

## Section 7. Regional studies and socio-economic geography

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### POTENTIAL AND REALITY DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRIT TOURISM IN AN GIANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM

**Abstract.** In this article, by the method of document synthesis, analysis, and actual survey in local studies, the author initially explores the points of spiritual tourism and analyzes the potential strengths of the tourism industry and the situation of spiritual tourism development in the locality in An Giang province. Thereby proposing some orientations in developing spiritual tourism in An Giang province, contributing to promoting the local socio-economic development.

**Keywords:** spirituality, spiritual tourism, An Giang province, Vietnam.

#### 1. Introduction

For a long time, spiritual activities associated with the community's life, expressed through pilgrimage activities in traditional festivals of ethnic groups, have appeared in Vietnam. Today, the tourism industry has exploited these activities to serve domestic and foreign tourists. They have become specific products associated with the spiritual tourism type of most localities in the country. Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism [3] promulgated the "Strategy to develop Vietnam's tourism for the period 2010–2015, with orientation to 2020 and a vision to 2030" identifying cultural tourism (including spiritual tourism) as the industry prioritized for development. An Giang province has many advantages for developing spiritual tourism, being a pilgrimage destination for many tourists in the Mekong Delta and the whole country. In the 2016–2020 period, An Giang has attracted over 5 mil-

lion domestic and international tourists. Visitors to An Giang are mainly pilgrims who combine sightseeing at Nui Sam tourist area, Cam mountain tourist area, visit to offer incense at Ba Chuc Tomb House, Tuc Dup Hill, visit President Ton Duc Thang's memorial area. Developing spiritual tourism is one of the orientations. Significant role in the development of tourism in particular and the socio-economic development of An Giang province. It brings economic efficiency and contributes to preserving and promoting cultural and religious values in localities in An Giang province.

#### 2. Research methods

*Subject research:* spiritual tourism activities in An Giang province, potential and current status of spiritual tourism development at some tourist sites in An Giang.

*The study uses several main research methods such as: Methods of collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing*

*documents:* This method is used in the project by synthesizing sources of documents, data, survey results, and actual surveys, analyzing to see the potential and current status of spiritual tourism development. This method will collect, analyze and synthesize documents from sources such as research papers of the authors on the issue of spiritual tourism and tourism data at An Giang Statistical office.

*Field method:* the field method is considered one of the main methods of the project because it helps the researcher have specific practical surveys to understand the localities' territorial characteristics and spiritual tourism activities. In the topic, this method is combined with the method of information collection and interviewing to have analytical data to achieve the desired results.

*Interview method:* interviews were conducted with tourists and managers at spiritual tourist sites in An Giang province. Interview content to see the ability to attract tourists to spiritual tourist destinations and the current status of spiritual tourism development in localities in An Giang province.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Characteristics of spiritual tourism

Spiritual tourism is a type of tourism that takes cultural and spiritual elements as a goal to satisfy people's spiritual needs in spiritual life. In terms of content and nature, spiritual tourism is a form of cultural tourism that has been modified to meet the specific needs of tourists (Tran Thi Hong Anh [8]). Spiritual tourism is now commonly expressed through sightseeing and sightseeing activities at religious and belief establishments. Tourists who are religious believers look to places, beliefs, and religious establishments, besides sightseeing, to worship and pray. In addition, for a part of tourists participating in spiritual tourism is also for learning and understanding religious philosophies for research purposes. Travel and spirituality are two needs that have an equal impact; sometimes, the need for spirituality is the primary motivation, and sometimes they need for travel is the primary mo-

tivation. However, the result of the spiritual tourist's enjoyment is always the same regardless of the motive of spiritual tourism. When going to those religious facilities, people experience spirituality. Spiritual tourists have the primary purpose of consciously transcending religious norms to seek spiritual values and good feelings about people.

#### 3.2. Potential for spiritual tourism development in An Giang province

An Giang is a locality with the most potential for tourism development in the Mekong Delta today. An Giang is a place to live, converging the unique cultural quintessence of the Kinh – Cham – Hoa – Khmer ethnic groups. With a diverse culture rich in identity, An Giang province has a system of rich humanistic tourism resources and incredibly spiritual, cultural tourism resources. An Giang is the gathering place of many religions and beliefs with many major pilgrimages throughout the year, great festival programs of local communities are held every year, along with a system of religious architectural works. It is one of the factors attracting tourists to the locality.

##### 3.2.1. Typical spiritual tourist attractions in An Giang

*Ba Chua Xu Temple:* Ba Chua Xu Temple was located at the foot of Sam mountain, in Nui Sam ward, Chau Doc city, An Giang province. It is an important historical, architectural, and spiritual relic of the locality and An Giang province. Ba Chua Xu Temple was built in 1870, at first, it was made of bamboo and leaves. In 1972, the temple was rebuilt according to the architecture of the East. The temple has a characteristic green color with a splendid, massive, and unique look. From the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of the fourth lunar month every year, the national festival of Via Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam takes place, attracting many domestic and foreign tourists to attend.

