

# Community tourism activities in Ba Thuoc district: current situation and solutions

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According to the Tourism Association of Thanh Hoa Province, although this community-based tourism engenders many positive changes, it still faces many difficulties, such as the large moving area or the limited connection with businesses and investors. In the article, the research team mentions the potential for community-based tourism development, recent results, and some existing problems in Ba Thuoc District. Therefore, the research team proposes some possible solutions to enhance community-based tourism services in this place.

## 1. Community-based tourism

### 1.1. Community tourism

Community-based tourism is considered an exciting type of tourism since it has attracted many tourists because of its closeness and hospitality. When tourists experience this type of tourism, locals welcome them to villages and hamlets where indigenous people live. Besides, visitors can also experience the life of local people with daily activities that help visitors learn about the cultural and traditional values of the locality. With the spending of tourists, community-based tourism not only creates more incomes and occupations to help local people improve their living standards but also brings many benefits to sustainable economic development for the locality. (Dinh Thuy Dung, 2022)

According to Clause 15, Article 3 of the Law on Tourism 2017: Community-based tourism is developed based on the cultural values of the community, managed, exploited, and benefited by the local community. Therefore, we can conclude: Community-based tourism is an activity of a local community engaged in tourism. In other words, this is a type of tourism in which the local community participates in the supply chain and tourism management. It is developed based on the community's culture, managed, exploited, and benefited by the community.

### 1.2. Types of community tourism

Community-based tourism is a diverse model that includes many forms depending on topography, historical long tides, and natural scenery. According to Hoteljob (2021), some popular forms of community tourism today are:

**Ecotourism:** A form of community tourism that takes place in areas with favorable conditions, tourists can learn about the beauty of the local cultural identity and social life along with environmental

issues in the locality.

**Cultural tourism:** A form of community tourism based on local culture, history, and archeology create unique and attractive tourism products.

**Agritourism:** A form of community tourism that allows participants to experience local agricultural areas, such as animal farms, agroforestry farms, orchards, and vegetable villages...tourists visit those and become local farmers as well.

**Indigenous tourism:** A form of community tourism in which indigenous people and ethnic minorities directly participate in tourism activities to attract and serve visitors.

**Village tourism:** A form of community tourism in which local villages create economic benefits for themselves through tourism exploitation, attracting visitors to engage in villages and providing food, accommodation, and entertainment services for guests in need.

**Arts and crafts:** A form of community-based tourism that thrives in localities with a long history, combining sightseeing with activities to experience making art products or spectacular crafts.

## 2. Actual situation of community tourism activities in Ba Thuoc district

### 2.1. Potential for community tourism development in Ba Thuoc district

Ba Thuoc is a mountainous district located in the west of Thanh Hoa, with an unspoiled natural landscape, fresh environment, year-round climate, and traditional culture imbued with national identity. These are the potential and strengths of the Ba Thuoc district to develop community-based eco-tourism, accommodation, resort, and homestay, contributing to making community tourism a key economic sector of the district. (Baothanhhoa.vn, 2020)

Along with nature, the formation history has created for Ba Thuoc a source of documents about colorful culture. Ba Thuoc district has many ethnic groups living together, with the Muong ethnic group accounting for 47.5% and the Thai ethnic group for 37.5%. Many Thai and Muong villages and hamlets still retain their unique cultural space, creating a foundation for developing tourism products, primarily for community-based tourism. Cultural values in customs, lifestyle, costumes and village relations in ethnic villages remain intact. (Baothanhhoa.vn, 2021)

Ba Thuoc is a convergence of diverse natural tourism potentials, typically the landscape of mountains and rivers, ecosystems in the Pu Luong nature reserve, Thac Hieu, Thac Mo, Muong Ky fish cave, and Dong Coc lake. In addition, the potential for humanistic tourism here is also highly respectable such as Mai Da Dieu archaeological site, Muong Kho festival, Ba Thuoc district boat racing festival, Thai and Muong stilts, Don street market, brocade weaving villages, and a series of intangible cultures with traditional folk songs and dances of the Kinh, Muong, Thai ethnic groups...

Ba Thuoc is also famous for its own "five cuisines" of the western land of Thanh Hoa, including sticky steamed rice with chicken in Kho Muong, duck in Hieu waterfall (Co Lung commune), Stone snails in Mo waterfall (Dien Quang commune), rock crabs in fish streams in Chieng Ban village (Van Nho commune) and young bees at Canh Nang market. These are the specialties that make up the attractiveness of this land.

Moreover, an abundant, hardworking, and creative workforce willing to learn and receive knowledge for economic development, poverty alleviation, and improvement of living standards is another crucial factor creating the potential for tourism development in the Ba Thuoc district.

