

Responsible tourism - Pathway to realizing sustainable development: Introduction to responsible tourism and its implementation in the ASEAN

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ABSTRACT

The concept of sustainable tourism first emerged in 1992. After more than 30 years on a journey towards establishing sustainable values, we have shown signs of perplexity in various aspects, focusing on issues such as: whose responsibility it is, how it should be implemented, and how it can be measured. Although each country has demonstrated efforts to minimize the impact of tourism on life across three dimensions: economic, environmental, and social. It must be acknowledged that these relentless efforts reflect a high sense of responsibility from governments and organizations. However, it seems the process of protecting the environment and human life is weaker than the rate of tourism development. We need to clarify more about who is responsible and how in this global campaign. Responsible tourism emerged in 2002 and became stronger after the COVID-19 pandemic as a global revolution for the tourism industry. Utilizing qualitative research methods: data collection and processing, case study, observation, and interviewing, this article (the first part) delves into the core aspects of responsible tourism as a strategic direction for achieving sustainability in the tourism sector. Furthermore, the paper summarizes the application of Responsible Tourism in some Southeast Asian countries in recent times.

Keywords: Responsible Tourism, sustainable tourism, sustainable development

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry has emerged as an important source of growth, employment and income in many countries. It has been estimated that, by the year of 2026, the tourism industry could support 370 million jobs and USD 11 trillion in the global GDP [1].

However, the adverse effects of tourism on human life and the environment were quickly recognized, leading to numerous protests worldwide against the overexploitation of resources for tourism purposes. Even before the pandemic's emergence, the chorus calling for a rethink of the global tourism sector had become louder.

A research revealed that in scholarly work published after 2015, most studies (88%) dealt with sustainability from an environmental perspective, with social and economic sustainability accounting for 24% and 22% respectively [2].

However, climate change is not the only salient threat and recent global sustainability risk

assessments have argued that severe consequences could result from a combination of environmental degradation and its associated social schisms [3].

The protests against the effects of over tourism are a case in point where residents of popular tourist cities had decided that the so-called limits to acceptable change had been exceeded, and that their ways of life and well-being had undergone disruptive and irreversible transformations [4].

Considering this, a significant challenge for the tourism sector is separating its expansion from adverse social and environmental impacts. To address this issue, numerous cities and destinations are promoting responsible tourism, increasingly becoming a central concern for both industry professionals and academic researchers [5].

New Era of Responsibility, it not too subtly suggests that for global tourism, the reframing that needs to take place is urgent and has been expedited by the pandemic of 2020. What is called for has been

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broached before and if tourism is to be the panacea of the catalogue of things ascribed to it, business as usual is surely not feasible. The call for an epoch where responsibility is assumed reverberates in talking circles that reference the Anthropocene as a time when the urgency to act with greater responsibility is now, more than ever, vital, given that the demands put upon the planet continue to intensify while the requisite attention needed to allow recovery and replenishment, and to stave off system failure, continually deteriorates. Tourism has become entrenched as a lifestyle phenomenon for many, and a livelihood source for as many more. The call for responsible tourism appeals to finding the balance between competing priorities and most importantly, to acknowledge planetary limitations [4].

2. OVERVIEW OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

In 2002, at Cape Town, the first International Conference on Responsible Tourism was held as an official side event of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Organized by the Responsible Tourism Partnership and Western Cape Tourism, this conference, a precursor to the WSSD in Johannesburg, laid the foundational groundwork for the emergence of this form of tourism.

2.1. The content of Responsible Tourism

Tourism, focused on reducing the adverse impacts of its activities, has now been globally recognized and politically endorsed as the appropriate direction for the development of the tourism sector. While the significance of sustainable tourism is unquestionable, it frequently emerges as a conceptual and rhetorical idea that is not practical in many respects. Sustainability is often regarded as value-laden, ambiguous or onerous because local contexts and issues are different across destinations and regions [6-7]. Worse still, the term is often used loosely by scholars or practitioners in their speeches and articles to justify the nobility of their works or persuade the public about the environmental friendliness of their marketing offering [8].

At the 2002 International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations held in Cape Town, It was recognized that Responsible Tourism takes a variety of forms and is characterized by travel and tourism that:

- Minimises negative economic, environmental,

and social impacts;

- Generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- Involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- Makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- Provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- Provides access for physically challenged people;
- Culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence [9].

