

IMPLEMENTING THE IMPORTANCE -PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS (IPA) TO ASSESS THE ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF DONG THAP PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT:

Dong Thap province owns a wide range of tourist resources with many historical and cultural relics, eco-tourism areas. In addition, the province has many peaceful scenic fruit orchards that can be used to develop agri-tourism products and services for both domestic and international tourists. However, the development of ecotourism in Dong Thap province is facing some challenges. This study uses the Importance - Performance Analysis (IPA) method to assess ecotourism activities in Dong Thap province through visitors' perceptions. Based on the study's findings, some solutions are proposed to help Dong Thap province develop ecotourism activities in the coming time.

Keywords: ecotourism, IPA, service quality, Dong Thap province.

1. Introduction

Thanks to the natural advantages in terms of climate and soil, Dong Thap can expand agriculture and produce a wide variety of strategic products such as rice, pangasius, vegetables, and fruits. The islands and riverbanks of the Tien and Hau rivers are renowned for their orchards of several well-known fruit varieties, including the Cao Lanh mango, Chau Thanh longan, Lai Vung mandarin, and Phong Hoa grapefruit. Since these orchards feature pure air, serene surroundings, cultural attractions, and kind residents, they are ideal for ecotourism development.

Since 2015, the People's Committee of Dong

Thap province has been launching a tourism development program to form its tourism development model. The program capitalizes on the advantages of its tourist attractions and differentiates Dong Thap tourism from that of the Mekong Delta in particular and Vietnam in general. Ecotourism, therefore, grows by utilizing the distinctive characteristics of the river area's attractiveness, inhabitants, historical relics, artisan villages, and festivals. However, issues including inadequate infrastructure (paths, trails, bridges, and roads), a lack of enjoyable experiences, limitations on the skills of tourist personnel, impulsive investments, and

environmental concerns have slowed the growth of ecotourism. A growth strategy is thus required to support the ecotourism development program.

2. Methodology

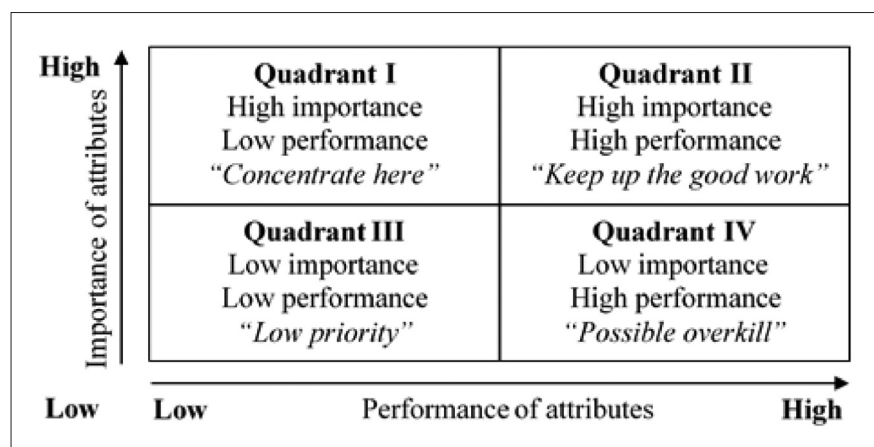
This study examines domestic visitors' satisfaction with ecotourism service quality and the performance of service providers in Dong Thap. Interviews were conducted using the accidental sampling method to acquire primary data, and the interviewers were people who had participated in Dong Thap ecotourism. It also includes a set of service quality standards associated with ecotourism activities as evidence for the questionnaire, which was inspired by the research of Nhan et al. (2015) and our real-world observation.

A five-point Likert scale is used to evaluate the importance and performance of service quality components of ecotourism operations. Respondents use a five-point scale to express their degree of agreement on the importance of service quality, with 1 indicating very unimportant and 5 indicating very important. Similarly, service quality performance is graded, with 1 being very dissatisfied and 5 representing very satisfied. The mean of the five-point Likert scale is calculated as follows: Distance value = (Maximum value – minimum value)/n = (5 – 1)/5 = 0.80. The interpretations of the mean value are as follows: from 1.00 to 1.80 represents very unimportant/very dissatisfied; from 1.81 to 2.60 represents unimportant/dissatisfied; from 2.61 to 3.40 represents neither unimportant nor important/neither dissatisfied nor unsatisfied; from 3.41 to 4.20 represents important/satisfied; from 4.21 to 5.00 represents very important/very satisfied.

