



ETHNIC CULTURE PRESERVATION: A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SAPA, LAO CAI, VIETNAM

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Abstract

Sa Pa - a town in the Northwest region of Vietnam, is famous for its majestic natural beauty, beautiful climate, and unique and attractive ethnic culture. The strong development of tourism in recent years has brought the locality many great socio-economic achievements but also poses a great challenge to the sustainable development of local tourism by its ethnic culture is gradually disappearing. This study was focused on analyzing the development of the community-based tourism (CBT) associated with the preservation of ethnic cultures in Sa Pa town on aspects such as tourism potentials, amount and structure of tourists, tourism products, tourism promotion activities, tourist service facilities, tour guide forces, and tourism infrastructure. On the basis of analysis, the study proposed a number of solutions to enhance the development of community tourism in Sa Pa town while preserving the local ethnic culture in the coming time.

Keywords: Tourism, sustainable development, ethnic culture, preservation, community-based tourism



INTRODUCTION

Sa Pa, a town in Lao Cai province, is a famous tourist destination in Vietnam, with the beauty of the Northwestern mountains. Located at an average altitude of 1500 - 1800 m above sea level, Sapa Town has an invaluable resource that is a cool, fresh year-round climate, with an average temperature of 15-18 °C. Tourists come here not only to enjoy the fresh air, the simple tranquility of a northwestern land, but Sapa is also the destination for visitors to admire the wild beauty of the ladder fields, waterfalls, majestic mountains, to discover customs, cultural beauty of ethnic groups on the mountains such as Black H'Mong, Red Dzao, Tay, Dzay, etc.

In recent years, the number of domestic and international tourists coming to Sapa has increased significantly. In 2019, over 3 million visitors to the town, of which, the majority are participating in community tourism activities. The tourism industry has attracted many investment projects with a total capital of 432.96 billion VND, contributing to the state budget in 2019 of 9,300 billion VND, creating jobs for 9,596 workers. In 2019, the growth rate of the total product in the town will reach 12.07%, of which the trade and service sector accounts for the majority of the economic structure (accounting for over 50%).

Along with the socio-economic development in general and the development of Sa Pa tourism in particular, ethnic cultures have many changes and become one of the unique tourism products that attract tourists through community tourism activities. To take this advantage, the locality is focusing on developing the CBT associated with preserving the ethnic culture. However, the downside of this rapid development is the threat that threatens the sustainable development of the tourism industry of Sa Pa, having negative impacts on the culture and life of the ethnic minorities of the locality. Traditional culture gradually eroded and changed due to lack of conservation orientation; cultural space in villages is gradually shrinking due to urbanization and development needs; Traditional architecture has been replaced by modern architectural works; Traditional costumes are less appearing and crossbreeding between ethnic groups.

Out of the total number of tourists coming to Sa Pa in 2019, only about 250 thousand tourists participate in community tourism activities associated with national cultural preservation (accounting for 7.59%). A question is raised is whether rapid development and urbanization ensure the sustainable development of the tourism industry in Sa Pa? What will help Sa Pa keep the uniqueness and attract tourists in the distant future, making them come to Sa Pa not only once but many times? The answer is that Sa Pa should preserve its ethnic cultural features, promote CBT development in association with national culture preservation. This is a strategy for the sustainable development of the local tourism industry.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study used secondary data for 3 years from 2017 to 2019 to analyze the current situation of tourism development based on community in association with ethnic cultural conservation in Sa Pa town, Lao Cai province. The study collected data from the following sources: Socio-economic development reports of the People's Committee of Sa Pa town, reports, statistical documents on tourism development at the Sa Pa Town Culture and Information Office, Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Lao Cai province; statistic data of the Statistical Office of Lao Cai province and websites of Lao Cai province, of Sa Pa town. The data was subjected to descriptive statistical methods; comparative analysis. Excel 2010 software and information technology application software were used for data processing.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The potential of developing community based tourism associated with preserving the ethnic culture of Sa Pa town

Topographic, unique climate

Located in the northwest of Vietnam, Sa Pa town is 1,600 meters above sea level, 38 km from Lao Cai city. Sa Pa town with floating clouds like a beautiful and magical picture. This is a highlight that attracts tourists to experience.

Sa Pa has an invaluable resource that is a cool, fresh climate, with many diverse nuances. Located at an average altitude of 1500m - 1800m, Sa Pa's climate has temperate and subtropical nuances. This is the ideal hot spot for tourists in summer, because the air is cool all year round.

Attractive tourist destinations

Sa Pa has many tourist spots, diverse types of tourism: ecology, adventure, spirituality, community, ethnic culture, shopping, etc.

In recent years, Sa Pa has had a number of destinations which was huge invested such as: Sun World Fansipan Legend with modern Muong Hoa mountain train, spiritual architectural complex on top of Fansipan, international 5-star hotel Hotel De La Couple - Mgallery ... Sa Pa has busy central streets such as Cau May, Dong Loi, Fansipan horse racing, etc.