## **2.2. Achievements in community tourism activities in the Ba Thuoc district**

Don village (Thanh Lam commune), Kho Muong village, Bang village (Thanh Son commune), and Hieu waterfall (Co Lung commune) have been recognized as community ecotourism sites by the People's Committee of Thanh Hoa province. Therefore, these attractions attracted up to 280,000 arrivals (of which international visitors accounted for 30%) to the Ba Thuoc district in the 2015-2020 period. In the first quarter of 2021, despite being significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, thanks to measures to ensure disease safety, the whole district welcomed more than 5,590 visitors to visit tourist attractions, including 397 foreign visitors. The tourism industry has created jobs for nearly 400 workers in the community, with an average income of 4-5 million VND/person/month. In addition, about 500 indirect

workers have additional income from tourism activities, sightseeing services, accommodation, and selling souvenirs. (Vnbusiness, 2021)

Tourism activities' effectiveness has contributed to a significant reduction in the poverty rate in villages in the Ba Thuoc district. For example, in Don village (Thanh Lam commune), the poverty rate decreased from 12% to 5% within three years from 2018 to 2020, Kho Muong village (Thanh Son commune) from 13% to 6.6%. (Vnbusiness, 2021)

Tourism activities in the Ba Thuoc district have positive changes when tourism business investment projects increase, focusing on the accommodation sector. In Ba Thuoc, there are now 93 accommodation establishments, focusing on directing guests to prominent destinations in Hieu, Don, Kho Muong, Bang, Nua, Kit, Son - Ba - Muoi villages and experiencing the production of brocade weaving products in Lung Niem commune and other traditional crafts village. Furthermore, the district concentrate on the development of cultural tourism, spiritual tourism, historical relics, archaeological relics, and festivals at relics: Mai Da Dieu, Ha Trung commune on January 15; Temple of Duke Ha Cong Thai, Dien Trung Commune on January 10, Gioi Temple.

Investment is primarily spent on infrastructure systems; so far, it is relatively synchronous and convenient for road and waterway traffic, facilitating the interaction with other tourist destinations inside and outside the province. Investment in building facilities and creating clean and beautiful landscapes is always appreciated. Up to now, the district's system of grassroots cultural and sports institutions has met most of the living needs of the residential community, with 21 football fields of all sizes (90m x 120m); 220 mini football fields; 249 volleyball courts; 120 badminton courts. Moreover, 169/205 villages, hamlets, and residential quarters have houses for community cultural activities (reaching 82.43%), of which 150 artistic homes meet standards prescribed by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. (Baothanhhoa.vn, 2022)

Resources are diverse and rich in both human resources and natural resources to be able to organize many different types of tourism. The cultural traditions of the Muong and Thai people are still handed down and preserved relatively intact. Awareness of authorities and local people on tourism development and community-based tourism has been enhanced considerably.

## **2.3. Some problems raised in community tourism activities in the Ba Thuoc district**

Due to the Covid-19 epidemic, the number of tourists in 2021 decreased by 7.37% compared to the same period in 2020. The total number of tourists in 2021 is 37,237, reaching 67.7% of the proposed plan.



Ba Thuoc tourism is still operating moderately; revenue is not as high as before, and many tourism service businesses still have to limit their full potential.

Tourism development in Ba Thuoc still has many difficulties, such as limited promotion, improper use of construction materials in the tourist community area, disruption of the general ecological landscape planning, and the lack of attention to environmental protection.

Many local areas lack "One Commune One Product" (OCOP) products in tourism service; the Night market business has not been appropriately promoted, many villages' roads have to cope with the shortage of lighting systems, hindering the travel of visitors.

The infrastructure system in mountainous areas is still lacking, facing many difficulties due to the large moving area. The localities have not connected with tourism businesses, so the attractions are not broadly advertised. Accommodation, entertainment, medical, communication, electricity, and water services are lacking. The work of environmental sanitation and food safety in villages and traditional stilt houses has not met the development needs.

In addition, the quality of human resources for community tourism development is still limited regarding qualifications and vocational skills. Tourism products and services are not yet abundant, are low quality, and have not yet met the needs of tourists, especially international tourists. These are the fundamental limitations that make community-based tourism unable to enhance enormously to match the available potential of the Ba Thuoc district.

### **3. Some solutions to develop community-based tourism in the Ba Thuoc district**

Ba Thuoc district needs to identify ecotourism, community-based tourism, and natural factors as the core of tourism development. Strengthening afforestation, creating green areas, promoting people's livelihoods, and preserving and promoting historical and cultural values imbued with national identity to exploit typical tourism products of mountainous areas, which directly contribute to creating a brand for Ba Thuoc tourism.

Moreover, Ba Thuoc authorities should focus on renewing mindset, raising awareness of all levels, sectors, and the whole society about the role of community-based tourism in the socio-economic development of Ba district.

Local authorities must stick to the plan, prioritizing developing tourism associated with community culture and being environmentally friendly. They also have to not only focus on developing potential tourism products in a professional direction, imbued

with the identity of the Ba Thuoc mountain region but also pay attention to water treatment, operation center, guest house, waste problem, and parking area.

Furthermore, the Ba Thuoc district must enhance the efficiency of tourism propaganda, strengthen tourism promotion on digital social platforms, accelerate reform of administrative procedures, increase the use of online public services, and thoroughly prepare tourism services. The state, people, and businesses must effectively cooperate in developing community-based tourism.

Authorities must also develop forms of community tourism services and products associated with tourist attractions and spend investment resources on the conservation and embellishment of historical relics and scenic spots to build and implement historical, cultural, and spiritual tourism products. They need to accelerate the recognition of standard criteria for resorts, pay attention to food hygiene and safety issues, and prevent COVID-19.

Ba Thuoc planners should focus on exploiting and promoting the value of craft villages, properly creating "One Commune One Product" (OCOP). Moreover, they should restore brocade weaving villages, handicrafts, and knitting to create souvenirs for visitors, develop regional specialty products from agriculture to provide to resorts and serve tourists, support building souvenir shops, and introduce local specialty products at tourist attractions.

Finally, the district should focus on developing high-quality human resources for local tourism development, and open training courses on community tourism professionals in the district. Create opportunities for people working in tourism to exchange, learn, and build partnerships to diversify tourism services and products./.

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