A total of 105 questionnaires provides comprehensive data for analysis. According to the result, male respondents account for 46.67% of the

total in the sample, while female respondents account for 53.33%. Concerning age, respondents aged 18-30 make up 47.62%, those aged 31-40 (23.81%), those aged 41-50 (19.04%), and those over 51 (9.53%). In terms of education, respondents with a high school diploma or below make up 24.76%, followed by those with a vocational degree (18.10%), students at university (54.29%), and graduates (2.85%). Regarding places of residence, 83.81% of respondents live in urban areas, while 16.19% reside in rural areas.

Figure 1: Importance-performance matrix



The importance-performance analysis (IPA) approach, which Martilla and James introduced in 1977, is used to evaluate visitors' perceptions of Dong Thap ecotourism. The IPA research findings will serve as the basis for ecotourism development initiatives in Dong Thap. The outcome is shown on an IPA quadrant diagram, with the vertical axis (Y) indicating the attribute importance and the horizontal axis (X) reflecting the attribute performance (Figure 1). The following are further explanations for each quadrant:

- Quadrant I: Attributes are important but perform poorly. As a result, these characteristics should be prioritized in order to assure the quality of services provided to visitors. As a result, immediate action and the allocation of additional resources are required.

- Quadrant II: Attributes have a high level of importance and performance. It means that the

service performance meets the visitors' expectations; therefore, service providers should maintain their achievements as a potential competitive advantage.

- Quadrant III: Attributes are poorly performed and unimportant to visitors. As such, no adjustments to the effort or resources allocated are required.

- Quadrant IV: Attributes are unimportant to visitors but well performed by service providers, implying that service providers are wasting resources. Thus, it is necessary to examine the

allocation of resources to such attributes and relocate them to others.

3. Findings

Based on the ecotourism assessment criteria, the questionnaire has two sections: the importance (expectations) level and the performance (satisfaction) level. Table 1 shows the IPA result based on the attribute's mean value. If the expectation exceeded satisfaction ($I-P > 0$), the service performance would not have satisfied visitors' expectations.

Table 1: Importance and performance of the attributes

Variable code	Attributes	Average score of importance of attributes (I)	Average score of performance of attributes (P)	Gap (I-P)
Landscape				
A1	Green orchard	4.47	3.57	0.90
A2	Fruit variety	3.54	3.03	0.51
A3	Fresh air and peaceful space	4.25	3.70	0.55
A4	Beautiful river landscape	4.03	3.26	0.77
A5	Sanitation and environmental concerns	4.04	3.13	0.91
Activities				
B1	Fruit picking and tasting	4.23	3.45	0.78
B2	Sightseeing boat	4.03	3.47	0.56
B3	Fishing and vegetables picking	4.15	2.78	1.37
B4	Horticultural work experience	4.03	3.19	0.84
B5	Village cycling	4.05	3.39	0.66
B6	Traditional craft-making experience	4.18	2.97	1.21
B7	Local cuisine	4.30	3.73	0.57
B8	Folk music experience (don ca tai tu, ho Dong Thap)	4.24	3.06	1.18
B9	Festivals, historical and cultural artifacts	4.13	3.26	0.87
B10	Souvenirs and speciality purchasing	4.39	3.09	1.30
B11	Vietnamese traditional folk games	4.09	3.54	0.55

Variable code	Attributes	Average score of importance of attributes (I)	Average score of performance of attributes (P)	Gap (I-P)
Technical infrastructure				
C1	Nearby ecotourism destination	3.61	2.88	0.73
C2	Wide and convenient roadways	4.02	2.72	1.30
C3	Car park	3.31	3.29	0.02
C4	Adequate and convenient garbage cans	4.11	3.04	1.07
C5	Good toilet hygiene	4.17	2.74	1.43
C6	Benches	4.22	3.28	0.94
C7	Welcome gate	4.01	3.04	0.97
C8	Farming tools and clothing	4.30	3.29	1.01
C9	Transportation	4.05	2.94	1.11
C10	Souvenir and specialty shops	3.38	2.94	0.44
C11	Food court	3.40	3.10	0.30
Staff				
D1	Friendly and welcoming locals	4.06	3.42	0.64
D2	Employee attitudes and communication	4.40	2.76	1.64
D3	Professional service	4.12	2.86	1.26
D4	Local awareness	4.21	3.40	0.81
D5	Employee uniforms	3.30	2.77	0.53
Service price				
E1	Entrance and parking fees	3.83	3.76	0.07
E2	Food pricing	3.59	3.44	0.15
E3	Fruit prices (U-pick and already-picked)	3.61	3.53	0.08
E4	Entertainment activity expenses	3.40	3.36	0.04
Security and safety				
F1	Vehicle safety	3.47	2.94	0.53
F2	Local security concerns (theft, begging, etc.)	3.63	3.26	0.37
F3	Food safety	4.34	3.36	0.98
Total average		3.97	3.20	

Source: Analysis result from survey data.

