



The Satisfaction of Tourists with Community-based Tourism in My Hoa Hung Commune in An Giang Province, Vietnam

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A B S T R A C T

The research was conducted to assess the satisfaction of tourists with local community-based tourism services in My Hoa Hung (MHH) commune in Long Xuyen, An Giang, Vietnam. The research findings will be the scientific and practical basis for effective and sustainable tourism development in MHH. A mixed-method of qualitative and quantitative is used in this study. Tourist local officers and tourist providers were interviewed as key informants. Such samples of domestic and foreign tourists were interviewed using a questionnaire survey to collect and analyze the tourists' satisfaction with tourism services. The result shows that tourists visiting MHH come from different regions and countries, from different age groups, and occupations, so their needs and satisfaction with MHH's community-based tourism services are also very diverse. The study uncovers that tourists are most satisfied with the human factor, especially the enthusiasm attitude of the tourist service provider (reaching 4.07 points), and then environmental landscape (3.90 points), infrastructure (3.90 points), price (3.80 points), and the lowest security- safety factor (3.73 points). However, in each factor, there are still a number of criteria that tourists are not satisfied with, which should be paid attention to for sustainable tourism development, such as environmental sanitation, traffic safety, and English communication ability of tourists service providers.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism is becoming one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. According to World Tourism Organization-UNWTO (2014), the tourism industry is responsible for 9% of the total GDP in the world. Vietnam possesses a huge tourism potential, not only in natural tourism resources but also in cultural tourism resources, so tourism development has been paid attention to and invested by the Party and State. Vietnam's tourism development strategy towards focusing on developing

cultural tourism, environmental landscape, traditional history, creating special attractions, preserving and promoting the identity of Vietnamese national culture and human dignity, and striving to turn tourism into a key economic sector in the general economic structure of the country (Phan Thi Anh, 2012).

With the strength of tourism potential, An Giang province is considered to have a thriving tourism industry in the Mekong Delta (An Giang Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2010). In 2016, An Giang welcomed 6.3 million visitors and the first ten months of 2017 welcomed

7.1 million visitors, including over 68,000 international visitors; and total tourism revenue is 3,450 billion VND. An Giang's goal is to make tourism a key economic sector and achieve an average visitor growth rate of 10%/year. The goal is that by 2020, the tourism industry of An Giang province will welcome 10.1 million visitors, of which the proportion of guests staying 20%, and the average number of staying days is 2.5 days. By 2025, An Giang, with the aim of "retaining tourists," increased the direct contribution rate of the tourism industry in the province's GRDP to 15.3%, and the average growth rate of tourists reached 5%/year (Vuong Thoai Trung, 2017).

My Hoa Hung (MHH) is a commune located on Ong Ho isle in the middle of Hau river, in Long Xuyen city, An Giang province. This place has natural landscapes with immense rivers, interlocking canals, orchards, and valuable historical and cultural relics. With the typical beauty of the Mekong Delta region, MHH was oriented to develop community-based tourism by the People's Committee of An Giang province. Through the Project "Developing Agricultural Tourism," funded by a Dutch farmers' organization (Agritertra), the Farmer Association of An Giang province selected MHH to become a community-based tourism site in 2007. Community-based tourism is a form of tourism "where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community." (Denman, 2001). Since 2017, MHH has attracted a lot of tourists, especially international tourists who come here to enjoy the beautiful scenery and experience the unique cultural life of people in the river region. However, the number of foreign visitors to MHH is unstable and mainly reliable to travel agency arrangements. Therefore, to develop community-based tourism in MHH, studying how local tourist services have met tourists' needs is necessary to draw out suggestions to improve tourist services.

Previous studies highlighted the important factor of customer satisfaction in the potential success of tourist business. Chi and Qu (2008, p.624) stated that "customer satisfaction has always been considered an essential business goal because it is assumed that satisfied customers buy more." In addition, Koo (2003) mentioned that if tourists are satisfied with a destination, they are likely to be loyal to this destination. In studying the tourist's perspective on re-visit intention in community-based tourism, Jee et al. (2019) found the significant positive effects between destination images (atmosphere, cultural environment, and destination brand) and re-visit intention of tourists.