2.2. Principles of Responsible Tourism Development

2.2.1. Economic Aspect

- When developing tourism projects, an economic impact assessment must be conducted to clearly identify the types of tourism to be prioritized for development, ensuring benefits for the local community and minimizing negative impacts on their lives.
- Strengthening linkages to encourage stronger participation of local communities in tourism activities.
- The quality of tourism products at destinations should highlight unique attractions and focus on added value.
- Tourism promotion must respect cultural, economic, natural, and social integrity; encouraging the development of types of tourism suitable to the actual conditions.
- Establishing a fair business environment, offering reasonable prices, and building business relationships that share responsibilities both in risks and successes; recruiting and training skilled employees.
- Providing significant support for small and medium enterprises operating in fields related to sustainable tourism.

2.2.2. Social Aspect

- Actively engaging local communities in policy formulation and decision-making processes,

enhancing their capacity to realize proposed initiatives.

- Assessing social impacts through advocacy processes from the planning stages, designing projects to minimize social impacts and maximize positive aspects.
- Making tourism a common experiential need of society to ensure the rights of all individuals, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.
- Preventing sexual exploitation in tourism, especially concerning children.
- Minimizing damage in the exploitation and use of resources; developing tourism closely tied to objectives for the poor and supporting hunger eradication and poverty reduction.
- Respecting the customs and practices of indigenous people; preserving and promoting cultural and social diversity.
- Ensuring tourism contributes significantly to improving health and education.

2.2.3. Environmental Aspect

- Environmental impact assessments are necessary during the planning and design of tourism projects.
- Utilizing resources reasonably and sustainably, reducing waste and overconsumption of resources and energy.
- Managing natural diversity and ecosystems sustainably; restoring damaged natural resource areas and clearly identifying environmentally linked tourism types to protect and conserve vulnerable ecosystems and protected areas.
- Enhancing training and awareness for all stakeholders on sustainable development.
- Improving tourism capacity for all stakeholders and adhering to the most healthy and effective tourism development models [9].

Responsible tourism is a type of travel that aims to reduce and counteract the adverse impacts of tourism activities or “any form of development or tourist activity which respects and preserves in the long term natural, cultural and social resources and contributes in a positive and fair way to the development and the bloom of people who lives, works and spend their holiday in this place” [10].

3. METHODOLOGY

Case Study: This involves an in-depth study of

recent movements and tourism development projects in ASEAN countries (Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Vietnam) to understand the adoption and evolution of responsible tourism in these nations. This contributes to affirming its implementation, albeit not uniformly, highlighting the need for foundational theories and universal standards for this global issue.

Observation Method: The author participated in Community-Based on Tourism (CBT) projects in Vietnam in localities such as Sapa, Son La, Hoa Binh, and Dong Thap to understand the current practices of community tourism models. This is in the context of comparing the implementation of responsible tourism between Vietnam and other countries in the region.

Interview Method: Accompanied by community tourism experts, local residents, and tourists, a survey was conducted from the Northwest to the Southwest regions to identify similarities and differences in tourism perspectives and practices among different groups.

In Part 1, the author broadly presents responsible tourism in ASEAN countries through case studies. Part 2 delves into an analysis of interview results and stakeholder opinions on the central theme – Responsible Tourism.

4. RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

4.1. Singapore

In Singapore, the enforcement of responsible conduct is rigorously upheld through the imposition of significant financial penalties, reflecting the city-state's commitment to maintaining public order and cleanliness. This stringent approach is evident in the structured penalty system for littering offenses, applicable to both residents and visitors alike. Offenders found guilty of littering are subject to a tiered fine system, designed to escalate with repeat offenses. The penalty regime starts with a substantial fine of \$2,000 for the first conviction, serving as a firm deterrent. Should the individual commit a second violation, the fine doubles to \$4,000, further emphasizing the seriousness of maintaining civic responsibility. In cases of a third offense, the penalty reaches a notable \$10,000, underlining the government's strict stance against such infractions. This structured punitive system is part of Singapore's broader strategy to promote and

ensure responsible behavior within its jurisdiction, showcasing its rigorous approach to law enforcement and public conduct [11]. The implementation of these severe fines serves as a deterrent, potentially altering careless behaviors within the jurisdiction of Singapore. Consequently, Singapore, as a city-state, offers a unique environment for research focused on fostering responsible tourism [12].