The IPA, which evaluates ecotourism activities in Dong Thap, is built with a line that intersects the vertical axis at a value of 3.97 and a line that intersects the horizontal axis at a value of 3.20. They are the average values of importance and performance level, respectively. The IPA diagram below depicts the average of attributes (Figure 2).

Figure 2 shows that 13 of the 39 attributes are found in quadrant I - "Concentrate here" ($I \geq 3.97$; $P \leq 3.20$). The attributes are: A5- Sanitation and environmental concerns; B3- Fishing and vegetables picking; B4- Horticultural work experience; B6- Traditional craft-making experience; B8- Folk music experience (don ca tai tu, ho Dong Thap); B10- Souvenirs and speciality purchasing; C2- Wide and convenient roadways; C4- Adequate and convenient garbage cans; C5- Good toilet hygiene; C7- Welcome gate; C9-

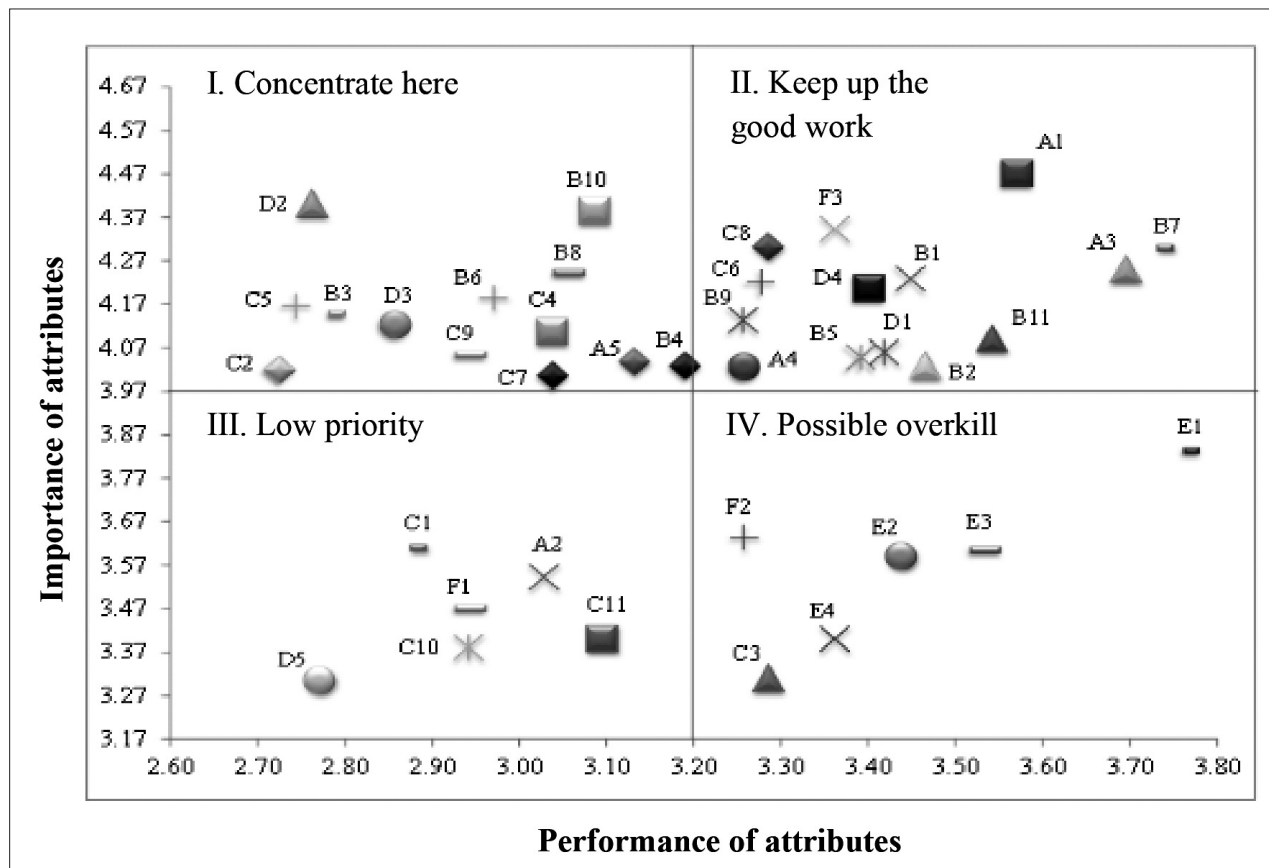
Transportation; D2- Employee attitudes and communication; D3- Professional service.