Community-based tourism in MHH has attracted the interest of many researchers. However, these researchers

just focused on studying the improvement of community-based tourism in MHH (Pham Xuan Phu, 2010) and the difficulties in developing this type of tourism (Chau Chien Y, 2009). There is no study that has been done yet to explore tourists' needs or satisfaction in this type of tourism to improve local tourist services to develop local community-based tourism. The present study was undertaken to investigate the satisfaction of tourists with community-based tourist services in the MHH commune and thus, increase understanding of the needs of tourists and aid the development of marketing strategies.

METHOD

The research was studied in MHH commune, which is located on Ong Ho isle in the middle of Hau river, in Long Xuyen city, An Giang province, Vietnam (Figure 1):

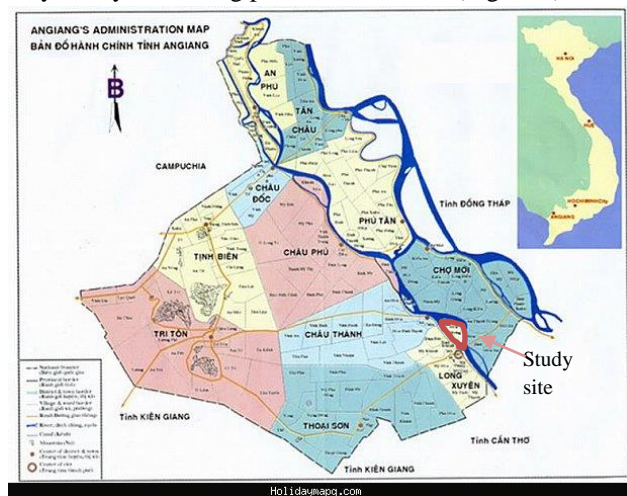


Figure 1. The study site in An Giang province, Vietnam.

This research was conducted in 2019, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. In-depth interviews were conducted with the commune officer responsible for tourism and the commune tourism cooperative leader to explore the development of community-based tourism in the commune, the advantages and troublesomes in developing community-based tourism, and the local orientations in developing this tourism model. In addition, nine households providing tourism services were interviewed deeply to explore their capacity in providing tourism services and their personal experiences in providing this type of tourist service.

Purposive sampling was applied to select respondents, both domestic and foreign tourists. Only tourists were invited to participate in the study. In total, 30 respondents from different age groups were approached and asked to participate in the survey. Specifically, those thirty respondents included 15 foreign respondents and 15 domestic respondents. By gender, 15 respondents are male, and 15 are female.

This paper analyzes the level of satisfaction of tourists on the following factors: security-safety, environment landscapes, humans, infrastructure, and prices. A 5-point Likert scale¹ was used to collect and analyze the opinions of tourist satisfaction with tourism services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The formation and development of community-based tourism in My Hoa Hung commune

Agricultural production is the main livelihood of people in MHH commune. Community-based tourism was first introduced to the commune in 2007 through a project called Developing Agricultural Tourism, funded by a Dutch farmers' organization (named Agriterra). The project has two phases (phase 1 lasts from 2007 to 2009, and phase 2 lasts from 2011 to 2012), funding a total of nine households by applying and providing an agricultural tourism model called "Homestay" (eat together, live together, and work together with local people). This tourism model has attracted tourists from different places, but the households providing these tourism services are unprofessional as they are not trained in practicing this type of tourism. Until 2014, the commune got "the Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism Development Program" (in the project EU-ESRT funded by European Union, shortened as Project EU). These tourist service providers were trained in tourism skills. Since then, community-based tourism in this commune has become flourished and developed. In addition, the communal Farmers' Union motivates households providing tourist service by arranging for these tourist providers to attend relevant and necessary training. Mr. An, the head of commune agricultural tourism cooperation, and other members have participated in many essential types of training on tourism skills such as behavior culture in communication, presentation skills, basic English, Vietnam Southern cuisine, and Asian and European cuisine. Moreover, they have also participated in study tours to learn and experience community-based tourism from other places.