The appearance of a shophouse commercial street designed, well-planned, long-term owned, located on Cau May Street, attracts the attention of many investors. Because, if "West Street" has more service chains with restaurants, coffee shops, fashion shops, souvenirs, bars, spas, or mini hotels visitors have more excitement to experience and spend much more at this Northwest's top tourist destination.

Some famous tourist spots that tourists often visit are such as: Ham Rong Mountain is right next to the town where tourists can see the whole town, Muong Hoa valley, Ta Phin hidden in the smoke; The old church in the town was built of stone; Muong Hoa valley; Silver Waterfall with water flowing from a height of over 200m; Hoang Lien National Park with many rare and precious creatures living on the temperate vegetation.

Unique and attractive ethnic culture

Sa Pa has the diversity of ethnic types, so it has a very unique and diverse ethnic culture, from costumes, cuisine to customs.

- Ethnic composition: Sa Pa has ethnic groups such as Dao, Tay, Day, Xa Pho, Kinh, which are unique ethnic cultural features of the regions interwoven and that beauty is preserved and promoted. This is a highlight that attracts visitors to tourist spots and routes.
- Costumes: Costumes of ethnic groups are unique, attractive by their colors, materials and decorations.
- Leaf bathing custom: The "Dao do" people are famous for their healthy leaf-bathing service. Many visitors come to Sa Pa and experience the Dao do leaf bathing with the concept of curing muscle aches, bones, joints or flu, itching and constipation, helping to strengthen health of women after childbirth, people after getting sick, working hard people.
- Traditional customs of each ethnic group: Sa Pa has 6 ethnic groups living together: Kinh, H'Mong, Dao Do, Tay, Giay, Pho Pho. Each ethnic group has its own cultural characteristics, from which many unique traditional festivals have been formed in Sa Pa. Sa Pa's cultural features are expressed through the life of the community of ethnic groups, vividly reflected through religious and spiritual rituals such as praying for peace and good land; good weather, good crops, good health for people and especially diverse festivals. The international tourists always enjoy coming to Sapa in the early spring to enjoy the festival season such as: Dance Festival of the Red Dao people in Ta Phin, Ta Van (Sa Pa); Sai San festival of the Mong people in Can Cau (Si Ma Cai); etc with unique and mysterious dances; passionate folk tunes and humane folk games.

Status of developing the community based tourism associated with preserving the ethnic culture in Sa Pa

Amount and structure of tourists

The amount of tourists increases annually, the structure of tourists divided between domestic and international groups has a significant difference, of which domestic tourists account for the main proportion.

Table 1: The number and structure of tourists participating in the CBT in Sa Pa, 2017-2019

Indicators	2017	2018	2019
1. Total number of tourists participating in the CBT associated with ethnic cultural preservation	219,880	236,430	250,000
Domestic tourist	141,130	154,776	166,298
International tourist	78,750	81,654	83,702
Structure (%)	100	100	100
Domestic tourist	64.19	65.46	66.52
International tourist	35.81	34.54	33.48
2. Total tourist in the town	1,720,000	2,700,000	3,294,000
3. The proportion of tourists participating in CBT associated with ethnic cultural conservation / Total tourists in the town	12.78	8.76	7.59

(Source: Sa Pa town's culture, sport and tourism department, 2020)

Tourists to Sapa are mainly domestic tourists, which normally account for more than 60%, but not long-term stay and consumption is not large. Thus, in order to increase the value of community ecotourism associated with promoting ethnic cultural features, Sa Pa must take solutions to preserve the traditional and primitive elements of these ethnic groups, which is essential to increase number of foreign visitors to Sa Pa.

Tourism Products

CBT products associated with the town's cultural features are those associated with: preserving and promoting historical relics; Preservation and promotion of intangible cultural values; Preserve and promote the value of local relics and landmarks.

Table 2: CBT products associated with conservation Ethnic culture in Sa Pa town, 2017-2019

Indicators	2017	2018	2019	Comparison			
				2018/2017		2019/2018	
				Quantity	Percentage (%)	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Quantity of CBT products associated with ethnic culture preservation	11	15	17	4	36.36	2	13.33
Quantity of tourism products	16	21	23	5	31.25	2	9.52
Proportion of CBT associated with ethnic culture preservation / total tourism products (%)	68.75	71.43	73.91	2.68	3.9	2.48	3.48

(Source: Sa Pa town's culture, sport and tourism department, 2020)

CBT products associated with the preservation of ethnic cultures in Sa Pa town in the period 2017-2019 play an important role in the town's general tourism development, accounting for a large proportion of the total number of tourism products of the town: accounting for 68.75% (in 2017); accounting for 71.43% (in 2018) and accounting for 73.91% (in 2019). Some of the managers in Ta Van interviewed said that the more the households doing the CBT, maintain the original identity of the ethnic people, the more foreign tourists like and enjoy.

