



Exploring tour guide practices in sustainable tourism development

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Abstract

To investigate the behavior of tour guides in sustainable tourism development, the study surveyed 168 tour guides, focusing on 11 selected behaviors (4 economic behaviors, 6 socio-cultural behaviors, and 4 environmental behaviors). Results showed that behaviors such as environmental protection, heritage preservation and compliance with regulations and laws at destinations were highly effective. However, other behaviors such as meeting the needs of tourists for local residents, promoting the purchase of local products and services, as well as receiving and transmitting feedback from tourists to local residents need to be enhanced. Based on these results, the paper provides recommendations to help tour guides promote sustainable development behaviors in the tourism industry.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the economic realm of the tourism industry, tour operation not only plays a crucial role but is also deemed indispensable in shaping and organizing travel experiences for customers (Manh, N. V. & Chuong, P. H., 2006). This positions tour operation as pivotal in driving sustainable tourism development. Within this domain, the role of tour guides becomes exceedingly significant. With specialized expertise, work environment, and unique access opportunities, tour guides are not merely navigators but also advisors, facilitators, and supervisors of tourism activities at destinations, aiming for sustainable development. They help customers better understand the impacts of tourism on the environment, culture, and local communities. Additionally, they foster awareness and participation in environmental and cultural conservation activities within local communities. Despite being indispensable players in the tourism industry, tour guides often receive less attention in studies focusing on their role in sustainable development (Wei Hu, 2007).

Recognizing this oversight and the imperative need to understand the role of tour guides in sustainable tourism development, the author decided to concentrate on researching and examining the behaviors of tour guides,

particularly focusing on real-life cases of tour guides working in Ho Chi Minh City or collaborating with tourism companies based in the city.

II. RESEARCH CONTENT

Overview

In 2012, in a report, Hu and Wall emphasized the need to study the role of tour guides in sustainable tourism. Tour guides are seen as pivotal in achieving sustainable goals and play a significant role in tourists' experiences. Subsequent studies by Tatar, Herman, Gozner (2018), and Francis et al. (2019) have continued to prove this role. They emphasize the tour guides' role in promoting sustainable tourism and managing negative environmental impacts. Although this role is demonstrated through advocacy activities (Dung, T. T. 2022), most tour guides believe these behaviors stem from self-awareness (Hanh, N. T. V. 2019). The examination of tour guides' role from a managerial perspective is also addressed (Hussein A Mustafa, 2021). Specific studies by Ozlem et al. (2020) have identified specific tasks that tour guides can undertake to contribute to sustainable development. However, despite the increasing research on the relationship between tour guides and sustainable development, research on the role of tour guides

in sustainable development remains limited, especially in Vietnam, and needs further exploration, particularly from the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects.

Introduction of the Survey Sample

The survey was conducted on 168 tour guides, with the following demographic characteristics: Regarding gender, 34% were female (57 tour guides) and 66% were male (111 tour guides). Regarding employment status, 45% were employees of travel companies, and 55% worked independently. Regarding market operation, 8% were inbound guides, 21% were outbound, and 71% were domestic guides. Regarding educational background, 64% had a university degree, 26% had vocational or college education, and 10% had postgraduate qualifications. Regarding age, 33% were aged 21-25, 54% were aged 26-

34, and 13% were over 35 years old. Regarding years of experience, 32% had 1-3 years of experience, 45% had 4-9 years, and 23% had 10 or more years of experience.

In summary, the survey sample was predominantly male, with a relatively young average age and a relatively high level of education. The majority operated in the domestic market and had diversity in years of experience. The difference between the employment units was not significant, with slightly more freelance guides, but not significantly so.

