



## **COMMUNITY- BASED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN HA GIANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM**

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### **Abstract**

*The real situation and potential of community –based tourism development in Western districts of Ha Giang province was analyzed through both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected from related parties including tourism enterprises, local governance, and both domestic and foreign tourists in Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man districts. The results showed that, this area has very good potential to develop community-based tourism from the natural beauty, the culture of ethnic people and cuisine. However, there existed a number of difficulties such as the road and means of transportation, the diversification of tourism service, ineffective of tourism*

*promotion... as well as the co-operation of stakeholders is not really good. Base on analysis the facts and potential of community-based tourism, the researchers has proposed some group solutions to promote tourism potentials, overcome difficulties and improve the living standards of locality in the future.*

*Keywords: Community-based tourism, tourism development, tourism potential, Vietnam*

## INTRODUCTION

Ha Giang is a province in the northeastern region of Vietnam, located in the area of high mountains in the northern part of Vietnam. Ha Giang is a majestic mountain complex and rugged terrain. This is a high concentration of mountains, in which the western highlands include Hoang Su Phi, Xin Man districts and a part of Bac Ha plateau with the height from 1,000m to over 2,000m. The terrain is popular with arches or half of arches, pears, and saddles alternating sloping terrains. Sometimes it is sharp or jagged, steeply dissected. Community-based tourism development in the western districts of Ha Giang province is a suitable direction to bring income for people and contribute to the local budget. In the past years, the western districts of Ha Giang province were attractive tourist destinations because of the beautiful scenery that is blessed by nature. It has rugged high mountains associated with majestic natural landscapes which is suitable for developing eco-tourism adventure. Due to the topography of Hoang Su Phi district, Xin Man is located on a fault system of the western edge of Tay Con Linh range, so there are many hot mineral water circuits with physicochemical properties and quality that have been well measured and tested. This is precious natural resource which can be exploited to create health care resorts. Besides, terraced fields and Shan Tuyet tea forest are the beautiful scenery that attract tourists to this place. An unique feature in the western districts of Ha Giang province is that there are many ethnic groups living together such as Tay, Nung, Dao, HMong, La Chi, with diverse traditional customs and being told and preserved by the local people. This have created a diversity of traditional culture with typical festivals such as the ceremony of coming to the field, the ceremony of honors, love markets, fair markets. Recently, the orientation of the leaders of the western districts and Ha Giang province is to prioritize the development of local tourism towards community ecotourism, which has made the number of visitors increase both in number of visitors as well as the cost of using tourism services, contributing to increase the state budget revenue and people's income. However, there is still a lot of difficulties in the community-based tourism development in the western districts

of Ha Giang province from the infrastructure to the linkage among the components in the local tourism value chain. In order to build a sustainable development direction for community-based tourism development in the western districts of Ha Giang province, the article assesses the current situation and tourism potential in the local through surveying related objects including: local authorities, tourism business establishments, tourists visiting and local people to show the advantages and disadvantages in developing community-based tourism in the locality.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The data**

The authors used both secondary and primary data. The secondary data was collected from Ha Giang's People Committee, Department of Culture Sport and Tourism, People Committee of Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man district.

The primary data was collected in 2018 from four stakeholders in community based tourism including local government officers, enterprises and tourist (both domestic and foreigners).

### **Sampling Method**

- + Local governance officers (Village and commune leaders) in Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man districts: used the non-probability sampling method with a sample size of 60 observations.
- + Tourists: Including domestic and foreign tourists who came to travel in those districts and Ho Thau commune where the associated model was implemented. Applying probability sampling method according to Slovin formula with 95% confidence will determine the sample size to be surveyed was 800 respondents (Of which, 400 votes for domestic visitors and 400 votes for foreign travelers).
- + Travel companies, businesses that provide tourism services (catering, accommodation, traditional products ...) participate in the linkage model, using non-probability sampling method with a sample size of 200 observations.
- + Local people in Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man districts who are participating in the process of community – based tourism development:

Probability sampling method was applied and based on Slovin formula with 95% confidence determined the sample size to be surveyed with 500 observations. The table 1 presents the sample distribution.

Table 1. The sample size review

<b>ORD.</b>	<b>Stakeholders that have been interviewed</b>	<b>Numbers (in people)</b>
1	Local governance officers	60
2	Tourism enterprises	200
3	Tourists (both domestic and foreigners)	800
4	The households that take part in the process of develop community-based tourism	500
<b>Total</b>		<b>1560</b>

### Data analysis approach

The collected data was cleaned and synthesised based on EXCEL sheet and SPSS 20.0 software. The paper uses descriptive statistical method and comparative method to analyze and evaluate the current situation and potential of developing high-quality tourism in the western districts of Ha Giang province to propose appropriate tourism development solutions.