Up to present, the agricultural tourism cooperation has nine members, in which five households provide Homestay services, two households provide ecological eatery, two households offer boat and bike services. With the advantage of being an island, MHH is distinctive in having many canals, an orchid garden, many temples, and old houses. MHH has become an attraction to many tourists

from different places. In 2018, MHH attracted 3,220 visitors, including 2,232 foreigners and 988 domestic visitors, contributing to the income of these households significantly and providing income for hired laborers working in these tourism places.

However, this type of tourism has not been expanded and attracted other households to provide this service as the number of visitors to MHH is unstable and mainly reliable to the arrangement of the travel agency. In addition, the supporting project "Agriterra" ended in 2012, so there is no fund to support training. The new tourist service providers are not equipped with the necessary tourism skills and English language, so they are hesitant to try. Mr. Binh, a homestay service provider for about six years, shared the information. He said, "*This type of livelihood is quite new to his family. His family has received much mental and judicial support in providing community-based tourism from local officers. However, the language barrier is the biggest limitation for his family as he is the only person who can communicate in basic English words with foreigners; others just communicate in sign language.*"

The profile of respondents

The ages of tourists

Most of tourists age from 25 to 40, occupying 47% of 30 respondents. This age group is in working age and normally have stable income and they are particularly interested in experiencing tourism. Therefore, more tourism activities need to be invested to attract the re-visit of this tourist group.

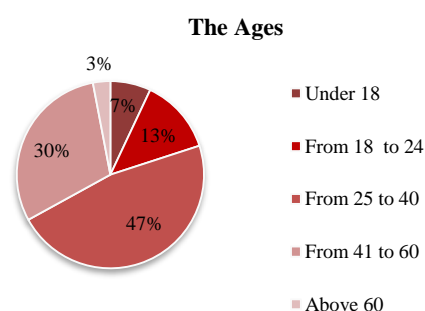


Figure 2. The ages of tourists.

¹ 5-Point Likert scale has 5 levels in which 1 is strongly unsatisfied, 2 is unsatisfied, 3 is neutral, 4 is satisfied, 5 is strongly satisfied.

The nationalities of tourists

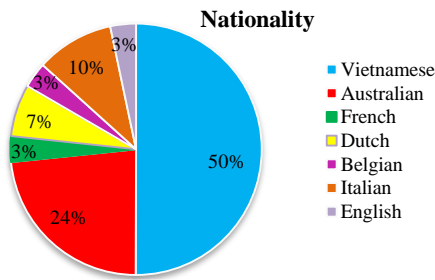


Figure 3. The nationality of tourists

Figure 3 shows that MHH has attracted domestic and foreign tourists from different countries. Domestic tourists normally relax and take a rest in a peaceful and fresh environment in MHH on weekends or holidays. On the other hand, foreign tourists enjoy learning about culture, experiencing local activities, enjoy traditional and local food in MHH.

The travel time of tourists

The findings show that tourists' travel time is very varied, as MHH is very close to Long Xuyen city. Hence, it is very convenient for city people to come there to relax whenever they have free time, precisely the travel time (see Figure 4).

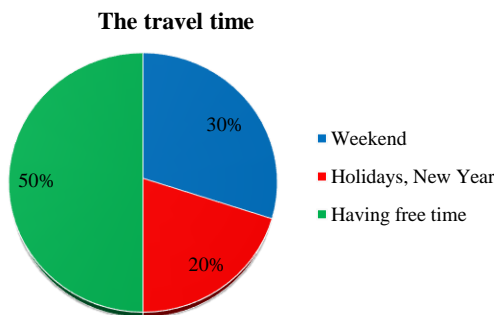


Figure 4. The travel time of tourists

For the tourist service providers, the travel time is different between domestic and foreign tourists. From November to March, most foreign tourists travel to MHH during Christmas and New Year. They normally have long holidays at that time, and they also love to travel to tropical countries to avoid wintertime then. They are interested in homestay service to experience local culture and enjoy traditional and local foods in MHH. On the other hand, domestic tourists from cities travel to MHH to enjoy the countryside, fresh atmosphere, and country food on weekends or whenever they have free time.

