
THE ACTUAL SITUATION OF ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS TO THANH HOA IN THE 2016 - 2020 PERIOD

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Thanh Hoa is a province with potentials and strengths in tourism development with a variety of forms to meet the needs of tourists. Over the years, with available good conditions, Thanh Hoa tourism has achieved remarkable achievements. However, mainly domestic tourists come to Thanh Hoa and international tourists are estimated in a limited number. The article analyzes the current situation of attracting international tourists to Thanh Hoa in the 2016 - 2020 period so that relevant organs have a more comprehensive view of the Thanh Hoa tourism development strategy in the coming years.

Key words: Actual situation; international tourists; Thanh Hoa.

1. Introduction

Tourism is an industry that has great impacts on the economy of every locality and country. In particular, the income from international tourists contributes to GDP growth, people's income, and foreign currency source to improve the balance of payments, and to promote local and national images to friends all over the world. In addition, tourism also creates job opportunities, increases incomes, reduces urbanization, which is an opportunity to expand cultural exchanges, improve people's knowledge, develop human factors, and ensure national security and social order and safety...

Thanh Hoa is a province with many potentials and advantages in tourism development with many different types of tourism to meet tourists' diverse needs. In order to exploit its strengths, Thanh Hoa tourism has developed long-term and short-term programs and plans in tourism development for years, focusing on investment activities. As a result, in recent years,

Thanh Hoa tourism has become an attractive destination for tourists with an increase in annual revenue. Although the number of visitors to Thanh Hoa has increased steadily, the number of international tourists to Thanh Hoa are still modest, which is not commensurate with the province's potentials and strengths. In fact, there have been active activities to attract international tourists, Thanh Hoa has not really become an attractive destination in comparison with other localities with similar potential and strengths.

Within the scope of the article, the actual situation of attracting international tourists to Thanh Hoa in the 2016-2020 period is discussed.

2. Research overview

Vietnam has been aware of the importance of tourism in its socio-economic development and globalization strategy. Therefore, how to attract international tourists to Vietnam is an essential requirement of development. Up to now, the solutions to attract international tourists to Vietnam have been researched and implemented by many localities; Some localities with tourism strengths have attracted many international visitors such as Sapa, Ha Long, Da Nang, Nha Trang... Centers, institutes and universities that carry out researches on solutions to attract international tourists have assessed the current situation and highlighted the tourism strengths of each locality, thereby partly contributing to the management and attraction of international tourists.

In the article "Research on Thai tourist behavior to Da Nang and suggestions for developing tourist attraction policies" (2009), the authors Huy, Le Van and Tho, Ha Quang - based on a survey of 500 Thai visitors to Da Nang, introduced behaviors related to tourists, thereby making some recommendations for policy development to attract Thai tourists (in particular) and international tourists in general to Da Nang.

With the bachelor's thesis in tourism "Ecotourism in Sapa for international tourists" (2010), on the basis of assessing the potential and current status of different types of ecotourism in Sapa, the author Thuy, Nguyen Phuong has built the orientation of different types of ecotourism in Sapa for international tourists.

Another bachelor's thesis in tourism "Some solutions to attract Chinese tourists at the Tourism Center of Hai Phong Petroleum Tourism Service Joint Stock Company" (2010) by Dung, Nghiem Thi Phuong a number of solutions to attract Chinese tourists have also been proposed, on the basis of understanding the actual operation of the company in serving Chinese tourists. However, these solutions are only suitable for the actual conditions of Hai Phong Petroleum Tourism Service Joint Stock Company.

With the topic "The current situation and development potential of the Russian tourist market in Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa" (2013), the author Loan, Nguyen Kim has proposed solutions to attract and develop the Russian tourist market in Nha Trang - Khanh Hoa, in which

one of the solutions focused on by the author is the quality improvement of tourism products and services.

In the article "Developing tourism in Thanh Hoa province into a spearhead economic sector" (2019), the author Binh, Le Thi analyzed the advantages and disadvantages in infrastructure development, promotion and diversification of tourism products in order to attract domestic and international tourists. In terms of attracting international tourists to stay and visit places in Thanh Hoa province, the author concludes that the number of international tourists coming to Thanh Hoa is still limited without any significant changes like some provinces in the Northern key economic region that have similar conditions in terms of tourism resources [4]. However, the article just focuses on summarizing the number of tourists including domestic and international visitors to Thanh Hoa through the stages to propose solutions to develop tourism into a spearhead economy of Thanh Hoa.

