

REGIONAL LINKAGES IN TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF CAN THO CITY AND THE EASTERN MEKONG DELTA TOURISM CLUSTER

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to analyze the characteristics of tourism products in Can Tho City and propose a model for linking them with the tourism offerings of the eastern Mekong Delta cluster. Secondary data were collected from the Departments of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Can Tho City and the provinces of Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Dong Thap, Tien Giang, Ben Tre, and Long An. Using the meta-analysis method, the research developed a tourism product linkage model designed to enhance regional cooperation and tourism development. The proposed model categorizes tourism products into four main groups: Eco-tourism - Orchard - Riverside tourism; Cultural - Spiritual - Architectural heritage tourism; Agricultural - Traditional handicraft village tourism; and Nature conservation - Wetland forest tourism.

Keywords: regional linkages, tourism products, Can Tho City

1. Introduction

Can Tho City, the tourism hub of the Mekong Delta region, plays a crucial role in connecting provinces and cities to create an attractive, diverse, and sustainable tourism product chain. The eastern Mekong Delta tourism cluster, which includes the provinces of Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Dong Thap, Tien Giang, Ben Tre, and Long An, boasts a rich ecosystem, unique cultural heritage, and prominent

tourist destinations. The linkage in tourism product development between Can Tho and the provinces in the eastern cluster not only optimizes tourism resources but also generates added value, extends visitor stay duration, and promotes local economic growth. This study is conducted to analyze the characteristics of tourism products and propose a tourism product linkage model between Can Tho City and the eastern Mekong Delta tourism cluster.

2. Theoretical basis and research methods

Regional linkage is the mutual linkage, cooperation and complement between localities in the region and between regions with the aim of enhancing the attractiveness and potential for socio-economic development, and at the same time promoting the development of localities inside and outside the territory (Nguyen Van Huan, 2012). Tourism is an economic sector that is capable of linking and needs to be linked for development in order to make full use of tourism resources, take advantage of external resources to promote the development of the industry. Regional linkages in tourism development will create common destinations that match with product diversity based on regional advantages (Nguyen Thi Duy Phuong, 2016). Links between localities with different characteristics and products will offer rich and diverse experiences to tourists (Baloch Q. & Rehman A., 2015); at the same time, create new tours, helping to reduce the boredom and monotony of old destinations within the region, thereby stimulating and attracting more tourists (Chheang, 2013).

A tourism product is a whole of tangible and intangible components based on activity at a destination; tangibility is expressed specifically in food, drinks, souvenirs; intangibility is expressed in types of tourism services, and other ancillary services (Middleton et al., 2009). According to the Vietnam Tourism Law (2017), a tourism product is a collection of services on the basis of exploiting the value of tourism resources to satisfy the needs of tourists. Therefore, the more diverse and interesting experience offered by a locality, the more successful they are when it comes to tourist attractions.

The study used secondary information collected from the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Can Tho city and the provinces of Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Dong Thap, Tien Giang, Ben Tre, and Long An to analyze the characteristics of tourism products of Can Tho city and the localities of the eastern Mekong Delta tourism cluster. On that basis, the study used the meta-analysis method to propose a tourism product linkage model between Can Tho

city and the eastern Mekong Delta tourism cluster.

3. Research results

3.1. The characteristics of tourism products of Can Tho city and the localities of the western Mekong Delta tourism cluster

Can Tho is a centrally governed city and serves as the economic, cultural, and social hub of the Mekong Delta region. Its strategic location makes it an ideal destination for hosting conferences, seminars, exhibitions, and events. Therefore, Can Tho City has very favorable conditions to develop MICE tourism. In addition, Can Tho has a pleasant climate, a system of interlocking canals, where the Mekong river civilization converges, so Can Tho prioritizes the development of river tourism. In addition, Can Tho City also develops complementary tourism products to meet the diverse needs of tourists and create a diversity of local tourism products, such as: ecotourism, cultural tourism, urban tourism, resort tourism, study-research tourism, souvenirs, cuisine, traditional culture, and entertainment services.

The eastern Mekong Delta tourism cluster comprises six provinces: Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Dong Thap, Tien Giang, Ben Tre, and Long An. Each of these provinces possesses unique tourism potential, contributing to the diversification and enrichment of the overall tourism offerings in the Mekong Delta region.