The research used statistical method to calculate the average score of the assessment of respondents in five level of Likert scale.

The formular for average score is:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k X_i K_i}{n}$$

$\bar{X}$  : Average score

$X_i$  : Score of level i

$K_i$  : No of people assess at level  $X_i$

n: No of respondents

Table 2. Five level of Likert Scale

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
5	4.20 - 5.0	Extremely agree
4	3.20 - 4.19	Agree
3	2.60 - 3.19	Neutral
2	1.80 - 2.59	Disagree
1	1.0 - 1.79	Extremely disagree

(Source: Rennis Likert, 1932)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### The results of tourism development at major west districts of Ha Giang

In recent years, Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man district of Ha Giang province are actively conducting tourism activities, especially developing CBT. Although the tourism development of these districts has low starting point and has difficulty in infrastructure, the tourism activities in Ha Giang province has achieved some remarkable results.

Table 3. The business results of tourism at the West district of Ha Giang in the period from 2016-2017

Indicators	Hoang Su Phi district			Xin Man district		
	2016	2017	2017/2016 (%)	2016	2017	2017/2016 (%)
1. Number of tourist (people)	12756	15328	120,16	24563	28060	114,24
<i>In which:</i>						
- Foreigner	3252	4718	145,08	3107	5685	182,97
- Domestic	9504	10610	111,64	21456	22375	104,28
2. Income from tourism (Billion VND)	8,24	17,25	209,34	12,282	14,034	114,26

(Source: Division of Culture and Social of Xin Man and Hoang Su Phi districts, 2018)

Coming to Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man districts, visitors can not only explore the various landscapes, historical, cultural and natural relics but also immerse themselves in a life of cultural identity with unique life of ethnic people. Over 2 years, the number of visitors to Hoang Su Phi district has increased by 20.6%, equivalent to 2572 turns. In which, international tourists account for over 30%, the rest are domestic tourists. The revenue generated from tourism business for Hoang Su Phi district in 2017 was 17.25 billion VND, up 109.34% compared to 2016. The same is a western district of Ha Giang province, but the number of tourists to Xin Man district was 28060 people, about 80% higher than that of Hoang Su Phi district in 2017. However, the growth rate of the number of visitors to Xin Man district in 2017 compared to 2016 was only 14, 24% increased. It is worth mentioning that the number of international visitors to Xin Man is quite modest, accounting for only about 20% of the total visitors. Because transportation is still very difficult, most tourists come to Xin Man district; they traveled in groups, so the costs of travel services were small. As a result, in 2017, the revenue from tourism activities of Xin Man district increased by 14.26% compared to 2016, but only by 81.3%

compared to the revenue from tourism activities of Hoang Su Phi district. In the coming time, in order to develop CBT in the western districts of Ha Giang province, take advantage of available potentials and strengths of these districts, it is necessary to have a synchronous coordination between organizations and local people during the implementation process.

### **Assessing the status and potential for developing community-based tourism in the western district of Ha Giang province**

#### *The status of developing community-based tourism in western districts*

The research team conducted surveys on four groups of stakeholders including: local state officers, tourism enterprises, domestic tourists and foreign tourists to find out their assessments on the status of natural resources and facilities; situation of accommodation establishments; local cultural identity; the variety and quality of tourism products. The results are as follows:

#### *a. About natural resources and infrastructures*

Table 4. Assessment of natural resource and infrastructures

Ord	Indicators	Average score			
		Local officer	Tourism enterprise	Domestic tourist	Foreign tourist
1	The abundance and variety of natural conditions	4.65	4.42	3.69	4.00
2	Special of natural conditions	4.18	4.42	4.23	3.63
3	The climate at the resort is fresh and cool	4.41	4.42	1.77	2.09
4	The convenience of transportation	3.71	1.79	2.23	3.27
5	Good tourism facilities	4.18	3.42	3.69	3.10
6	Good communication system	5.00	3.47	4.23	2.36

According to the assessment of local officers and tourism enterprises, 100% of the surveyed respondents agreed when evaluating the western districts of Ha Giang province with abundant, diverse and unique natural conditions. With a cool climate that few localities in Vietnam have. This is a good premise to create conditions for tourism development in general and high-quality tourism in particular for western districts of Ha Giang province in the near future. However, the current conditions of facilities are still very difficult, especially infrastructure and transportation.