Number of travel times to My Hoa Hung

The attraction of tourist sites and the effectiveness of tourism services can be assessed based on the number of travel times of tourists to MHH.

Table 1. Number of travel times to MHH

Travel times	Types of tourist		Percentage
	Domestic	Foreign	
First time	4	13	56.7%
two times	3	2	16.7%
Three times	2	0	6.7%
More than three-time	6	0	20%

Table 1 shows that 56.7% of respondents travel to MHH for the first time. The re-visit of tourists to MHH is very limited, mainly domestic tourists. It can be learned that community-based tourism activities in MHH are not very attractive to re-visit, especially to foreign tourists. Mr. Tam, a member of the Agricultural tourism cooperative, mentioned, "MHH has not attracted tourists to re-visit because MHH is not large and there are not many tourism activities to play and explore. The rural attractions in MHH is not distinctive in Mekong delta so foreign tourists have not been attracted to re-visit this place". This result signals that tourist providers need to invest more interesting tourist activities and improve their tourism services to pull tourists' re-visit.

Meeting the expectations of tourists

The Figure 5 illustrated how tourist services in MHH meet tourists' expectation:

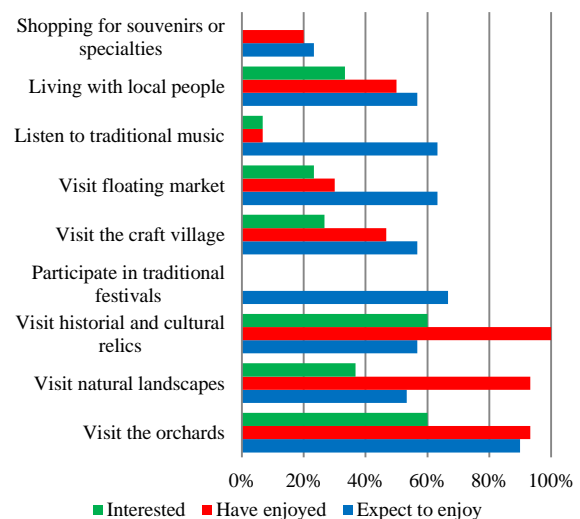


Figure 5. Meeting the expectations of tourists

The analysis was based on three criteria: (i) activities tourists expected to enjoy, (ii) activities tourists have enjoyed in the tour, and (iii) activities tourists are interested in the tour. The results show that three activities, "visiting the orchards," "visiting natural landscapes," and "visiting historical and cultural relics," are the activities most

tourists expect to enjoy and have enjoyed and are interested in their tour. However, there are some activities that many tourists expect to enjoy, but they are not able to enjoy on their trip: "Participating in traditional festivals" and "Listening to traditional music." The reason is that these activities are only available at certain times of the year and their visit does not fall in these days. In addition, the results also show that the percentage of tourists expected to enjoy most activities is very high. However, after enjoying the activities, the number of tourists still interested in the activities is much lower, so we can see that the tourist services here have not fully satisfied the tourists' expectations. Therefore, to attract tourists to re-visit MHH, tourist providers need to know tourists' expectations to provide tourist activities and services meeting the expectations of tourists.

The needs of tourists

This section will present the criteria that most tourists consider in choosing a tourist site for their travel and relaxation.