Routes, destinations, resorts of tourism

Sa Pa's tourism has many tourist routes in the province, linking with other provinces and also international tourist routes.

- International tours

+ Tourist route connecting Sa Pa National Tourism Zone to Thach Lam (Kunming, China), Dai Ly, Lijiang (Yunnan, China) through the international road gate of Ha Khau (Lao Cai).

+ Self-drive car tour (Caravan tour) connecting Sa Pa National Tourism Zone with Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Luang Prabang (Laos, through Tay Trang, Dien Bien international border gate), Vientiane (Laos) and Chiang Mai (Thailand).

- *Interprovincial tourist route*: Connecting with Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Yen Bai, Phu Tho, Ha Giang, Bac Kan and Thai Nguyen along the national highways: 4D, 37, 279 and National Highway 2.

- *Intra-provincial tourist route*: Connecting Sa Pa National Tourism Zone with Lao Cai City, districts: Bac Ha, Muong Khuong, Bao Thang, Si Ma Cai and Bat Xat.

- Tourist route in Sa Pa National Tourism Zone:

+ Sightseeing routes: Touring routes in Sa Pa tourist city and connecting to tourist subdivisions of Sa Pa National Tourism Zone;

+ Trekking tours: From Sa Pa tourist town to ethnic villages: Cat Cat, Sin Chai, Ta Phin, Lao Chai, Ta Van, Ban Ho, Nam Sai, Sa Pa, Hau Thao, Su Pan, etc.

+ Thematic tourism route: Mountain climbing tour, conquering Mount Fansipan (Sa Pa town).

- The extended route connecting to Bat Xat district:

+ The trekking tour connecting to the ethnic villages: Ban Xeo, Muong Hum, Sang Ma Sao, Den Sang, Y Ty, A Mu Sung, A Lu, Trinh Tuong ...;

+ Thematic tourism route: Route to conquer Ky Quan San - Bach Moc Luong Tu peak, Nhiu Cu San peak (Bat Xat district);

+ Mountain bike racing tourist route: Connecting from Lao Cai city to Bat Xat, Sa Pa.

Tourism promotion activities

Sa Pa town has practically applied 4.0 technology to tourism activities, Sa Pa town has directed propaganda agencies in the town to effectively exploit propaganda and activities for Sa Pa's tourism on many media: Sa Pa Tourism App, Lao Cai Tourism App, The Electric Information Portal of Sa Pa Town and Sa Pa Tourism Promotion Website and on the radio and television system in the town.

In the period of 2017 - 2019, Sa Pa has published more than 1000 news, articles and reports on cultural and tourist activities on newspapers, travel magazines and advertising on television channels, portal electronic information of the town and on the Tourist App information page.

Tourism service business establishments

By the end of 2019, there are 690 tourist accommodation establishments in Sa Pa Town (390 motels and hotels in the town and 300 homestays in communes). Regarding ratings, Sa Pa has 02 hotels recognized as 5 star standard; 2 hotels recognized as 4 star standard; 30 hotels with standard from 1 star to 3 stars, with a total of 8,000 rooms; with 9,196 employees working in accommodation establishments (directly 5,170 workers, indirectly 4,026 employees); there are 275 large and small restaurants and 64 restaurants in hotels, with a capacity of serving more than 4,000 pax / turn; 23 units, including 15 companies doing international travel; 03 domestic travel companies; 05 branches, representative offices; 20 karaoke service establishments, 46 sauna and massage service establishments ...

By 2019, the total number of homestays in the town is 174. In which: Ta Van (55 establishments), Lao Chai (12 establishments), Ban Ho (26 establishments), Ta Phin (24 establishments), Nam Sai (05 establishments), Nam Cang (01 establishments), Thanh Phu (03 establishments), San Xa Ho (05 establishments), Su Pan (02 establishments), Hau Thao (41 establishments) basis). On average, each accommodation establishment has the revenue of about 140 million VND / year.

Tourist guide force

The number of employees in community tourism activities increases annually: 980 employees (2017), 1,150 employees (2018), an increase of 17.35% compared to 2018; In 2019, there are 1,300 employees, an increase of 113.04% compared to 2014. Thus, it can be seen that job opportunities for workers in community tourism development in the town are increasing, this proves that there are many CBT products that tourists have many choices and interested to experience in the area.