Domestic tourists and foreign tourists have high levels of agreement about the rich, diverse and unique natural conditions; have a cool and cool climate. However, they think that

the locality needs to improve the transit points for tourists as well as the communication system sometimes not really good. One problem that both domestic and foreign tourists are very concerned about was that the problem of transportation is too difficult (over 70% of respondents agree or more).

*b. About the status of accommodation facilities*

Table 05. Assessment of accommodation facilities (Hotel, motel, and homestay)

Ord	Indicators	Average score according to the assessment of			
		Local officer	Tourism enterprise	Domestic tourist	Foreign tourist
1	Facilities at homestay meet the requirement	4.06	4.0	3.38	4.09
2	Cool resting space, in harmony with the surrounding natural landscape	4.47	4.16	3.92	4.00
3	Accommodation create lots of relaxing space for visitors	4.00	4.21	2.69	3.54
4	Multiple service for visitors	4.53	4.32	3.23	3.73

Regarding the current status of accommodation establishments and food services: Most of the officials and tourism enterprises surveyed agreed that the accommodation establishments had a cool and airy space in harmony with the natural landscape. They were highly agree in the view of ensuring that visitors have conditions to experience local tourism services. The current status of accommodation establishments has basically met the requirements of tourists when visiting. The local food and beverage services are quite diverse, ensuring nutrition requirements, hygiene and personal identity of the people.

Domestic and foreign tourists estimated the conditions of accommodation facilities at lower level, especially they do not appreciate the accommodation facilities have relaxing space, experience for visitors; The services were not diverse and the professionalism in serving customers were not really high. There are not many cultural programs for visitors to experience. With food service, most of the opinions agreed that foods are rich and unique, and the foods are provided by indigenous people made them believe in the quality.

There was a deficiency between the assessment of domestic and foreign tourists. If domestic tourists have quite rigorous assessments on criteria such as good accommodation and quality standards, the space is cool and airy, in harmony with the surrounding natural

landscape, items and environmentally friendly equipment, accommodation facilities create a lot of relaxing space, experience for travelers (over 20% of respondents agree or more), in contrast, foreign visitors proved quite easy to calculate when evaluate on those criteria (over 40% of respondents agree or more). However, there is a need of regular inspection teams to guide food service establishments about food hygiene and safety, irregular inspection of the restaurant's processing process to ensure better quality.

*c. About the local cultural identity, festival program and traditional products*

Local cultural identity and traditional: The results indicate that domestic tourists are more difficult than foreign tourists. There are many indicators such as unique and attractive traditional culture; unique customs and lifestyles; many traditional values are being preserved and developed; there are production methods, traditional crafts are being preserved and In order to serve tourism well; many ethnic communities live in harmony with medium or low medium scores from domestic tourists but higher scores by foreign tourists. For tourism products and eco tourism activities, there is no difference between domestic and international tourists. Indicators: Diversified community ecotourism products; tourism products with specific characteristics and cultural identity of ethnic minorities; Many tourism programs associated with life Local people, There are rich and unique culinary culture at medium scores or low average scores. Therefore, it is necessary to develop local tourism products and make it a tourist attraction.

Table 6. Evaluate local cultural identity and tourism products

ORD	Indicators	Local	Tourism
		governance	Enterprise
		Avg score*	Avg score*
<b>I</b>	<b>Local cultural identity</b>		
1	Unique and attractive traditional culture	4.29	4.65
2	Unique customs and lifestyles	4.88	4.63
3	Many traditional values are being preserved and developed	4.24	4.53
<b>II</b>	<b>Festive cultural programs and traditional products</b>		
1	Many festivals and cultural programs in the locality	4.06	4.42
2	Tourism products with specific characteristics and cultural identity of ethnic minorities	4.24	4.37
3	Many tourism programs associated with life Local people	4.35	4.0



The survey results show that indicators such as traditional culture are unique and attractive; many traditional values are being preserved and developed; there are traditional methods of production and traditional crafts preserved and in order to server tourism well that are evaluated at high levels by local governance. The results also provides information that 90% of tourism enterprises points traditional elements score at high. In the coming time, these are available strengths of the locality for enterprises to continue exploiting and promotion.

### Potential for community tourism development in western districts of Ha Giang province

The community tourism development potential is described through 3 indicators: (i) This is an area with great potential for community tourism development, (ii) This is a favorable area to attract capital in the community based tourism sector and (iii) developing community tourism here will bring many economic, cultural and social benefits to the locality. The survey results show that nearly 100% of enterprises and local management officials highly appreciate the potential for community tourism development in the western districts of Ha Giang province.