The criteria for choosing a tourist site

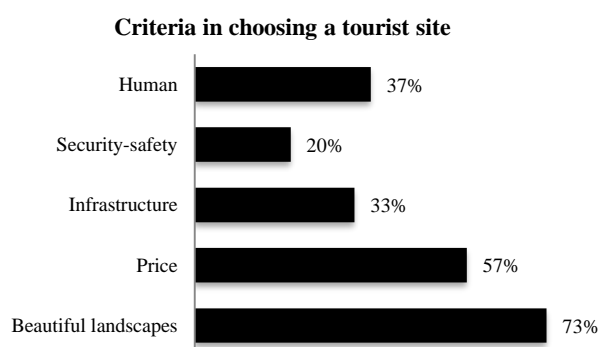


Figure 6. The criteria for choosing a tourist site

When deciding on a place to visit, people will set many criteria that suit their conditions and needs. Tourists coming to MHH have a very high demand for enjoying the remarkable ecologic resources of this area, accounting for 73.3%. Because MHH is an island, there are also numerous rivers and streams, and there has not been much interference from the era of industrialization and modernization. It still retains the primitive features and typical culture of the countryside of Southern Vietnam. The criteria of the price at the tourist destination are always concerned. 56.7% of tourists select MHH because of its low cost. As mentioned above, MHH commune is in a rural area, and the form of tourism here is community-based tourism, so the price is much lower than other types of tourism. The next criteria that many respondents, accounting for 36.7%, are interested in is humans, particularly the host's hospitality in a tourist site.

The level of satisfaction of respondents with community-based tourist services in My Hoa Hung

This section assesses tourists' satisfaction with community-based tourist services based on the following criteria: environmental landscape, safety-security, humans, infrastructure, and prices. To assess the level of satisfaction, we use the 5-Point Likert scale, as we mention in the method section.

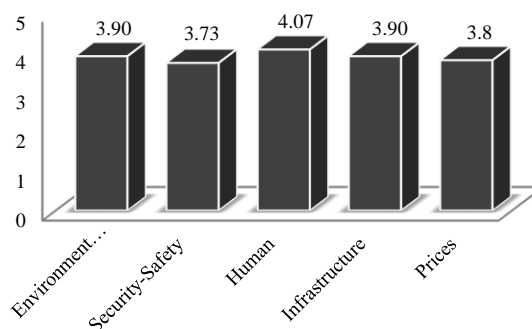


Figure 7. The satisfaction level of respondents

We can see from Figure 7 that tourists are most satisfied with "humans" other criteria are just ranked between "neutral" and "satisfied," so all these criteria need to be improved to meet tourist satisfaction.

In the following section, we will analyze the level of tourists' satisfaction with each criterion. The following results are performed using the descriptive statistics method in SPSS software, giving the mean value for each factor. The Crosstab comparison method gives the difference in satisfaction of each tourist group.

The level of tourists' satisfaction with environmental landscapes

The environmental landscape in MHH is one of the most favored criteria for tourists. MHH is attractive as a "green island" embraced by the Hau river. This place bears the typical beauty of the Mekong Delta region, such as fish cages on rivers, interlocking canals, traditional villages, orchards, and ancient houses over 100 years, so it is very suitable for those who like to immerse themselves in nature and the space of the rural southwest. However, there is a significant difference in the satisfaction level of domestic and foreign tourists to environmental landscapes (Table 2).

Table 2. The level of respondents' satisfaction with environmental landscapes

Level of satisfaction	Nationality	
	Domestic	Foreign
Strongly unsatisfied	0%	0%
Unsatisfied	0%	0%
Neutral	40%	13.3%
Satisfied	33.3%	80%
Strongly satisfied	26.7%	6.7%

For foreign tourists, where their living environment is quite different, the scenery of rivers, gardens, and bungalows in rural Vietnam is new to them. Most of them are satisfied with the landscapes in MHH; 6,7% rank strongly satisfied and 80% rank satisfied. For domestic tourists, who are familiar with these images, only 26,7% rank strongly satisfied and 33,3% rank satisfied.

In this criteria, the tourists are most satisfied with fresh and cool air, which is ranked 4,57 above 5 (Figure 8). Although MHH is within Long Xuyen city, MHH is located separately on an island. This area has not been much industrialized, less smoke and dust, every house has gardens, and the atmosphere here is very fresh. Mr. Van, a nearby Long Xuyen city student, shares that "he often travels to MHH with his friends on weekends or after exams. From his place, he just needs to go across a ferry to come to MHH, but the atmosphere in MHH is much cooler and fresher, which freshens him significantly".