Quadrant II - "Keep up the good work" ($I \geq 3.97$; $P \geq 3.20$) entails the following: A1- Green orchard; A3- Fresh air and peaceful space; A4- Beautiful river landscape; B1- Fruit picking and tasting; B2- Sightseeing boat; B5- Village cycling; B7- Local cuisine; B9- Festivals, historical and cultural artifacts; B11 - Vietnamese traditional folk games; C6- Benches; C8- Farming tools and clothing; D1- Friendly and welcoming locals; D4- Local awareness; F3- Food safety.

Quadrant III - "Low priority" ($I \leq 3.97$; $P \leq 3.20$), there are 6 attributes: A2- Fruit variety; C1- Nearby ecotourism destination; C10- Souvenir and specialty shops; C11- Food court; D5- Employee uniforms; F1- Vehicle safety.

Quadrant IV - "Possible overkill" ($I \leq 3.97$; $P \geq 3.20$) includes C3- Car park; E1- Entrance and

Figure 2: IPA diagram of ecotourism service quality



Source: Analysis result from survey data.

parking fees; E2- Food pricing; E3- Fruit prices (U-pick and already-picked); E4- Entertainment activity expenses; F2- Local security concerns (theft, begging, etc.).

4. Solutions for ecotourism development

The article suggests some solutions that might contribute to the ecotourism development in Dong Thap in the coming years based on the results of the IPA analysis and the information gathered through the survey.

Sanitation and hygiene concerns: ecotourism site owners should focus on resolving sanitation and hygiene concerns since these factors are crucial considerations in travel decisions. Thus, they must adhere to health and safety regulations and guarantee they are on the proper route.

Pleasurable activities and handicraft experiences: site owners can offer visitors additional activities like traditional folk games and artisan village experiences. The mat weaving in Dinh An of Lap Vo district, the production of rice flour in Sa Dec city, and the construction of boats in Lai Vung district are all possible stops on the artisan village tour. On the other hand, combining ecotourism with artisan village visits is a way to preserve local traditional crafts, increase residents' incomes, and promote ecotourism.

Infrastructure improvement and growth strategy: local authorities must improve infrastructure to capitalize on the potential of

ecotourism. High-quality infrastructure, like paths, bridges, and roads, is critical to bringing visitors from cities to the countryside. In addition, the authorities must have policies to assist competitively advantageous ecotourism sites in expanding their businesses and sustaining their development while limiting impulsive private investments.

Food safety: the Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practices (VietGAP) standard and food safety requirements must be followed while growing fruit, fruit-based products, vegetables, and other agriculture goods in ecotourism destinations. Local governments are responsible for carrying out the criteria in ecotourism sites, as well as ensuring compliance with the standards.

5. Conclusion

Dong Thap's socio-economic development plan prioritizes ecotourism development based on local resources. Despite the comparative advantages (in terms of nature, culture, and history) and diversity of specialties, the growth of ecotourism is still restrained. The article uses the IPA in conjunction with tourists' perceptions to identify attributes that should be concentrated, maintained, and promoted to fully please tourists, as well as those that should get limited investment. The article also makes suggestions for enhancing service performance and piquing visitor interest in Dong Thap ecotourism in the future ■

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**VẬN DỤNG PHƯƠNG PHÁP IPA
ĐỂ ĐÁNH GIÁ SỰ PHÁT TRIỂN
DU LỊCH SINH THÁI MIỆT VƯỜN
Ở TỈNH ĐỒNG THÁP**

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TÓM TẮT:

Tỉnh Đồng Tháp có nguồn tài nguyên du lịch phong phú với nhiều di tích lịch sử, văn hóa, khu du lịch sinh thái... Bên cạnh đó, du lịch sinh thái miệt vườn với nhiều loại trái cây đặc sản, gần gũi thiên nhiên và văn hóa địa phương là tiềm năng lớn thu hút du khách trong nước và quốc tế. Tuy nhiên, việc phát triển du lịch miệt vườn ở tỉnh Đồng Tháp còn tồn tại một số hạn chế, khó khăn nhất định. Bài viết vận dụng phương pháp phân tích mức độ quan trọng - mức độ thực hiện (IPA) để đánh giá hoạt động du lịch miệt vườn trên địa bàn qua cảm nhận của du khách. Dựa trên kết quả nghiên cứu, bài viết đề xuất một số giải pháp góp phần phát triển loại hình du lịch hấp dẫn này trong thời gian tới.

Từ khóa: du lịch miệt vườn, IPA, chất lượng dịch vụ, tỉnh Đồng Tháp.