Table 7. Assessing the potential for developing community based tourism by local management officials and tourism enterprises

Ord.	Statement	Local	Tourism
		governance	Enterprise
		<i>Avg score</i>	<i>Avg score</i>
1	This is an area with great potential for community tourism development	4.88	4.68
2	This is a favorable area to attract capital in the community based tourism sector	4.29	4.37
3	developing community tourism here will bring many economic, cultural and social benefits to the locality	4.88	4.79

Another hand, the result showed that most of domestic tourists satisfy and will come back here if they have opportunity and introduce to their relatives, and friends. This may be the good signal for the community tourism development in Ha Giang in the next time.

Table 8. Assessing the potential for developing community based tourism by domestic tourists and foreigner tourists

Ord.	Statement	Foreigner tourists	Domestic tourists
		Average	Average
1	I am please to choose this as a destination	3.76	3.81
2	I will come back here	3.31	3.81
3	I will recommend to my relatives and friends to experience this place	3.92	3.91
4	I believe that the locality has a strong potential for tourism development	3.38	4.00

Because of the available conditions of nature, national cultural identity as well as current infrastructure in the western districts of Ha Giang province, the locality has good potential for developing community tourism. In the next time, the districts need to put in place many appropriate policies to attract investment in the tourism field, thus bringing about many economic, cultural and social benefits to the locality and the local people.

*The coordination of stakeholders in developing CBT in western districts of Ha Giang province*

Assessing the coordination between stakeholders in developing local CBT in recent years had agreement that: In order to develop a CBT effectively, it is necessary to have close links between stakeholders. Through the survey process shows that most managers have assessed that there is a link between stakeholders in the development of CBT. However, the role of tour operators (tourism business enterprises) in local tourism development has not been highly appreciated in many aspects such as: construction of attractions, dining establishments, and storage, resident, and service style.

Table 9. The coordination of stakeholders in developing CBT Ha Giang province of local officers

Ord.	Indicator	AVR score	Ord.	Indicator	AVR score
1	The local authorities have good plan and policy to develop CBT in the province	4.88	5	Tour operators organize tours and community tourism programs	3.53

2	Local authorities always respond promptly and quickly handle complaints and feedbacks from tourists on local tourism management.	4.59	6	Travel businesses handle fast and respond well to the requirements of travelers	3.47	Table 9...
3	Local authorities have policies to encourage and support households doing business in community-based tourism services in the area	4.82	7	Local people are friendly and hospitable	5.00	
4	The local government has a mechanism to monitor and strictly manage business services related to CBT in the area.	4.59	8	The coordination between stakeholders (agencies, businesses, households) in developing local tourism in general and community tourism in particular is very tight.	4.12	

Survey results show that, in the western districts of Ha Giang province, the association of enterprises with individuals / organizations is not much. There were 36.84% of respondents answered that there is a link in the development of CBR with local individuals / organizations. This means that more than 63% of tourism business enterprises are still operating independently, not connected with local people and authorities. This has created many difficulties in the development of the local mobile community.

Assessing the alignment of stakeholders in the development of CBD in the western districts of Ha Giang province, foreign tourists still rated higher than domestic visitors for most criteria such as: the coordination between local authorities, tour operators and local people through specific programs (cultural exchanges, arts, sports.. ); local authorities in conjunction with travel businesses to build programs to promote tourism images in the media; Travel businesses in combination with indigenous people organize well tour programs, Travel businesses handle quickly and meet the requirements. bridge of visitors. There is an indicators that both domestic and foreign tourists are a bit worried about the local calendar is that the timeliness and ethnicity to handle complaints and feedback from visitors about the issue of tourism management in the locality. In the future for the development of the CBD, it is necessary to have a closer link between the stakeholders such as local authorities, people and travel businesses.

### *The readiness of local people in participating CBT*

In recent years, local people have recognized the role of tourism in household economy, so the survey results show that the high consensus of the interviewed people when they are ready to develop community-based tourism with related activities, such as: providing tourism products / services; participating in festivals and community cultural activities to serve tourists; providing materials and food for eating establishments. Some activities related to planning for community-based tourism development or keeping and maintaining traditional crafts receive lower feedback because according to the people, this depends much on the plan and guidelines of the People's Committee.

Most surveyed households want to see more tourists in Ha Giang; local infrastructure systems (roads, electricity, water, sewer, drainage, communication, etc.) are improved; capital and equipment and technical materials for tourism business are supported. They also look forward to training skills to serve tourists, being supported in promoting community-based tourism development, being supported in developing community-based tourism in the locality.