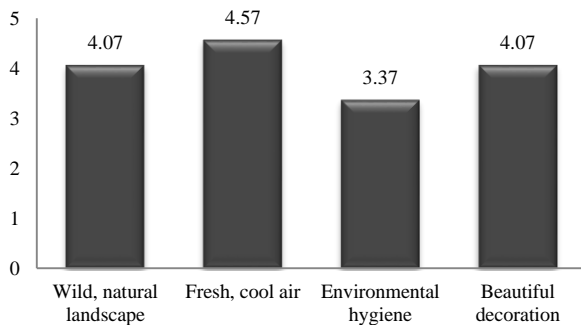


Figure 8. The level of satisfaction to environmental landscape.

However, the tourists are unpleasant with "environmental hygiene" and ranked it only 3,37. This is an issue of Vietnam tourism in general and community-based tourism in MHH. Although there is a public trash can, it is observed that there are very few trash cans, mainly concentrated in tourist spots (Ton Duc Thang memorial area, homestay, ecological gardens, etc.). In this regard, all stakeholders should pay attention to environmental sanitation throughout the commune because tourists like to travel to almost all areas in the commune.

Currently, there are only a few roads in the commune where garbage is collected. On the rest roads, people still have the habit of throwing garbage indiscriminately on the street and into the river, causing pollution and loss of aesthetics. This sub-criteria is particularly important to foreign tourists. Mr. Patrick, a French photographer, shares that "MHH's natural beauty and friendly people are very impressive to him, and this is his second travel to MHH. However, he is sometimes uncomfortable seeing plastic garbage along the road or on the river". Therefore, the local officers should pay more attention to keeping

environmental hygiene in the commune to ensure its remarkably natural beauty.

The level of tourists' satisfactions on security-safety

Security-safety is one important criteria to tourists but the security-safety in MHH is ranked lowest in the level of satisfaction, only 3,73 (Figure 7). Twenty-one tourists are satisfied with the security-safety in MHH, and most of them are domestic tourists while 9 foreign tourists are unsatisfied.

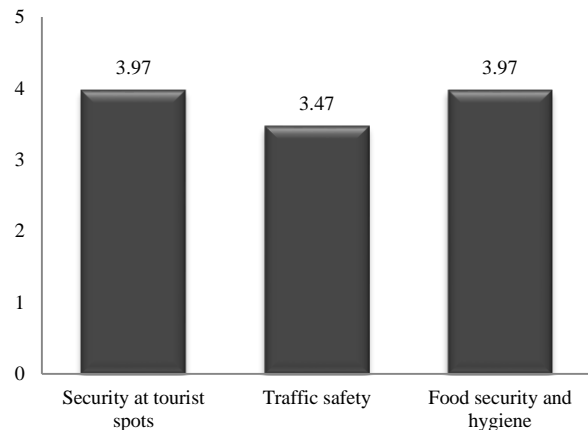


Figure 9. The level of satisfaction on security-safety

In security-safety criteria, tourists are most worried about traffic safety conditions and rank their satisfaction only 3.47 points. When interviewed, some tourists shared that there are some local people who drive too fast while the rural roads are narrow, so every time someone overtakes, they feel panic. In addition, the water travel is also unsafe, the boat is the main means for tourists to move on the river, but the quality of the boat is not guaranteed. The boat is small and old. Its appearance looks uncertain. Besides, the issue of food hygiene and safety is also a concern. The tourists enjoy local dishes, but they also worry about food safety and hygiene as it directly affects their health.

Through the analysis results above, the local government should consider upgrading and expanding the road surface, raising awareness of local people when joining in the traffic, and upgrading the means of transporting passengers on the river to ensure safety. At the same time, it is necessary to increase inspection of food sources provided to visitors.

The level of tourists' satisfaction with human

The results (Figure 7) show that the human criteria receive the most satisfaction from tourists (4.07 points), especially those who participate in activities with local people (homestay). Human criteria are found to be the most important factor for community-based tourism

development. Twenty-seven out of a total of 30 respondents are satisfied with the human factor. They are most impressed with the hospitality and enthusiasm of the host tourist provider and local people. Three respondents, who are not satisfied, said that the tourist provider's English level is poor, and communication is limited, so they cannot fully understand the local culture.