Questionnaire Design

The criteria and observational variables were extracted from various academic sources related to the research issue, based on the context and specific research subject of the topic

Criteria	Observed Variables	Source
Economic Aspect	Introducing local specialty products to tourists (ECA1)	(Temizkan & Tokay, 2016)
	Encouraging tourists to purchase products, use local services (ECA2)	(Grabowski và Geng, 2000; Hu và Wall, 2012; Leshem, 2013; Tatar et. al, 2018).
	Understanding, meeting the needs of tourists for local residents (ECA3)	
	Receiving and transmitting feedback from tourists to local residents (ECA4)	
Socio-cultural Aspect	Heritage preservation (SCA1)	(Weiler &Black, 2014)
	Introducing, promoting local cultural values (SCA2)	(Cohen, 1985), (Pond, 1993), (Ap & Wong, 2001), (Ham, 2001)
	Advocating for the conservation of local cultural values (SCA3)	(McDonnell, 2001), (Christie & Mason, 2010)
	Encouraging tourists to experience local cultural products, services (SCA4)	(Temizkan & Tokay, 2016)
	Respecting customs of the destination (SCA5)	(Vietnam Tourism Law, 2017)
	Compliance with regulations, laws at the destination (SCA6)	
Environmental Aspect	Ecosystem protection (ENC1)	(Weiler & Black, 2014)
	Advocacy for environmental protection (ENC2)	(Ballantyne, Packer, & Hughes, 2009; Weiler & Kim, 2011).
	Advocacy for the use of eco-friendly products (ENC3)	(Randall & Collins, 2009)
	Monitoring and reminding of tourists' environmental behaviors (ENC4)	(Ballantyne, Packer, & Hughes, 2009; Weiler & Kim, 2011)

The variables ECA1, ECA2, ECA3, ECA4 (economic); SCA1, SCA2, SCA3, SCA4, SCA5, SCA6 (socio-cultural); ENC1, ENC2, ENC3, ENC4 (environmental) were used to investigate the role of tour guide behavior in promoting sustainable tourism development. Evaluation was conducted using a Likert scale with 5 levels: (1) never - 0%, (2) rarely - 25%, (3)

occasionally - 50%, (4) frequently - 75%, and (5) always - 100%.

Method

A survey method was employed to assess the behavior of tour guides in fulfilling their roles in sustainable

tourism development based on three pillars: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental.

The sampling method used in the study included: convenience sampling (suitable for the study's conditions); quota sampling (to ensure diversity in the socio-demographic characteristics of the study sample); and snowball sampling (to leverage the professional networks of tour guides who agreed to participate in the survey).

III. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Economic Aspect

The contribution of tour guide behavior to economic development was assessed through various activities, such as guiding tourists on excursions and encouraging them to purchase local products, thereby fostering economic growth at the destination. Additionally, the role of tour guides includes networking activities, improving the quality of tourism services, and providing a more positive experience for travelers.

Table 1: Tour Guide Behavior in Sustainable Tourism Development (Economic Aspect)

	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Average Value	Standard deviation	Evaluation
ECA1	2	5	4.27	.652	Always
ECA2	2	5	3.85	.706	Frequently
ECA3	1	5	3.73	.867	Frequently
ECA4	1	5	3.95	.884	Frequently

Source: Survey data from the study, 2023

Research on the behavior of tour guides reveals that they frequently introduce local products to tourists, especially characteristic products (the highest score reached is 4.27). Behaviors such as receiving and transmitting feedback from tourists (3.95), encouraging the purchase of local products (3.85), as well as understanding and meeting the needs of tourists for the local community (3.73) are all performed regularly. However, there is a significant discrepancy among tour guides in implementing these behaviors, ranging from never performing (score 1) to always performing (score 5). Although introducing local products is always done, the frequency of encouraging purchases may be lower due to barriers such as product

mismatch with tourists or transportation constraints. Despite not always encouraging purchases to support the local economy, tour guides still take responsibility for introducing products to tourists.

Socio-cultural Aspect

In the socio-cultural aspect, tour guides play a crucial role in carrying out actions such as respecting, protecting, and preserving culture. They not only disseminate cultural messages but also encourage tourists to participate and contribute to preventing negative impacts on heritage and the local community.

Table 2: Tour Guide Behavior in Sustainable Tourism Development (Socio-cultural Aspect).