The author Dung, Nong Thi in the article "Attracting tourists to Thai Nguyen province in the era of industrial revolution 4.0" (2019) has focused on studying the influence of the industrial revolution 4.0 on the change in consumer behavior of tourists towards tourism services in Thai Nguyen province, thereby proposing some solutions to increase the attraction of tourists in general and foreign tourists in particular to Thai Nguyen province in the period 2020 - 2025. In addition to solutions related to tourism quality and services, the author also emphasizes the enhancement of community-based tourism exploitation, and the role of building a sense of tourism business in the community [5].

In the Master's thesis of Business Administration "International tourist attraction: a case study for Vietnam" (2017), Hien, Vu Thi Thanh has deeply researched the actual situation of activities to attract international tourists to Vietnam, thereby proposing solutions and recommendations on policies to attract more international tourists to Vietnam in the coming years [6]. However, the scale of this study is fairly wide, therefore, the solutions are still quite general and have not yet made a difference for each locality.

In general, the above studies have focused on theory and practice in tourism activities, tourism business, tourism market and mentioned experiences of attracting international tourists of some localities in the country. Due to the differences in infrastructure of provinces, the above researches are only reference documents on tourist attraction issues of international tourists in Thanh Hoa province. In addition, although there have been studies related to the current situation of tourism development in Thanh Hoa province, specific factors in tourist attraction, especially international tourist attraction have not been mentioned.

3. Research approach and methods

3.1. Research approach

Documents on planning routes and tourist spots; relevant books, publications, research works on international tourist attraction and websites of tourist sites, attractions and tours; summary reports on tourism activities in Thanh Hoa over the years.

Investigation, actual survey on the quality of management activities, promotion and attraction of international tourists; service quality in zones and spots; tourism service establishments in Thanh Hoa province.

3.2. Research methods

To achieve the research's objectives, the author has used a number of specific research methods:

- Document analysis method

This is the basic method used in most humanistic social studies. The basis of this method is based on the analysis of documents collected from regulatory agencies, service establishments; documents on the Internet, books, publications. The data is systematized, selectively synthesized and analyzed in accordance with the contents of the research.

- Sociological investigation method

A questionnaire was developed to assess the current status of activities to attract international tourists in Thanh Hoa province. The analysis results from the questionnaire will be the basis for assessing the situation of attracting international tourists to Thanh Hoa.

- Survey method

The author conducts a field survey to comprehensively assess the current status of activities to attract international tourists in Thanh Hoa province. The information collected from the surveys is an objective basis for assessing the situation of attracting international tourists to Thanh Hoa.

4. Research results

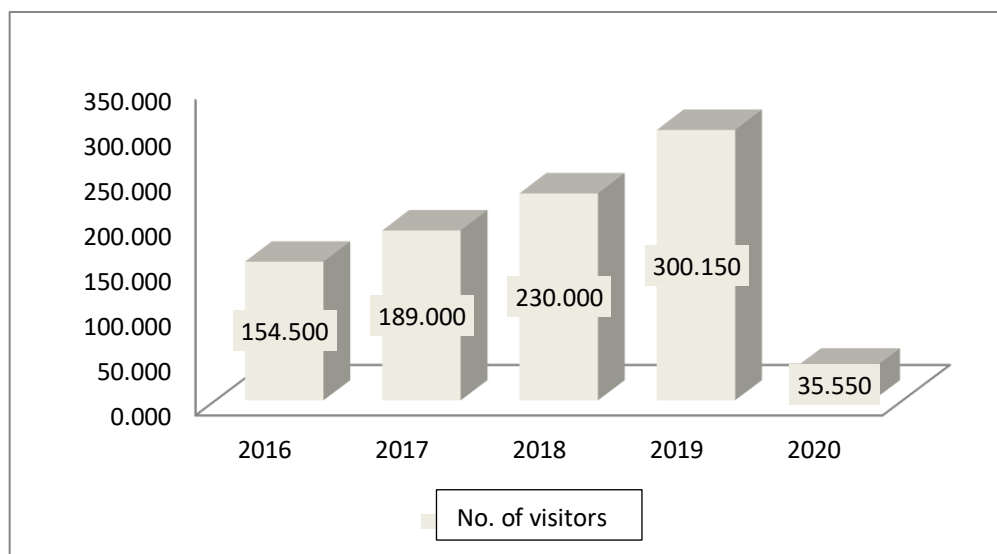
4.1. International tourists to Thanh Hoa