4.2. Malaysia

Roots & Shoots Malaysia, an extension of the international Jane Goodall Roots & Shoots initiative, was established in 2015 with the aim of empowering Malaysian youth to create positive changes in society, wildlife conservation, and environmental protection. This initiative offers the annual Roots & Shoots Malaysia Award (RASMA), providing young people with opportunities to gain valuable experience and engage in volunteer work with partnering non-governmental organizations. By collaborating with local entities, Roots & Shoots Malaysia implements a youth action program designed to foster volunteerism and active participation in community projects [13]. This program aligns with other Malaysian conservation endeavors, such as the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre and EcoKnights, by encouraging and facilitating youth engagement in the preservation of Malaysia's natural and cultural heritage. As the program expands to include more school groups, it underscores the growing importance and awareness of youth in Malaysia's journey towards sustainable development. This highlights the critical role of young leaders in promoting and implementing inclusive, equitable, and responsible tourism practices, essential for the country's long-term environmental and cultural sustainability [14].

4.3. Myanmar

Myanmar, rich in undiscovered locales with vast potential for tourism, is supported in its responsible tourism endeavors by the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI). This non-profit organization, backed by several European governments, aims to advance responsible tourism through knowledge dissemination, educational programs, and research. It advocates for the empowerment of local communities and the safeguarding of the environment as cornerstones of sustainable tourism practices.

The MRTI has instituted an internship program targeting young professionals, providing them with insights into the nonprofit sector and responsible business methodologies within the tourism industry. Participants gain not only practical experience but also opportunities to develop professional connections while working with the MRTI team. Their involvement in various activities, such as events and field trips, enhances their practical skills and enables them to contribute meaningfully to the field of responsible tourism in Myanmar.

Furthermore, the MRTI facilitates the International Field Project (IFP), a practical learning initiative for undergraduates studying tourism. This project enriches local youth with hands-on experience and a deeper understanding of the interplay between tourism and socio-economic and environmental factors. Through scientific research and collaboration with industry and NGO professionals, students engage with global tourism debates and practices. Additionally, MRTI, in collaboration with Swiss Contact, runs the Vocational Skills Development Programmer to elevate tourism and hospitality knowledge among Myanmar's youth, leading to increased employment and income opportunities. MRTI's multifaceted approach, which includes both digital and traditional methods, equips the younger generation with essential skills and fosters their growth as Responsible Youth Leaders (RYLs), pivotal for a country like Myanmar that is focused on enhancing youth participation and influence in responsible tourism. These initiatives serve as a blueprint for youth across the nation, inspiring them to become active RYLs within their communities [14].

4.4. Philippines

The Philippines' diverse cultural landscape is shaped by its island geography and a history rich with trade and colonization. This blend of influences from Europe, America, and Asia is manifest in the nation's vast array of heritage sites, practices, and traditions.

In Manila's historic district of Quiapo, the Kapitbahayan sa Kalye Bautista at Iba Pang Lugar (KKB) focuses on engaging young people in the conservation of this area's cultural legacy. Among various efforts, KKB is renowned for organizing 'Lakbay Lakaran: A Neighborhood Walk,' which

offers youth-led tours of overlooked yet culturally rich locales. Supported by the MAHAL Project and in collaboration with local authorities, this project serves a dual purpose: fostering community unity and aiding disadvantaged families while instilling in youth a profound appreciation for their cultural roots and encouraging the pursuit of a more organized, clean, and proud community.

Parallel to its cultural treasures, the Philippines is celebrated for its stunning natural beauty, attracting visitors with untouched beaches and extraordinary natural wonders. The country's rich biodiversity includes many species found nowhere else on Earth. In this context, a collective of young Filipino creatives has been using their artistry to advocate for environmental conservation. Their venture, KAGUBATAN, is an online exhibition and webinar series that uses various art forms, such as photography, painting, and digital illustration, to explore the symbiotic ties between humans, nature, and culture. The exhibition raises funds for environmental causes, including the WorldWide Fund (WWF) Philippines' Ipo Watershed Restoration project, which aims to plant 1,000 new seedlings. Proceeds also support Philippine Parks and Biodiversity and the Bantay Danaos of Agusan Marshlands for the Ipo Watershed Bantay Gubat initiative, all under the stewardship of Youth Engaged in Wetlands, an international collective of young people committed to wetland conservation and sustainable management [14].