	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Average Value	Standard deviation	Evaluation
SCA1	3	5	4.67	.509	Always
SCA2	3	5	4.53	.599	Always
SCA3	2	5	4.44	.663	Always
SCA4	3	5	4.29	.710	Always
SCA5	3	5	4.56	.606	Always
SCA6	3	5	4.65	.538	Always

Source: Survey data from the study, 2023

Tour guide behaviors are rated based on indices such as heritage preservation (highest at 4.67), compliance

with regulations and laws at destinations (4.65), respect for local customs (4.56), introduction and promotion of local

cultural values (4.53), advocacy for the conservation of local cultural values (4.44), and encouragement of tourists to learn about and experience local culture (4.29). Despite discrepancies in perception and behavior, tour guides are committed to performing these behaviors. Protecting heritage, complying with regulations, and respecting local customs are considered their top priorities. Meanwhile, behaviors such as introducing local culture, advocating for the conservation of cultural values, and encouraging tourists to explore local culture demonstrate lower levels, possibly due to time constraints and specific activities in the tour program. Overall, tour guides' awareness and

behavior regarding socio-cultural aspects show no significant differences.

Environmental Aspect

Starting from their own initiative, tour guides need to effectively carry out environmental protection. They should seize opportunities during briefings to integrate environmental protection messages and encourage tourists to use eco-friendly products. Throughout the tour, if they notice tourists engaging in actions that could harm the environment, tour guides should delicately remind them to prevent such negative impacts.

Table 3: Tour Guide Behavior in Sustainable Tourism Development (Environmental Aspect).

	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Average Value	Standard deviation	Evaluation
ENA1	3	5	4.71	.469	Always
ENA2	3	5	4.44	.635	Always
ENA3	2	5	4.21	.790	Always
ENA4	2	5	4.10	.911	Frequently

Source: Survey data from the study, 2023

The "Environmental Protection" behavior scored the highest in Table 3 (4.71), followed by "Advocacy for Environmental Protection" (4.44), "Advocacy for the Use of Eco-friendly Products" (4.21), and "Monitoring and Reminding of Tourists' Environmentally Harmful Behaviors" (4.10). Although these indicators demonstrate the commitment of tour guides to the environment, the monitoring and reminder behavior scored the lowest, possibly due to difficulties in management and concerns about negative feedback from tourists. The difference between "Advocacy for Environmental Protection" and "Advocacy for the Use of Eco-friendly Products" may be attributed to inconsistencies in businesses, making it challenging to promote the use of eco-friendly products. In summary, tour guides' environmental-related behaviors show minimal differences in perception.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the role of tour guides in sustainable tourism development has been executed well and contributes significantly to the holistic development of the tourism industry. Behaviors such as environmental protection, heritage conservation, and adherence to destination regulations and laws have been effectively implemented, reflecting the direct and crucial role of tour guides in building a sustainable tourism environment as evidenced by

previous research (Ham, 2002; Weiler & Black, 2014). However, there are still aspects that need improvement to enhance the role of tour guides. Particularly, understanding and meeting the needs of tourists for local people, encouraging tourists to purchase local products and use local services, as well as receiving and conveying feedback from tourists to local people, need to be strengthened.

To improve these aspects, specific measures may include:

Enhancing training: Providing training courses for guides on how to interact and communicate effectively with tourists and local communities. Training on sustainable tourism development should also be integrated into guide training programs (Ham, 2001; UNESCO, 2011).

Developing sustainable tourism programs: Collaborating with local communities to develop tourism programs that benefit both tourists and the local community. Encouraging the use of local products and services in tourism programs (Tosun & Temizkan, 2004).

Promoting social responsibility: Encouraging tour guides to participate in social and environmental activities at tourism destinations. Creating opportunities for tour guides to demonstrate social responsibility and contribute to the local community.

Building partnership relationships: Strengthening cooperation between tour guides, local communities, local authorities, and tourism businesses to ensure that tourism programs are developed and implemented sustainably and beneficially for all stakeholders (Hanh, N. T. V., 2023).

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