With the potentials and strengths available, along with policies, strategies, programs and plans in tourism development, the number of international tourists coming to Thanh Hoa is increasing day by day. According to statistics of Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the number of international visitors to Thanh Hoa tourism only reached 34,980 visitors in 2010 while the number had increased to 127,000 visitors and 300,150 visitors by 2015 and in 2019 respectively. In 2020, despite the influence of the epidemic, most countries in the world closed their borders and did not welcome foreign tourists, the number of visitors international visitors to Thanh Hoa also reached 35,550 visitors. Foreign tourists mainly come from Thailand, Laos, China, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore and some European countries... Meanwhile, tourists from Britain, French, Canada has recently had upward trend. The number of international tourists to Thanh Hoa mainly focuses on areas and tourist attractions of exploration, community (homestay) in some mountainous and highland districts.

In which, Ba Thuoc district is the leading locality in the province in attracting international tourists. Meanwhile, sea tourism - a strength of Thanh Hoa tourism in recent years has been focused on investing in upgrading both infrastructure and technical facilities to improve the quality of tourism services and products. In fact, more and more international tourists have been attracted to Thanh Hoa beaches.

Figure 1: Number of international tourists to Thanh Hoa in the period 2016 - 2020

Unit: Visitors



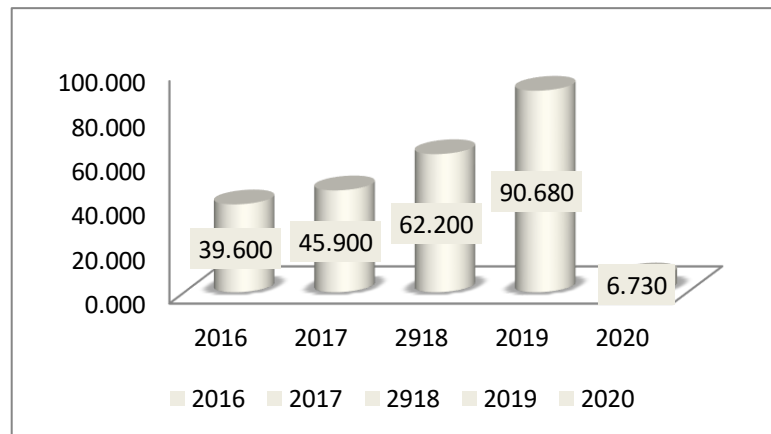
Source: Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism

According to the chart, it can be seen that the number of international visitors to Thanh Hoa tends to increase over the years. This is a good sign that Thanh Hoa is increasingly becoming an attractive destination for not only domestic tourists but also international tourists with an average growth rate of 29.4%, especially in the current situation. Only in 2020, due to the epidemic, did the number of international visitors decrease significantly.

Along with the increase in the number of international visitors to Thanh Hoa, the revenue from international tourists also increased. The revenue from international visitors reached 39,600 USD in 2016 while the figure has increased to 90,680 USD by 2019; The average expenditure in 2016 was 80,000 VND/day; however, by 2019, it has increased to 98,000 VND/day. This is a low number, but in general, this is also a good sign for Thanh Hoa tourism, especially in the current context with a lot of difficulties when tourism products are not diversified enough to meet the needs of tourists.