Table 10. Readiness of households in community-based tourism development

No	Criteria	AVR score	No	Criteria	AVR score
1	Ready to provide tourism products / services (accommodation, meals, transportation, instructions, souvenirs, local specialties, essential goods) for tourists	3.97	5	Ready to supply raw materials, fresh food to the restaurant, accommodation with catering services	4.19
2	Ready to participate in festivals, community cultural activities to serve tourists	4.12	6	Willing to participate in local meetings on community-based tourism development	4.18
3	Willing to preserve and maintain traditional crafts to introduce to tourists	3.79	7	Willing to comment on the planning of community-based tourism development in the local.	3.46
4	Ready to welcome tourists	4.03	8	Willing to persuade others to participate in local community-based tourism activities	4.08

The readiness of people in community-based tourism development: Most of the surveyed households are willing to participate in community-based tourism development. There is a high rate of consent with Indicators in the willingness to associate with other households to develop tourism in the locality; to participate in tourism activities implemented by the district and commune; to cooperate with travel companies, farmers who wish to participate in tourism cooperatives. However, they have not really agreed to participate in tourism villages or tourism associations. The level of consent in willingness to extract an income from tourism to pay for local common activities such as expenditure on management, finding sources of customers, sanitation of households is not high.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to develop community-based tourism and become a spearhead economic sector of the western districts of Ha Giang province, the authors would like to give specific recommendation as follows:

### *On natural resources and facilities:*

- It is necessary to have a synchronous solution to preserve and exploit natural resources and diverse ecosystems effectively for the purpose of sustainable development of industries, including tourism and community-based tourism.
- Improve transport infrastructure and communication.
- Transfer points and welcome visitors are designed in modern and convenient way.

### *On tourism environment:*

- Continue to improve and maintain a green, clean and beautiful environment.
- Develop community and village culture in combination with security, fire and explosion prevention, etc. in the new situation to ensure political security and social safety in the tourist area.
- Continue applying information technology to solve administrative procedures and residence permit procedures conveniently, quickly and accurately.
- Strengthen activities to guide tourists, especially foreign tourists, so that they can feel more enthusiastic, responsible and professional attitude.
- Improve the level of foreign language (English) of the staffs of the parties related to the travel itinerary, visitors' experience.

*About accommodation facilities:*

- Design and upgrade accommodation facilities to achieve higher quality standards.
- There is a need of policies for households and businesses of community service businesses to increase investment in procurement of equipment and utilities in accommodation facilities.
- Research and provide more new and attractive services to bring practical benefits, interesting surprises and good impressions for visitors.
- Solutions to preserve and promote local cultural identity and tourism product:
- Strengthen propaganda, education and exchanges to create harmony and consensus within local communities.
- Pay attention to preserving civilized customs and traditional culinary styles that are conducive to health, traditional production methods and trades for tourism development. At the same time, eliminate the backward customs and culinary styles that are harmful to health.
- Research more meaningful programs to promote tourism in association with traditional production, daily activities and local people's festivals.

**CONCLUSION**

In recent years, district leaders in the western districts and Ha Giang province have oriented and prioritized in developing local tourism towards community tourism. The number of tourists coming to this place increased both in the number of visitors as well as the cost of using tourism services. However, the potential of the tourism industry for the locality is not adequate, especially the level of linkage between stakeholders in community-based tourism development is still lax. After surveying the real situation of tourism in 02 districts of Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man with many subjects surveyed, the study found that the western districts of Ha Giang province have many beautiful landscapes, typical customs and diverse cuisine. Local authorities have many support and incentives for community-based tourism development. Local people responded to participating in tourism. However, transportation is still difficult; The link between the Government - the business - the local people have not really been attached to the common direction, so the results are not as expected. Therefore, in the next time, the parties need to have more discussions and linkages of benefits, develop together community-based tourism in many aspects such as: building diversified and unique resort products satisfying the needs of visitors; To widely promote the unique cultural and culinary characteristics of ethnic groups; Training local guides with knowledge and ability to meet standards. At that time, the community-

based tourism development will become a bright spot for the western districts of Ha Giang province in the future.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

The research just focused on analysis of facts and potential of community-based tourism development in Western districts of Ha Giang province. The future research may cover wider range with the comparisons between the development of community-based tourism in different provinces. The researcher could also focus on the cooperation between participations for sustainable development of community-based tourism in Northwest region of Vietnam.

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