transferred from travel companies in Ho Chi Minh City, with the number of 95 people (57.2%), free travel 50 people (30.1%), others 21 people (12.7%). Guests staying 1 night accounted for a large number of 150 people (90.4%), guests staying 2 nights were 11 people (6.6%), and guests staying for over 2 nights were 5 people (3%). The main purpose of tourists was to visit, being 114 people (68.7%), spending time in resorts 26 people (15.7%), doing business was 12 people (7.2%), and 14 people (8.4%) for other purposes.

**Evaluating the scale with Cronbach's alpha coefficient**

According to the evaluation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient, 31 observable variables were reduced to 21. The model consisted of 21 variables with Cronbach Alpha of 0.879 > 0.6. All variables in the model had a total correlation > 0.3. Moreover, if any more variables were removed from the model, Cronbach's alpha coefficient would be below 0.879, so the remaining variables in the model were kept to be included in the EFA analysis.

**EFA analysis for the independent variables**

All 18 independent variables were included in the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). After 2 EFA analyses, 18 observed variables were extracted into 4 groups of factors with 17 observable variables (Type 1, variable V14 has a loading coefficient less than 0.5); all observable variables had a satisfactory load multiplier > 0.5. All factors had high level of reliability and validity.

**Group 1 (F1): Infrastructure, geographical location and entertainment places**

- Convenient ferry transport system
- Sufficient means of transportation
- Convenient location for waterway travel
- Convenient location for road travel
- Safe and comfortable campsites
- Unique activities in hamlets and villages
- Attractive amusement parks and squares
- Attractive nightlife

**Group 2 (F2): Natural and humanistic tourist destinations**

- Attractive and unique garden tourist destination

- Friendly and hospitable local people
- Notable celebrity memorial sites

**Group 3 (F3): Bonus services**

- Relaxation and health care service
- Conference and exhibition centers
- Supermarket in the shopping street

**Group 4 (F4): Food and accommodation**

- Food suiting different tastes
- Delicious local dishes
- Room quality at reasonable prices

**Factor equation:**

$F1$ = 0.286$X1$ + 0.212$X2$ + 0.253$X6$ + 0.157$X7$ + 0.157$X10$ + 0.176$X11$ + 0.242$X12$ + 0.159$X13$

$F2$ = 0.379X14 + 0.378$X15$ + 0.353$X16$

$F3$ = 0.349$X3$ + 0.580$X4$ + 0.329$X5$

$F4$ = 0.329$X8$ + 0.527$X9$ + 0.316$X17$

From the above equation, it can be seen that factor X4 (0.580) involves conference and exhibition centers and factor X9(0.527) involves delicious local dishes. These are the two factors that exert the strongest impact on the level of tourist attraction to Vinh Long. In addition, factors X3, X4, and X5 also have a strong impact on the tourism attraction of Vinh Long, which are attractive and unique garden tourist destinations, friendly and hospitable local people, and notable monuments and memorials of celebrities. This is consistent with the current situation of Vinh Long's tourism because the province's tourism resources which can attract tourists are mostly garden tourist spots; moreover, the local people are friendly and hospitable and the province also introduces lots of delicious local dishes. Besides, the supplement of conference and exhibition services would contribute to increasing the attraction of Vinh Long's tourism.

4. **Local marketing strategies and solutions for attracting visitors to Vinh Long through the local marketing approach**

**Local marketing strategies to attract tourists to Vinh Long**

*a) Local image marketing strategy (promotion)*

Based on the natural, human, cultural, and socio-economic conditions of Vinh Long, it can be seen that the following values and characteristics can be the foundation for the image of Vinh Long; for example, An Binh Island – a green, affluent, and peaceful destination. The destination is suitable for developing eco-tourism as well as river and garden tours. The place is also the hometown of heroes such as Vo Van Kiet and Pham Hung. When the image of Vinh Long tourism is introduced, the slogan "Peaceful eco-tourism" can be used. From an international perspective, when it comes to Vietnam, the image of "peace" will play a key role in attracting tourists, ensuring a safe trip, reducing stress in life and stimulating positive thoughts. At the same time, "peace" is also associated with Vinh Long's homestay tourist destination, An Binh island, a typical tourist destination in Vinh Long. This attraction has been known by many international and domestic tourists; therefore, this image can be used for local marketing in the field of tourism.

*b) Marketing strategy with local characteristics (products)*

These are local highlights of the locality with high tourist attraction value. These highlights can be favored by nature, left by history or built by the locality. Vinh Long, endowed with fruit gardens and homestay tourism, is capable of attracting international tourists. The attractive features of Vinh Long's landscape can be the ditches and canals interspersed with fruit gardens, or the charming, peaceful and quiet sceneries accompanied by different kinds of fruits such as Nam Roi pomelos or oranges… Famous historical figures include the Late Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet, the Late Chairman of the Council of Ministers Pham Hung. At the national level, these attractions have high marketing value. However, from a regional or international perspective, the awareness of these attractions is not very significant. Therefore, it is necessary to have more activities and events to create highlights and impressions in the hearts of visitors.

*c) Infrastructure marketing strategy (place)*

Due to the lack of strong development of architectural works to make a mark, Vinh Long's infrastructure needs to be invested in to create highlights in the future. However, the My Thuan Bridge can also be used to market Vinh Long to some extent. My Thuan Bridge is a beautiful cable-stayed bridge that has been widely promoted and introduced in the mass media as a symbol of Vinh Long. This bridge helps to shorten the traveling time on National Highway 1A from Ho Chi Minh City to Vinh Long as well as to the Mekong Delta provinces. The convenient transportation system in both roads and waterways in Vinh Long is also one of the big factors attracting tourists.