Figure 2: Revenue from international tourists in the period 2015 - 2019

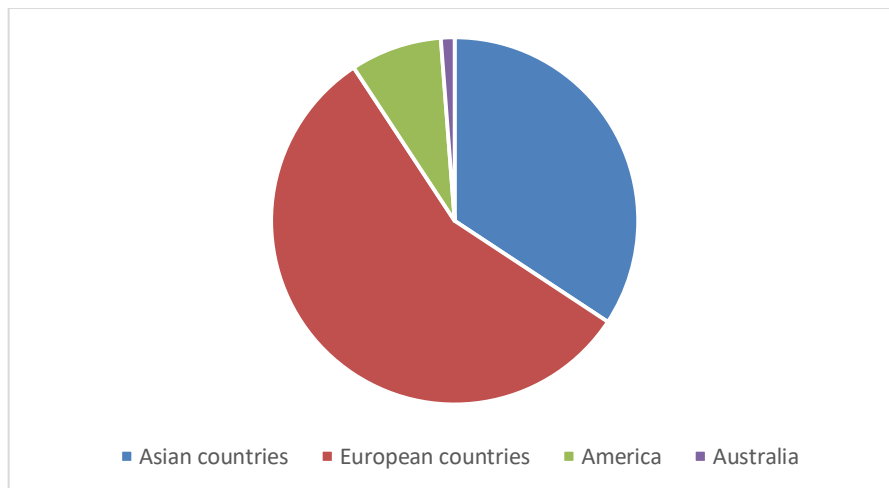
Unit: thousand USD



Source: Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism

The international tourist market in Thanh Hoa is also quite diverse, in which tourists mainly come from Japan, China, Korea, Europe, America... with the largest number of European visitors accounting for 56.1%. European visitors can be considered as the key tourist market of Thanh Hoa tourism industry. Asian tourists rank second with 33.6%.

Figure 3: International tourist market by continent



Source: The authors' investigation and survey in 2020

To learn more about the international tourist market to Thanh Hoa in recent years, the authors have deeply investigated 20 tourist sites and attractions that have the potential to attract international tourists, and conducted a survey of 107 international visitors. The results show that the proportion of tourists coming from European countries still accounted for a larger number, such as French tourists accounting for 13.1%, British visitors of 10.3% and the smallest number being Australian with 1.9%.

Figure 4: International tourist market by nationality

Unit: %

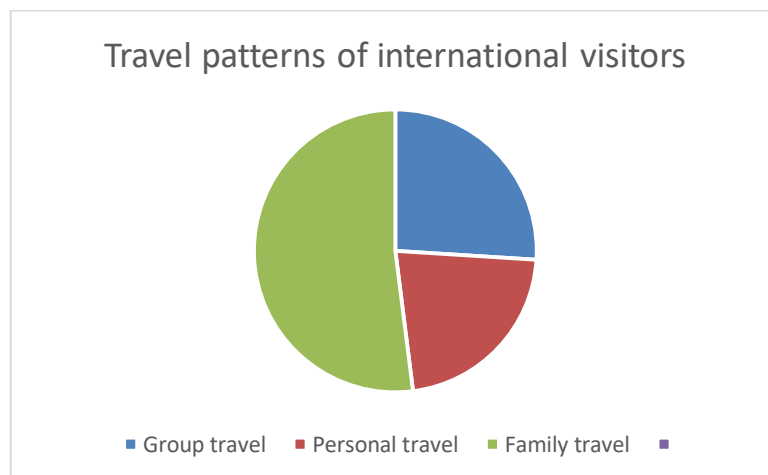


Source: The authors' investigation and survey in 2020

It can be seen that the international visitor market to Thanh Hoa is quite diverse, but still at a low level and unevenly.

According to the survey results, it is found that international tourists often travel in groups with family or friends, and prefer to visit places with natural scenery. The number of visitors travelling in groups accounts for a higher proportion with 52% of visitors, followed by group travel with 26%.

Figure 5: Travel patterns of international visitors



Source: The authors' investigation and survey in 2020

The duration of stay in Thanh Hoa from 1-3 days accounted for 86.0%, while the stay of 4-7 days accounted for 12.5%, and the stay of 7 days or more accounted for 1.5%. In terms of the average length of stay per visitor, the stay of visitors traveling on a tour is 2.3 days, while that of visitors traveling themselves is 2.7 days. The length of stay will affect the visitor's spending on shopping and using services during the trip. This is an important factor that should

be paid close attention by local tourism business managers to build tourism products to increase the spending ability and shopping needs of tourists.

Through face-to-face interviews, it is found out that international tourists often travel with the purpose of leisure, not the purpose of visiting cultural - historical monuments (11.3%). International tourists choose to travel abroad in general and to travel to Thanh Hoa in particular mainly for leisure such as swimming, sightseeing and shopping. They do not pay much attention to the cultural and historical attractions in Thanh Hoa, but are mainly interested in coastal resort tourism or mountain resort (37.9%) and exploring, experiencing, and learning about life of local people (37.1%). Besides, international tourists are especially interested in buying souvenirs during the trip and don't care much about the price.