*Tomb of Thoai Ngoc Hau:* also known as Son Lang, belongs to Nui Sam ward, Chau Doc city. This is a scenic spot, a typical ancient architectural work from the feudal period. This is a national historical relic ranked in 1997. The tomb of Thoai Ngoc Hau is located in the middle, on both sides are the graves of

the primary Lady Chau Thi Te and the grave of the second lady Truong Thi Miet. Tomb of Thoai Ngoc Hau is located near the Ba Chua Xu Temple, so it is convenient for visitors to visit Sam Mountain Resort.

*Tay An Pagoda:* is a Buddhist temple located at the junction at the foot of Sam mountain, in Nui Sam ward, Chau Doc city. The pagoda was located on a high and spacious platform, in an area of 15.000 m<sup>2</sup>. The pagoda has an architecture that combines the Indian style and ancient architecture of the Vietnamese people. In the temple, there are about 150 large and small statues: Buddha, Bodhisattva, Arhat, Jade Emperor, and Than Nong. Most of the statues were made of precious wood, carved elaborately and finely, typical for Vietnamese sculpture art of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tay An Pagoda is not only a place for tourists to worship but also a famous spiritual tourist attraction.

*Huynh Dao Pagoda:* is a temple with the most significant temple area and campus compared to other pagodas in the Nui Sam tourist area. This temple was built according to modern architecture but imbued with Buddhist culture. Major holidays such as Buddha's birthday, Vu Lan festival, and the full moon day of the lunar month attract many Buddhist followers and tourists from all over the world to attend the festival and make offerings.

### 3.2.2. Architectural and cultural works of Khmer people in An Giang province

The Khmer people in An Giang have lived in this land for a long time. Due to favorable natural conditions, the An Giang Khmer people now have a reasonably stable material life, and their cultural and spiritual needs are enhanced. In particular, Khmer people in An Giang in the South, in general, follow Theravada Buddhism. The Khmer have built temples to worship Buddhas and Gods. Many temples have a historical value of over 300 years old.

During the holidays, the festival programs of the Khmer people in An Giang are also beautiful points in the spiritual life of the local community here. Chol Chnam Thmay festival is a celebration to welcome the new year, and this is the biggest festival of the

Khmer people. Another big festival of the year is the Don Ta festival. Along with this festival is the very famous Bay Nui Cow Racing Festival, which attracts thousands of visitors to watch and cheer.

### 3.2.3. Architectural and cultural works of Cham people in An Giang province

An Giang now has more than a thousand Cham people. They live mainly in Chau Phu, Tan Chau, An Phu, and Chau Thanh districts. The Cham people in An Giang mainly live by wet farming rice, miniature trading, and handicrafts. Despite being a reasonably large community living on the Hau River, the Cham people always stick with and integrate with the community of ethnic brothers, preserving their distinct cultural identity (People's Committee of An Giang Province [7]). The Cham people in An Giang have many festivals, and each festival has its unique traditional rituals.

### 3.2.4. Other historical, cultural, and religious monuments in the locality

An Giang is a historical land in the Mekong Delta, where there are many historical-cultural and religious monuments. It is an attractive point for tourists, especially spiritual tourists. In addition to the famous cluster of relics at Sam mountain, many other tourist attractions in the province can exploit this type of spiritual tourism.

*Chau Phu communal house:* This is the oldest communal house in the province and a national architectural and artistic relic. Nguyen Van Thoai built the communal house in 1817 to worship Nguyen Huu Canh. On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1988, the Ministry of Culture and Information (now the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) issued Decision No. 1288/VH-QĐ recognizing Chau Phu communal house as a national architectural and artistic relic. Visitors can come here to visit, especially on the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> day of the fifth lunar month. There is a solemn ceremony of worshipping for peace.

*Vinh Nguon communal house:* Vinh Nguon communal house was built to worship Nguyen Huu Le, a character ordained by the king, whose history is

unknown. On June 2, 2011, the communal house was recognized by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism as a “national architectural and artistic relic” according to Decision 1713/QĐ-BVHTTDL.

*Vinh Te communal house:* The communal house was built in the Tiger year (in 1938). At first, the communal house was located a few hundred meters east of its present position. The communal house was established to worship the famous general Thoai Ngoc Hau, who had great merits in reclaiming and establishing hamlets, expanding the territory, and preserving the border. Notably, he led the excavation of the Thoai Ha canal and the Vinh Te canal.

*Temple of Nguyen Trung Truc:* The temple is located in Long Kien commune, Cho Moi district. He was the leader of the anti-French insurgency in the South, with a resounding victory that sank a French ship on the Nhat Tao River (19<sup>th</sup> century).

*Tuc Dup hill historical relic site:* located in An Tuc commune, Tri Ton district, An Giang province. Tuc Dup was a solid base for An Giang’s army and people during the resistance war against the United State.