*d) Human marketing strategy*

Unlike the local infrastructure, human factors and natural landscapes cannot be created. Vinh Long has famous historical figures contributing to glorifying this "nine dragons" land (the late Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet and the late Chairman of the Council of Ministers Pham Hung. These historical and cultural figures are great for marketing on a national level. However, gaining international recognition requires more promotional efforts. In addition, Vinh Long also attracts tourists thanks to the image of local people. It can be seen that the outstanding qualities of Vinh Long's people are simple and honest nature, simple lifestyle, friendliness, and hospitality. The sociable and hospitable people in Vinh Long are an attraction factor of this locality. This is an element that can be effectively used for very effective Marketing.

**Solution for attracting visitors to Vinh Long with the local marketing approach**

*State management*

It is necessary to build and plan key tourist spots and areas to attract investment, and flexibly adjust the planning following the actual requirements for tourism and population development. It is also advisable to investigate and propose the list of appropriate types of entertainment, sightseeing, and staying, and at the same time propose specific investment forms and plans and support enterprises in building entertainment facilities, resorts, and tourist destinations through the policy of land allocation and lease.

It is to organize the tourism survey on Tien River and Hau River tours in order to develop these two tourist tours and to conduct surveys to exchange experience in the state management of tourism in localities with effective tourism activities. It is also to strengthen the cooperation and association in tourism development with Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho according to the agreements approved by the leaders of the two localities.

It is to strengthen the coordination in inspecting enterprises' compliance with the laws during their business operations in order to promptly remind these businesses to maintain the

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recognized operation conditions, professionally improve the service quality and target high-income customers. It is to guide tourist accommodation businesses to upgrade facilities and service quality from 3 stars to 5 stars.

*Improving the quality of tourism products*

Vinh Long's tourism products are still monotonous, poorly introduced and uncharacterized. Therefore, in addition to the existing tourism products, the tourism industry needs to consider, supplement, and innovate the existing products based on the different needs of tourists. It is necessary to coordinate with businesses to develop some new tourist attractions, some types of river entertainment tourism, and typical products to attract tourists to Vinh Long. These tourism products can be classified into two directions; one of which is the low-cost tourism product and service available to any visitor, and the other is the high-cost tourism product to create a distinctive difference in its products and services and attract high-income tourists. This difference can make other tourist destinations unable to imitate.

It is to develop a characterized type of tourism that is attractive to international tourists, e.g. homestay tourism. Especially, it is necessary to reintroduce An Binh Island tourism products to be more unique, attractive, and different from other tourist attractions in the nearby provinces. In particular, it is necessary to exploit Cai Cuong's ancient house in combination with eco-tourism in An Binh Island. In addition, it is essential to diversify the types of river and garden tourism and cultural tourism.

It is to build more entertainment venues to retain tourists, which involves fully-equipped tea rooms and hotels because night tourism can to increase the length of stay and encourage visitors' spending. It is to focus on exploiting the internal resources of traditional culture to create long-lasting tourism products such as traditional festivals of the Khmer, Southern amateur music, culinary culture… to enhance the attraction of tourists to Vinh Long.

*Improving the quality of tourism human resources*

It is to send qualified people to visit and learn about the management and technical expertise at foreign tourism businesses to update new development perspectives in tourism for serving the locality. It is also to provide training and re-training for employees who regularly contact with tourists, e.g. receptionists, room staffs, bar staffs, tour guides… with regard to communication skills and foreign language skills meeting the national and regional standard.

It is to coordinate with universities and vocational schools offering tourism training in the region to provide qualified human resources with on-the-spot training for necessary skills in tourism service, and simultaneously to create favorable conditions for tourism students of these schools practice and improve their career. This is also a form of coordination and experience drawing of the university and society between theory and practice.

It is to take advantage of the support from the project being implemented by the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism to develop tourism human resources with the funding of the European Union. This is the project to equip businesses with a team of trainers for tourism so that they can organize their own training or internal training to meet the needs of their human resources as well as the industry as a whole. Simultaneously, it is to disseminate materials for training and fostering human resources, such as those of VTOS for tourism businesses.

*Boosting the advertising and promotion*

It is to coordinate with the Information and Communication Technology Center to upgrade the website of the units, and connect the portal with the agencies of the Vietnam National

Administration of Tourism, the promotion units of the neighboring provinces, and the relevant departments in the province. It is to promote the online guidance for accommodation facilities and tourist attractions on environmental protection, food hygiene, and safety, and inform visitors of accommodation facilities, and services offered in Vinh Long.

It is to coordinate with units inside and outside the industry to introduce special travel pages and columns on the media within and outside the province in the forms of memoirs, television magazines, cultural magazines and so on. It is to edit and produce a new film to introduce and promote Vinh Long's river and garden tourism and to enhance information and multi-media promotion, in which promotions on the national television channels are focused.

It is to introduce large-format tourism promotion posters at some locations where a large number of guests gather and organize a travel photograph contest to create photo materials for disseminating and promoting Vinh Long's tourism image.

## 5. Conclusion

Local marketing is an important strategy for local economic development. If the locality is considered a complex producing diverse products, local marketing has a similar role to that of marketing in enterprises. Vinh Long possesses many competitive advantages in developing local tourism; therefore, it is advisable to take advantage of those local competitive advantages to develop tourism with a reasonable strategy in the context of localities competing with each other to facilitate their growth.

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