Table 1. Purpose of international visitors when visiting Thanh Hoa

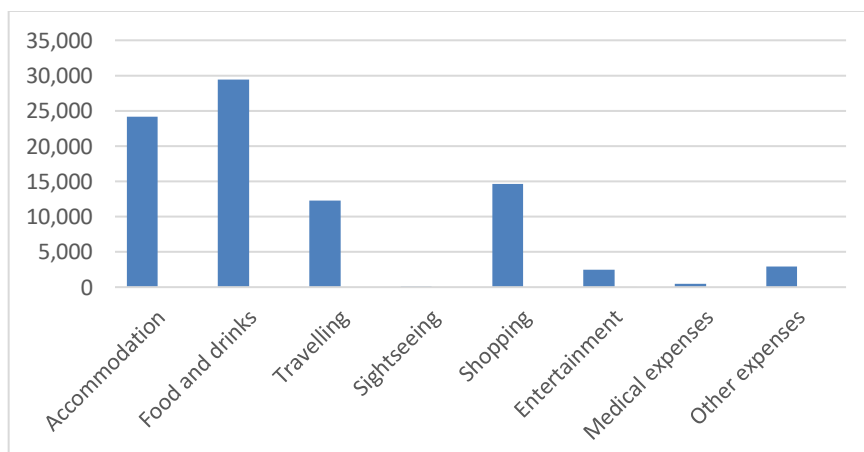
TT	International visitors' purposes	Percentage (%)
1	Leisure travel	37.9
2	Explore, experience, learn about life	37.1
3	Visit cultural - historical monuments	11.3
4	Visit relatives and friends	4.0
5	Conferences	6.5
6	Business	3.2
Total		100.0

Source: The authors' investigation and survey in 2020

Spending by international visitors when coming to Thanh Hoa mainly focuses on room rental, food and drinks, shopping and travelling. Accordingly, the average total daily expenditure of international visitors in Thanh Hoa is 88.4 USD, in which room rental of 24.2 USD, food and drinks of 29.4 USD; travelling of 12.3 USD; shopping of 14.6 USD; sightseeing and entertainment activities of 4.5 USD; medical and other expenses of 3.4 USD.

Figure 6: Average spending per day of international tourists

Unit: USD



Source: Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism

By gender, female guests spend an average of 92.6 USD per day, which mainly on shopping while male guests spend an average of 87.4 USD.

By type of accommodation, the average spending per day of guests in 5-star hotels is the highest with 124.2 USD/day, while that of 4-star hotels, 3-star hotels, and 2-star hotel is 102.9 USD/day, 68.6 USD/day, 36.2 USD/day respectively. Meanwhile, guests in tourist village only spend 75.2 USD/day.

4.2. Tourism technical facilities and human resources

** Tourism technical facilities*

Tourism technical facilities include the facilities of the tourism industry and a number of national economic sectors engaged in tourism. Tourism technical facilities include different components with certain functions and meanings for the creation and implementation of tourist products.

- Catering and accommodation facilities: This is the most characteristic component in the entire system of tourist technical facilities, meeting the most basic needs of people (eating and sleeping) when they live outside of their usual place of residence.

- The system of professional shops: is part of the tourism technical material facilities. Their purpose is to satisfy the demand for goods of tourists by selling customer-specific items, finished goods and other goods. This system of facilities consists of two parts: one part belongs to tourist service centers mainly serving tourists while the other belongs to the local commercial network with the task of serving the local people, and also playing an important role in serving tourists, contributing to improving the efficiency of tourism activities at the destinations in the province.

- Medical facilities: is for the purpose of serving medical tourism and providing additional services at tourist destinations. This facility includes treatment centers, medical rooms equipped with equipment to ensure first aid when needed.

- Facilities serving cultural information activities: aim to improve and expand socio-cultural knowledge for tourists, facilitate social communication and propaganda cultural achievements of ethnic groups. These facilities include cultural center, cinema room, theater, club, exhibition hall...