4.5. Thailand

Thailand's natural wonders and vibrant tourism draw travelers worldwide. The Thai Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Association (TEATA) works with multiple entities to safeguard these assets by promoting responsible tourism and youth leadership in sustainability projects.

TEATA aims for equitable and informed tourism practices and participates in various local and global conservation efforts. Their activities range from conducting workshops to engaging in tourism that benefits social causes. The 'Low Carbon Contest: Vlog-The Journey Season 2' is one such initiative, encouraging Thai students to create eco-friendly travel vlogs, thus spreading sustainable tourism messages through social media.

A notable youth-driven research initiative in Thailand, led by the Greater Mekong Sub-region Study Centre of Nakhon Phanom University

(GMSC-NPU), aims to foster a sustainable tourism sector in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, encompassing Nakhon Phanom in Thailand and Khammouan in Laos PDR, leveraging the engagement of local youth networks (Thipsingh, 2015). This endeavor primarily emphasizes raising fundamental consciousness among young people about their regional assets, steering them towards a conservation mindset. Consequently, students from two regional educational institutions (Nakhon Phanom and Khammouan) have articulated their perspective on the significant role their local tourism resources, such as natural environments, cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and service offerings, play in promoting sustainable tourism development. They have also devised a conceptual framework dubbed "T-E-A-M" for the advancement of sustainable tourism. This acronym encapsulates Team (T), Exchange (E), Action (A), and Management and Manpower (M). Hence, it is evident that the youths participating in this project have derived valuable insights from the sustainable tourism development community, which has facilitated their comprehension of tourism-related challenges within their locales, involvement in tourism planning, enactment of sustainable tourism strategies, and realization of reciprocal benefits and assessments, thereby contributing to the evolution of responsible tourism [14].

4.6. Vietnam

Vietnam continuously faces the dilemma of balancing environmental protection with economic development [15]. The country is home to 54 ethnic groups, constituting a diverse minority population. However, these ethnic minorities predominantly reside in underdeveloped remote and border areas. A poignant reality in developing nations is that these individuals are too impoverished to adequately focus on environmental concerns, leading to a reluctance in supporting policies prioritizing environmental protection.

The CBT Vietnam Project is a community-based tourism initiative aimed at building and enhancing the capabilities of local ethnic minorities, small business owners, village governments, and local communities. The primary objective of the CBT Vietnam Project is to ensure that increased tourism visitation results in positive experiences

for both tourists and local inhabitants in the villages. It also offers an array of training initiatives focused on general tourism knowledge, tourism planning, entrepreneurship, environmental management, and homestay development [16].

Since its inception, the CBT Project has garnered substantial support from various stakeholders: government, local residents, the business community, and tourists. Originating in Sapa, the initiative has now expanded to numerous localities in the Northwest, Central, and Southwest regions of Vietnam. However, the CBT Project faces significant challenges, particularly as rapid cultural exchanges lead to uncontrollable cultural assimilation and changes. To maintain the remarkable village communities in these rural areas, youth and other stakeholders (e.g., government and business owners) collaborate under the CBT Vietnam Project. This collaboration aims to teach local people basic tourism skills and foster their entrepreneurial spirit, enabling them to set and achieve realistic objectives. For instance, project collaborators work with ethnic minority communities such as the Black Hmong, Red Dao, and Giay in villages like Lao Chai, Tavan, Taphin, Giang Ta Chai, and Pù Luong (Thanh Hoa). Through this project, local people have improved sanitation, created community tourism products (e.g., temporary markets, walking circuits, and homestays), developed business plans, established community organizations, and coordinated community clean-up days with the youth.

Additionally, under this initiative, the youth collaborate with both regional and local governments, as well as key players in the tourism industry such as hotels, law enforcement, non-governmental organizations, and tour guides. For instance, they organize familiarization tours for operators to their villages, aiming to establish sustainable enterprises. Conversely, they facilitate trips for locals, many of whom have never ventured beyond their villages, to Hanoi, where they present their products to both local and international tourism enterprises. These enlightening experiences contribute to a deeper comprehension of aspects like product development, partnership formation, just and reasonable pricing, cultural conservation, and strategies for village enhancement. In essence, the CBT Vietnam project evidences the pivotal role of Vietnam's youth in reshaping the tourism sector

into one that is fair, sustainable, environmentally and culturally considerate, and economically viable [16].