Vinh Long, a fertile land nestled between the Tien and Hau rivers, boasts a dense network of rivers and canals, lush orchards, and a refreshing climate. Thanks to these natural advantages, the province has long been renowned for its distinctive garden-style ecotourism. Popular destinations include An Binh islet ecotourism area, Vinh Sang, Truong Huy, Hoang Hao, and the historic Vinh Long ancient house. Besides, Vinh Long boasts a rich cultural and historical heritage, with numerous provincial and national historical sites. The province is also home to several traditional craft villages, specializing in bamboo weaving, leaf roofing, rice paper making, pottery, and blacksmithing. These have been integrated into cultural tourism and community-based tourism, offering visitors immersive experiences that

reflect the region's unique cultural identity.

Tra Vinh boasts diverse tourism resources, including an intricate network of rivers and canals, specialty fruit orchards, rich mangrove forests with diverse flora and fauna, scenic landscapes, historical revolutionary sites, unique architectural landmarks, and traditional festivals celebrated mainly by the Kinh, Hoa, and Khmer ethnic groups. As a result, Tra Vinh has significant potential for developing various types of tourism, such as spiritual and cultural tourism, coastal tourism, eco-tourism in orchard areas, river-based tourism, community-based tourism, and leisure tourism. Among these, the most distinctive feature of Tra Vinh tourism is its spiritual and cultural tourism, highlighted by numerous ancient Khmer pagodas and traditional festivals that vividly showcase the local ethnic cultural identity.

Dong Thap is endowed with abundant natural resources, pristine landscapes, a dense network of rivers and canals, lush fruit orchards, numerous historical and cultural relics, and traditional folk festivals that strongly reflect the local ethnic identity. With these distinctive features, Dong Thap has a competitive advantage in developing eco-tourism products and experiential tourism, allowing visitors to explore the local way of life while appreciating the scenic waterways and rich indigenous culture.

Tien Giang benefits from favorable natural conditions, with an intricate network of rivers and canals interwoven throughout the landscape, creating lush, year-round fruit orchards and renowned specialty products such as Hoa Loc mango, Co Co pomelo, Cai Be oranges and tangerines, Lo Ren Vinh Kim star apples, Ngu Hiep durians, Cho Gao dragon fruit, and Go Cong acerola cherries. With its distinctive Mekong Delta waterways, diverse ecosystems, unique cultural identity, and numerous historical and cultural relics, Tien Giang holds great potential and competitive advantages in attracting tourists, particularly through its signature eco-tourism offerings. Additionally, the province is actively investing in developing cultural tourism, community-based tourism, and Go Cong coastal

tourism, all of which strongly reflect the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Ben Tre is known as the homeland of the Dong Khoi Revolution, Ben Tre is also famous for its vast coconut groves, lush fruit orchards, numerous traditional handicraft villages, and rich cultural and historical heritage. These unique features provide Ben Tre with a strong advantage in developing various types of tourism, including river-based eco-tourism, cultural tourism, community-based tourism, leisure tourism, and recreational tourism. Among these, river-based eco-tourism in orchard areas stands out as the province's signature experience. Visitors to Ben Tre can also indulge in the distinctive coconut-based cuisine, an essential and delightful part of exploring the culinary culture of Southern Vietnam.

Long An boasts a diverse ecosystem of flora and fauna, an intricate network of canals, and the Vam Co Tay and Vam Co Dong rivers, which enrich the land with fertile alluvium, nurturing vast rice fields and abundant fruit orchards. These natural advantages make Long An well-suited for the development of eco-tourism, with standout attractions such as Tan Lap floating village, Lang Sen wetland reserve, and Dong Thap Muoi ecotourism area. In addition to its natural beauty, Long An also captivates visitors with its historical and cultural heritage, traditional craft villages, and numerous folk festivals deeply rooted in local beliefs. These festivals reflect a strong sense of community and the close-knit spirit of village life.

3.2. Tourism product linkage model between Can Tho City and the eastern Mekong Delta tourism cluster

Based on the analysis of the tourism product characteristics of each locality, the research team proposes a tourism product linkage model between Can Tho City and the eastern Mekong Delta tourism cluster, developed around four main product groups:

First, Eco-tourism - Orchard - River tourism: This route connects Can Tho - Vinh Long - Ben Tre - Tien Giang, offering visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in the lush waterways and rural landscapes, experience the rustic lifestyle, and explore traditional craft villages. Departing from Can

Tho, tourists can visit scenic eco-tourism destinations featuring engaging recreational activities, explore the Cai Rang floating market, enjoy a river cruise, and experience Southern folk music. The journey then leads to Vinh Long, home to An Binh islet and lush orchard gardens. In Ben Tre, visitors can navigate through nipa palm forests, paddle a traditional ba lá canoe, and learn about coconut candy production. The final stop is Tien Giang, renowned for the Cai Be floating market, Thoi Son islet, and its abundant fruit orchards.