Table 3: The human resources participated in CBT development associated with ethnic cultural conservation in Sa Pa town, 2017-2019

Indicators	Units	2017	2018	2019	Comparison			
					2018/2017		2019/2018	
					Quantity	Percentage (%)	Quantity	Percentage (%)
1. Quantity								
Labor participating in CBT	Person	980	1,150	1,300	170	17.35	150	13.04
Employees participating in the tourism industry in town	Person	4,000	4,478	9,596	478	11.95	5,118	114.29
The rate of labor involved in CBT development / Total tourism employment in the town	%	24.50	25.68	13.55	1.18	4.82	-12.13	- 47.25
2. Qualifications								
Postgraduate	Person	980	1,150	1,300	170	17.35	150	13.04
Bachelor	Person	124	150	185	26	20.97	35	23.33
College, intermediate	Person	349	424	508	75	21.49	84	19.81
Unskilled labor	Person	308	353	377	45	14.61	24	6.8
	Person	198	223	230	25	12.63	7	3.14

(Source: Sa Pa town's culture, sport and tourism department, 2020)

The town has cooperated with the Lao Cai Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Hanoi Open University to open 20 training courses on tourist accommodation management skills, tour operations, skills of organizing community tourism activities, on-site explanations, restaurant operations, reception skills, housekeeping skills, community-based tourism skills, English communication for nearly 2,000 employees working at tourism business establishments in the town.

Tourism infrastructure

Urban planning has attracted many investment projects in tourism such as construction projects of Indochina international hotels; the construction project of 5-star hotel Silkpath Sa Pa; complex project of works, entertainment services, hotels Fansipan; the project of constructing a

stationary parking lot with a capacity of about 500 vehicles, the project of the resettlement area of group 12 of Sa Pa town; Highway 4D bypass of section of Sa Pa town, project of resettlement and residential arrangement in the Northwest, upgrading drainage system, roads in inner city ..., upgrading construction of marine system directions, explanatory boards - interpretations, maps along routes and tourist attractions for visitors to create safety and show professionalism when serving guests.

Table 4: Accommodation and homestay establishments for CBT development associated with ethnic cultural conservation in Sa Pa town, 2017-2019

Indicators	Comparison						
	2017	2018	2019	2018/2017		2019/2018	
				Quantity	Percentage (%)	Quantity	Percentage (%)
1. Homestay	38	42	58	4	10.53	16	38.1
Cat Cat village	4	4	8	0	0	4	50
Ta Phin village	5	6	8	1	20	2	25
Ta Van village	6	6	8	0	0	2	25
Lao Chai village	5	6	9	1	20	3	33.33
Sin Chai village	6	7	9	1	16.67	2	22.22
Ho village	6	6	8	0	0	2	25
Y Linh Ho village	6	7	8	1	16.67	1	12.5
2. Other accommodation establishments	125	134	140	9	7.2	6	4.48
3. Total	163	176	198	13.00	7.98	22.00	12.5

(Source: Sa Pa town's culture, sport and tourism department, 2020)

The size of accommodation establishments and homestays in the town for CBT development increases every year. In 2017, there were 163 establishments (with 38 homestays), in 2018 there were 176 establishments (with 42 homestays) and in 2019 there were 198 establishments (with 58 homestays).

CONCLUSIONS

Community based tourism is an industry with great potential for the socio-economic development of localities in mountainous areas. This type of tourism plays an important role for the development of Sa Pa. It develops on the advantages of the local majestic and beautiful

natural beauty, wonderful cool climate, and more especially, the advantage of very unique ethnic cultures. However, in the context of the local socio-economic change in the trend of increasing urbanization and modernization, the ethnic cultural features tend to fade away. This is a big challenge for the community based tourism industry in Sa Pa. This study has analyzed the current state of community tourism in Sa Pa in many aspects such as tourism potentials, especially in-depth analysis of unique ethnic cultural potentials, analyzing the current status of community tourism development associating with the preservation of ethnic culture in order to be able to find the achievements and the limitations that exist in this activity.

In further research, the authors shall analyze in depth this issue through identifying and analyzing the factors affecting the development of community tourism in association with ethnic cultural conservation and shall study in a larger scope such as in one province or the whole of the Northwest region of Vietnam.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of analyzing the current situation of CBT development associated with ethnic cultural conservation in Sa Pa, in order to achieve the goal of preserving local ethnic culture and developing sustainable tourism, this study has proposed a number of effective recommendations following:

- (1) Planning the development of the community-based tourism area in association with ethnic cultural conservation in Sa Pa town.
- (2) Increase investment in CBT development associated with ethnic cultural preservation in the area.
- (3) Promote the management and investment of unique and diverse CBT products associated with the preservation of ethnic culture.
- (4) Improving the quality and quantity of the team serving the CBT associated with ethnic cultural conservation in Sa Pa town .
- (5) Improving the quality of management, developing travel activities and promoting local CBT products.
- (6) Strengthen inspection, supervision, and limit environmental protection pollution in the development of community tourism associated with the preservation of local ethnic cultures.
- (7) Increase the participation of households in community tourism development in the area.

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