In general, the youth of Southeast Asia are quick to adapt to the evolving societal dynamics of Asia. They are increasingly open-minded, rapidly engaging with and respecting cultural differences, possess technological knowledge, and demonstrate a high degree of autonomy while traveling. However, due to differences in natural conditions such as geographical location, climate, natural tourism resources, and social conditions like culture, customs, and national policies, there are significant variances in behaviors, motivations, preferences, awareness of global environmental issues, and their attitudes towards major challenges. Through collaboration with governments and non-profit organizations within local communities, the youth can not only realize the importance of sustainable tourism development but also understand their role in it [17].

5. CONCLUSION

The undeniable positive values of tourism for human life cannot be overlooked. Yet, it is critical to candidly recognize its detrimental impacts. Humanity has long been aware of this, prompting numerous campaigns to balance exploitation with conservation. Sustainable tourism emerged in this context, calling for global collective action, as we understand that halting tourism activities entirely is not feasible. However, the COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point, awakening humanity to years of uncoordinated action, with each nation following its path and each locality implementing its policy. Responsible Tourism, which emerged in 2002, has since resurged more vigorously than ever. With its specific content, it has highlighted what needs to be done immediately on this planet, identifying relevant stakeholders and establishing connections to protect our green planet and sustainably exploit tourism.

Following the emergence of Responsible Tourism, numerous nations have launched a range of initiatives, with a special emphasis on engaging the youth, a group recognized for their adaptability, dynamism, and skills in technology and networking. Countries in Southeast Asia serve as prime examples of adapting to global trends in tourism development. Boasting appealing and significant tourism resources, they have swiftly

established connections with developed countries and various governmental and non-governmental organizations to collaborate effectively. The primary objective of these efforts is to harness the potential of tourism while concurrently reducing its adverse effects on the economy, environment, and societal fabric.

Since the new era of Responsible Tourism began, tourism activities have shown positive signs: increased cooperation between countries in the region on common issues, establishment of non-governmental organizations, social funds, and

activities aimed at raising public awareness. However, it must be acknowledged that, in many aspects, cooperation between organizations and units remains limited, and the improvement in tourism exploitation in each country and locality is not yet evident, with many aspects yet to achieve further development. Therefore, subsequent research will continue to present content related to responsible tourism to form a foundational theoretical framework and provide practical guidance and training for a timely tourism development approach.

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Du lịch có trách nhiệm - Con đường hiện thực hóa phát triển bền vững: Giới thiệu Du lịch có trách nhiệm và việc áp dụng tại khu vực ASEAN

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TÓM TẮT

Khái niệm về du lịch bền vững lần đầu tiên xuất hiện vào năm 1992. Sau hơn 30 năm trên hành trình hướng tới việc thiết lập các giá trị bền vững, chúng ta đã thấy có dấu hiệu của sự bối rối trong nhiều khía cạnh, tập trung vào các vấn đề như: trách nhiệm thuộc về ai, việc thực hiện nên như thế nào, và làm thế nào để có thể đo lường. Mặc dù mỗi quốc gia đã thể hiện nỗ lực nhằm giảm thiểu tác động của du lịch đối với cuộc sống trên ba khía cạnh: kinh tế, môi trường và xã hội. Cần phải thừa nhận rằng, những nỗ lực không ngừng này phản ánh một ý thức trách nhiệm cao từ phía chính phủ và các tổ chức. Tuy nhiên, có vẻ như quá trình bảo vệ môi trường và đời sống con người yếu hơn so với tốc độ phát triển của du lịch. Chúng ta cần làm rõ hơn về ai là người chịu trách nhiệm và cách thức thực hiện trong chiến dịch toàn cầu này. Du lịch có trách nhiệm xuất hiện vào năm 2002 và trở nên mạnh mẽ hơn sau đại dịch COVID-19 như một cuộc cách mạng toàn cầu cho ngành du lịch. Bằng phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính: thu thập và xử lý tài liệu, nghiên cứu trường hợp, quan sát và phỏng vấn, bài viết này (phần đầu tiên) đi sâu vào các khía cạnh cốt lõi của du lịch có trách nhiệm như một hướng đi chiến lược nhằm đạt được sự bền vững trong ngành du lịch. Bên cạnh đó, bài báo sơ lược việc áp dụng Du lịch có trách nhiệm tại một số quốc gia Đông Nam Á trong thời gian gần đây.

Từ khóa: Du lịch có trách nhiệm, du lịch bền vững, phát triển bền vững

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