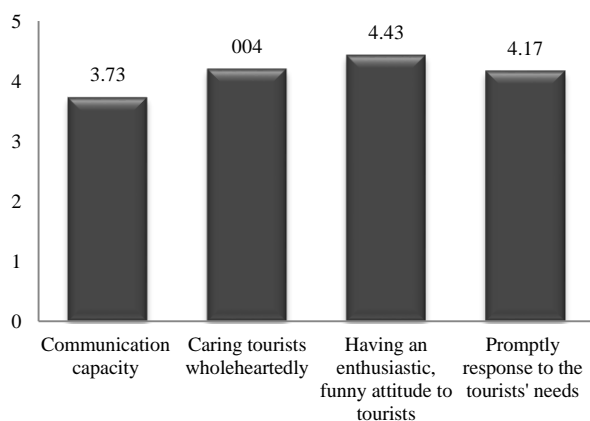


Figure 10. The level of satisfaction with local people

Figure 10 shows that the factors of enthusiasm, funny attitude, caring for tourists wholeheartedly, and prompt response to the needs of tourists are the decisive factors in tourists' satisfaction, ranked at 4.43, 4.20, and 4.17, respectively. Indeed, the virtues of mildness, hospitality, and generosity are distinctive characteristics of the people in the Southern countryside. (Son Nam, 2005; Thai Huynh Phuong Lan, 2018). It is a precious asset that helps to attract visitors from different places. Ms. Sunna, an Australian tourist, shared her most impression of staying in a homestay "I love living in a homestay with the local people because they treat me like a family member. I learned a lot of interesting things while being here. The host family's warmth and kindness are a beautiful memory to me."

However, the difficulty of communicating with tourists, especially foreigners, is also a significant criterion that needs more attention. This criterion is ranked only 3.73 points out of 5 points. Although there are training courses on communication skills and English classes for tourist providers, very few can communicate in English.

Table 3 shows that for domestic tourists, 93,3% are satisfied, and 6,7% are strongly satisfied with the human factor. Of 80% of international tourists, 53,3% are satisfied and 26,7% are strongly satisfied. In comparison, the other 20% of foreign respondents rank neutral. For foreign tourists, the language barrier is a hindrance when traveling here. Therefore, it is very necessary for tourist service providers to strengthen their English capacity to be able to communicate with foreign tourists more effectively.

Table 3. The level of domestic and foreign tourists' satisfaction with human factor

Level of satisfaction	Nationality	
	Domestic	Foreign
Strongly unsatisfied	0%	0%
Unsatisfied	0%	0%
Neutral	0%	20%
Satisfied	93.3%	53.3%
Strongly satisfied	6.7%	26.7%

The level of tourists' satisfaction with infrastructure

The tourist satisfaction level is not high in infrastructure, only at 3.90 points (figure 7). Twenty-five among 30 interviewed tourists were satisfied with the infrastructure in MHH. Most of them like the rustic and simple features of the southern countryside and feel relaxed when traveling here. There are five dissatisfied opinions, and mainly they complain the traffic system is quite inconvenient and unsafe. The figure below shows the satisfaction level for each specific criterion:

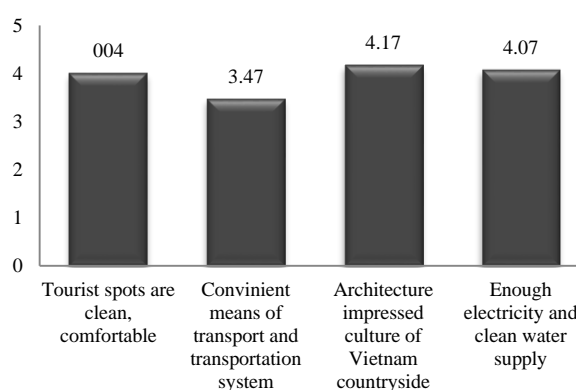


Figure 11. The level of satisfaction with infrastructure

Most tourists like the architecture impressed culture of Vietnam countryside (ranked 4.17 points out of 5 points) because currently, MHH commune still retains many over 100 years old stilt houses, bringing tourists comfort and peace in a nostalgic space. Electricity and clean water conditions ensure the needs of tourists, reaching 4.07 points. The tourist spot factor is clean and comfortable, which also meets the satisfaction of visitors, ranked 4,0. Finally, the convenient transportation system has the lowest score in this infrastructure group. As mentioned above, some roads in MHH are narrow, and some are even rough, so it is very difficult to travel. On the other hand, water travel is also unsafe because of old means of transportation.