On being determined to be one of the important factors creating products and satisfaction for tourists when visiting Thanh Hoa, in recent years, the province and tourism industry have paid great attention to investing in upgrading tourism technical facilities to meet the needs of accommodation and entertainment of tourists. According to statistics from the Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, by 2020, the province has 925 accommodation establishments with a total of 41,300 rooms, of which 43 accommodation establishments have been upgraded to higher level, ensuring to serve the vacation needs of tourists when visiting

Thanh Hoa. In the system of accommodation facilities, Thanh Hoa has invested in many high-class resorts to meet the resort needs of guests, especially in Pu Luong - which is currently attracting the highest number of international tourists to Thanh Hoa at present. In addition, the restaurant system is diverse with many forms to meet the needs of eating and enjoying the cuisine of tourists when visiting the sea of Thanh Hoa.

Table 2: Accommodation in Thanh Hoa province

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Accommodation	650	700	740	820	900	925
No. of rooms	20,500	22,700	25,900	30,000	40,100	41,300

Source: Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism

** Human resources*

Human resources in tourism are the subjects participating in the tourism and socio-economic development process. This resource is the synthesis of the subjects in each field of tourism, but it is not a simple collection of individuals or collectives. That strength originates from the inherent cultural qualities of each subject and is multiplied in the practice of tourism. Therefore, when talking about tourism human resources as the driving force of the tourism development process, it is talking about the positive qualities of the aggregate of subjects revealed in that process and promoting the development while minimizing the negative aspects and limitations of tourism human resources.

The role of tourism human resources in is increasingly being confirmed. The tourism human resources are responsible for forecasting, leading and guiding the community to become a force creating new tourism values. The tourism workforce must be a pioneering force, helping and guiding people to understand and apply science and technology to their work; actively participate in hunger eradication and poverty alleviation, create jobs, improve people's intellectual and physical well-being, create favorable conditions for integration, and contribute to building a healthy, democratic, fair and civilized society.

Tourism human resources play a pioneering role in creating tourism values of the international labor division chain in the context of deeper and more comprehensive international integration. Individuals and tourism human resources themselves are both subjects capable of integrating and promoting the entire endogenous strength of the nation, as well as an object of receiving and promoting the quintessence and advanced experience in tourism development of the world for sustainable tourism development.

Being well aware of the importance of human resources in tourism development, in recent years, Thanh Hoa has been promoting socialization and international cooperation, attracting resources to develop tourism human resources. Meanwhile, the province focuses on diversifying forms of tourism training and promoting the application of advanced science and technology in training, fostering and developing tourism human resources. In particular, the

quality of human resources has been improved in both state management, corporate governance and tourism workers.

According to statistics of Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, by the end of 2020, the province has 40,600 direct tourism workers; in which, the number of trained laborers is 32,300 people. In particular, the province pays great attention to training and equipping workers with necessary skill including communication skills in tourism, foreign languages (especially for areas with a high percentage of international visitors). This is an important human resource for Thanh Hoa tourism to increasingly assert its position in the country and over the world as well as ensure the quality of tourism products.

Table 3: Tourism human resources for the period 2015 - 2019

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Tourism human resources	18.600	20.800	24.300	28.400	33.500	40.600
Trained	13.500	15.410	18.310	21.500	26.400	32.300
Untrained	5.100	5.390	5.900	6.900	7.100	8.300

Source: Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism

4.3. Tourism investment cooperation and promotion

As a economic sector with highly international nature, in order to promote tourism development, in addition to promoting internal resources to take advantage of external resources, Thanh Hoa tourism industry has strengthened the expansion of integration and cooperation activities with many provinces in the country and around the world to promote tourism development as well as attract tourists to Thanh Hoa.

Domestically, Thanh Hoa has actively linked and cooperated with provinces with a strong tourism industry and similarities in tourism activities in order to promote and support each other in tourism development. Specifically, on May 31st, 2019 a signing ceremony of cooperation in tourism development among 3 provinces of Quang Ninh, Ninh Binh, and Thanh Hoa was taken place at FLC tourist area. In addition, there are the signing ceremony of tourism development cooperation agreement between the Tourism Association of the three provinces, the Hanoi UNESCO Club and the CTC Community Tourism Club and the signing ceremony between the Nghe An Tourism Promotion Center, the Tourism Promotion Center Phu Tho Tourism Center and Hung Yen Tourism Promotion Center; the signing ceremony of tourism cooperation agreement between the three provinces of Ninh Binh - Thanh Hoa - Nghe An...