### **3.3. Situation of spiritual tourism development in An Giang province**

An Giang promotes religious pilgrimage tours at pagodas, revolutionary cultural relic sites in shady places like the Ba Chua Xu Temple Festival in Sam Mountain, Ba Chuc’s Tomb, and Tuc Dup Hill relic site, Cam Mountain tourist area, President Ton Duc Thang memorial area. With the above advantages, it has created favorable conditions. Conditions for the tourism industry An Giang has many tourism products, primarily developing the type of spiritual tourism. Since then, An Giang tourism has prospered in recent years and achieved positive results. In the 2016–2020 period, An Giang welcomed 38 million domestic and foreign tourists, of which 405.000 international visitors and 4.1 million stayed as guests, with revenue of 21.200 billion VND. In 2019 alone, the tourism industry of An Giang province welcomed about 9.2 million visitors, an increase of 8.23% over the same period in 2018, reaching 100% of the 2019

plan. In 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, tourists to An Giang decreased by 30% over the same period, reaching 65% of the plan. This is a positive signal in the general tourism development of the province and especially the development of spiritual tourism (An Giang Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism [1]). Currently, local spiritual tourism activities are focused on exploiting by travel companies at the following tourist spots and resorts:

*Nui Sam tourist area Chau Doc city:* The local spiritual tourist attraction is mainly based on the attractiveness of tourism resources, including the cluster of Nui Sam relics, especially Ba Chua Xu Nui Sam Temple.

According to the socio-economic report of Chau Doc City, the number of visitors to the Nui Sam tourist area in 2016 was 3.723.000 arrivals; by 2020, it will be 4.274.800 visitors. This is the result of the efforts to exploit the pilgrimage tour of the local authorities. Tourism activities at the relic cluster take place all year round, but the main focus is on the festival season of Ba Chu Xu Nui Sam (People’s Committee of Chau Doc City, [5]).

*Cam Mountain tourist area:* In addition to the Sam Mountain relic cluster, there is also a cluster of Cam Mountain relics (Tinh Bien district) at an altitude of 710 m with the giant Maitreya Buddha statue in Asia, Van Linh pagoda, Big Buddha temple. This place has majestic mountains cool climate all year round, suitable for tourists to visit, relax and meet the needs of spiritual pilgrimage. According to An Giang Tourism Development and Joint Stock Company, Cam mountain welcomes more than 1.2 million visitors each year. The most significant number is in the spring from January to June of the lunar calendar. In addition, visitors can enjoy the panoramic view of nature with the cable car system, visit pagodas, visit unique architectural works, explore caves, and bathe in streams.

*Other tourist attractions that exploit spiritual tourism in An Giang:* In recent years, An Giang is also attracting several religious pilgrims from Southeast

Asian countries, especially the market. Malaysian, Indonesian. This number of tourists mainly focuses on pilgrimage activities of major religions such as Christianity and Islam. With the Cham community in the South with a system of churches, Large cathedrals such as Long Xuyen Church are attractive tourist attractions attracting this part of tourists. The main tourist activities are pilgrimage-belief combined with entertainment and entertainment.

### **3.4. Orientation to develop spiritual tourism in An Giang province**

According to Decision No. 2088/QĐ-UBND of the People's Committee of An Giang province on the development plan for the field of Culture, Sports, and Tourism in the province, emphasizing the development of cultural and religious tourism products, historical – religious relics, this is one of the significant orientations to develop the local tourism industry. Spiritual tourism development is the development of an integrated field, requiring the participation of many parties, including the investment of the State, local authorities, travel agencies, and tourist at spiritual points. In order to improve the quality of tourism services, localities need to have policies to encourage businesses and investors to jointly develop spiritual tourism, further tightening the relationship between businesses, local, and between local and business. In order for spiritual tourism to develop in the right direction, bringing traditional, spiritual, cultural, and historical values, in addition to preserving and preserving landscape values, An Giang needs to actively build reasonable tourism programs and routes, invest

in spiritual tourist areas to create synchronization, improve transport infrastructure leading to relics. Spiritual and cultural tourism aims at sustainable development, contributing to the overall growth of the tourism industry and contributing to the socio-economic development of the province. This is one of the strengths of An Giang tourism.

### **4. Conclusion**

Spiritual tourism is becoming a popular trend, connecting cultures in the spirit world. In the past, many tourists came to spiritual places every year, and the trend is that more and more tourists have spiritual tourism needs. Spiritual tourism activities in An Giang are associated with religion and combine with promoting the ethics of drinking water, remembering the source, worshiping ancestors, national heroes, and forebears who have contributed to the country. Spiritual tourism has become an indispensable and increasingly exciting need, bringing practical effects to the socio-economic development of An Giang province, improving the people's spiritual life, and making positive contributions to the country's development. Exploiting spiritual and cultural values into tourism activities is a tourism development trend in An Giang province, where there is much potential to develop this type of tourism. In the coming time, the locality needs to pay attention to development orientation and improve the efficiency of spiritual and cultural tourism activities to develop commensurate with the potential. The overall growth of the tourism industry contributes to the socio-economic development of the province. It is one of the strengths of An Giang tourism.

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