Given the above difficulties, the local authorities should consider and upgrade the traffic system to be more convenient and safer. At the same time, tourist providers should be supported capital to upgrade equipment and facilities and ensure safety for tourists.

The level of tourists' satisfaction with prices

Price is one of the decisive factors when tourists choose a tourist destination. Unreasonable prices also make visitors dissatisfied and have no desire to re-visit. The results show that tourists are not satisfied with the prices of tourism activities in MHH, accounting for 3.80 out of 5 points (Figure 7). This reflects the fact that the service prices here are not really reasonable.

In the results of the data analysis below, the criterion "price of accommodation" is analyzed on a total of 15 samples. There is this difference because among 30 interviewed tourists, 50% are foreign and 50% are domestic tourists, but only foreign visitors use accommodation services. The remaining criteria are still analyzed on a total of 30 samples.

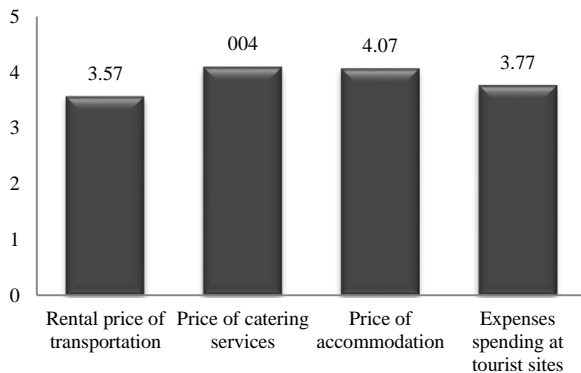


Figure 12. The level of satisfaction with prices

Tourists are satisfied with the price of food and drink, reaching 4.10 out of 5 points. The survey shows that the price of food and drink services in MHH is quite "affordable," partly because MHH is a rural area, and the price of raw materials is also much lower than in cities. In addition, tourist providers have been trained the Asian - European cuisine, so they can serve the tastes of different types of guests suitably. Tourists are also satisfied with the price of accommodation service in MHH commune, reaching 4.07 points. But tourists are uncertain about the price of means of transportation and the expenses spent at the tourist sites, ranked 3.57, and 3.77 points, respectively.

The survey shows that the majority of foreign tourists book tours from travel companies, maybe the cost of each service has been increased, but the service does not meet the needs they want. Therefore, visitors feel the services are not worth the money they spend. This requires closer cooperation between the travel agency and tourist providers to agree to offer the most reasonable price, suitable for each service for tourists.

CONCLUSIONS

Owning the remarkable ecological resources, cultural relics of the Ton Duc Thang memorial area, and many other tourism products, MHH is suitable for developing community-based tourism. The survey result shows that community-based tourism in MHH has attracted tourists from different age groups and different places in the country and from all over the world. In addition, the tourists' demands are also very diverse, and the level of satisfaction for each criterion in tourism is also different.

Using the Likert 5-level scale and Descriptive statistics method by SPSS software for the average value for each factor. The results show that the majority of tourists are satisfied with MHH's community-based tourism, but there are still some shortcomings that need to be addressed. Visitors are quite disappointed with the problem of environmental sanitation, the unsafe traffic at the tourist destination and food safety and hygiene, the language barrier with tourism operators, the narrow and rough rural road system, and the price inconsistency of some services.

In order to develop community-based tourism, MHH needs to improve many aspects, including constantly learning, investing, and creating typical tourism products to improve the level of satisfaction of tourists traveling in MHH. By doing so, in the future, community-based tourism will become an industry with high economic efficiency, contributing to improving the living standards of the local population. Tourism management, investment, and business at all levels in the commune need to improve service quality further and, at the same time, create conditions to improve the qualifications and skills of the tourist service providers. In addition, it is necessary to focus on the construction of infrastructure for tourism development, such as roads, and entertainment areas.

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