Second, Cultural - Spiritual - Architectural heritage tourism: This route connects Can Tho - Tra Vinh - Dong Thap - Long An, allowing visitors to explore Khmer cultural heritage, ancient architecture, and significant historical sites. Starting in Can Tho, tourists can visit Binh Thuy communal house, Binh Thuy ancient house, and Truc Lam Phuong Nam zen monastery to learn about Southern Vietnam's folk beliefs. The journey continues in Tra Vinh, where visitors can admire Khmer architectural marvels such as Hang Pagoda, Ang Pagoda, and Ba Om Pond, gaining deeper insight into the Khmer cultural heritage in the Mekong Delta. In Dong Thap, tourists can explore Sa Dec flower village, visit Kien An Cung Pagoda, and discover the Xeo Quyt relic site. The final stop in Long An offers visits to the Hundred-Pillar ancient house, Nguyen Huynh Duc mausoleum, and an ecological experience at Tan Lap floating village.

Third, Agricultural - Traditional handicraft village tourism: This route connects Can Tho - Vinh Long - Dong Thap - Tien Giang, providing visitors with hands-on experiences in traditional craft villages and agricultural farms. Starting from Can Tho, visitors can learn how to make traditional cakes at Con Son and explore the chocolate-making

process at Muoi Cuong cocoa garden. The journey then moves to Vinh Long, famous for Mang Thit red pottery village and floating fish farms along the Tien river. In Dong Thap, visitors can explore Tram Chim national park and learn about lotus-based product processing. Finally, in Tien Giang, tourists can visit the Cai Be floating market and participate in agricultural activities at local orchards.

Fourth, Nature conservation - Wetland forest tourism: This route connects Can Tho - Dong Thap - Long An, offering immersive experiences in the unique ecosystems of the Mekong Delta. The journey begins in Can Tho with a visit to Bang Lang stork garden, where tourists can observe thousands of rare bird species. Next, in Dong Thap, visitors can explore Tram Chim national park, take a boat ride through the lush melaleuca forests, and witness the mesmerizing sight of Sarus cranes in flight. The journey concludes in Long An, tourists can explore Tan Lap floating village and embark on a boat journey through the melaleuca forest.

4. Conclusion

The research findings indicate that Can Tho City has highly favorable conditions for linking tourism product development with the eastern Mekong Delta tourism cluster. This collaboration focuses on leveraging the unique tourism products of each locality across four main product groups: Eco-tourism - Orchard - Riverside tourism, Cultural - Spiritual - Architectural heritage tourism, Agricultural - Traditional handicraft village tourism, Nature conservation - Wetland forest tourism. This linkage not only maximizes the strengths of each destination but also enhances the visitor experience, contributing to regional socio-economic development■

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Received date: February 10, 2025

Reviewed date: February 25, 2025

Accepted date: March 20, 2025

LIÊN KẾT VÙNG TRONG PHÁT TRIỂN SẢN PHẨM DU LỊCH: NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP TP.CẦN THƠ VÀ CỤM DU LỊCH PHÍA ĐÔNG ĐỒNG BẰNG SÔNG CỬU LONG

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TÓM TẮT:

Nghiên cứu này tiến hành phân tích đặc điểm của các sản phẩm du lịch tại TP.Cần Thơ. Dữ liệu thứ cấp trong nghiên cứu này được thu thập từ các Sở Văn hóa, Thể thao và Du lịch của TP.Cần Thơ, các tỉnh Vĩnh Long, Trà Vinh, Đồng Tháp, Tiền Giang, Bến Tre và Long An. Thông qua phương pháp phân tích tổng hợp, nghiên cứu đã xây dựng một mô hình liên kết các sản phẩm, dịch vụ du lịch của khu vực phía Đông Đồng bằng Sông Cửu Long nhằm tăng cường hợp tác và phát triển du lịch trong khu vực. Mô hình đề xuất phân loại các sản phẩm du lịch thành bốn nhóm chính, gồm: Du lịch sinh thái - Du lịch vườn cây ăn quả - Du lịch ven sông; Du lịch di sản văn hóa - Tâm linh - Kiến trúc; Du lịch nông nghiệp - Làng nghề truyền thống; và Du lịch gắn với bảo tồn thiên nhiên - Du lịch rừng ngập nước.

Từ khoá: liên kết vùng, sản phẩm du lịch, TP.Cần Thơ