The regular participation in cultural, sports, tourism and commercial events in provinces and cities throughout the country such as Vietnam International Tourism Fair VITM, International Tourism Fair ITE of Ho Chi Minh City... brought Thanh Hoa's tourism image to domestic and foreign tourists.

Besides, Thanh Hoa tourism is also interested in cooperation with countries in the region and the world. Many cooperation agreements have been signed, for example, the signing of a cooperation agreement between Sam Son city (Thanh Hoa) and the Central district of Saint Petersburg at the headquarters of the Central district of Saint Petersburg (Russian Federation). Tourism promotion activities in foreign markets have been organized such as investment calls in markets of countries in the region (ASEAN, Korea, China, Japan...) and Europe (Russian Federation, France, Germany...); the opening of a direct flight from Thanh Hoa to Bangkok (Thailand) operated by Vietravel.

5. Discussion

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the attraction of international tourists in Thanh Hoa in recent years has received much attention and achieved remarkable results such as an increase in the number of visitors (except for years with epidemic). In addition, there are still many limitations in terms of tourism facilities and tourism human resources, investment cooperation and tourism propaganda, and promotion.

In recent years, Thanh Hoa tourism industry has made great progress with important milestones in infrastructure development, promotion and diversification of tourism products. According to the statistics, up to 18 tourism infrastructure projects have been implemented in the whole province while many business projects in tourist zones and attractions have been licensed to operate. In particular, in terms of tourism promotion, in addition to linking and cooperating with provinces with strong tourism industry and similarities in tourism activities to promote, associate and support each other, Thanh Hoa tourism is also interested in cooperation with countries in the region and the world.

The total number of visitors to Thanh Hoa in 2015 was 5,530,000 visitors, of which international visitors were 127,000, reaching a revenue of 5,180,000 million VND. By 2019, the total number of visitors was 9,655,000, of which international tourists were 300,150, reaching a revenue of 14,526,000 million VND¹.

According to this figure, we can clearly see the efforts of the tourism industry and Thanh Hoa province in developing the spearhead economic sector. However, these results are not commensurate with the potential and strengths of Thanh Hoa province when the rate of international visitors to Thanh Hoa is still very low. This number is quite modest in comparison with the provinces with developed tourism activities across the country such as Ninh Binh, Ha Long, Da Nang. In addition, the number of international tourists to Thanh Hoa mainly focuses on some specific areas, tourist attractions in some mountainous and highland districts with short stays. The length of stay will affect the visitor's spending on shopping and using services during the trip. It is an important factor that should be paid close attention by local tourism business managers to increase the spending and shopping needs of tourists.

¹ Thanh Hoa Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism

It can be seen that it is necessary to analyze and assess the current situation of attracting international tourists to Thanh Hoa to be able to come up with comprehensive and practical solutions to promote tourism development in Thanh Hoa in general, and attract more international tourists to Thanh Hoa province in particular.

The article only focuses on analyzing the current situation of attracting international tourists in some aspects; there are still many contents that need to be researched and supplemented. However, this will be the basis for other researchers to find out the causes of limitations and propose the right directions to attract international tourists to Thanh Hoa province in the future.

6. Conclusion

Thanh Hoa is located in the North Central tourist area and possesses many advantages both in terms of nature and society in the development of the tourism economy. Over the years, Thanh Hoa tourism has developed, achieved remarkable achievements and has become one of the attractive destinations for tourists. With a system of rich and diverse tourism resources, it can be said that Thanh Hoa is an attractive destination for tourists from different countries around the world; however, the development of Thanh Hoa tourism industry is not commensurate with the potential with a limited number of international tourists to Thanh Hoa. To promote activities to attract international tourists to Thanh Hoa, it is very important to identify the factors that attract international tourists to Thanh Hoa. The analysis of the current situation in the article is the basis for proposing solutions to attract international tourists to Thanh Hoa. It is hoped that, in the near future, potential and strengths of Thanh Hoa will be fully exploited with an increasing number of international visitors to Thanh Hoa.

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