

# Sustainable tourism and local development in Quang Nam Province: Policy analysis and strategic recommendations

Le Thi Kim Hoa <sup>1\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, VIETNAM

\*Corresponding Author: [lethikimhoa@iuh.edu.vn](mailto:lethikimhoa@iuh.edu.vn)

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## ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism has become a central pillar of local development strategies in emerging economies. This study examines the effectiveness of tourism-related policies in Quang Nam Province, Vietnam, over the period 2017–2024, encompassing pre-pandemic growth, the COVID-19 disruption, and post-pandemic recovery, using a qualitative policy analysis approach. Drawing on provincial directives, national strategies, and official tourism statistics, this study applies the Triple Bottom Line, Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), and Community-Based Tourism (CBT) frameworks to assess tourism governance outcomes and policy implementation gaps. The findings indicate a strong recovery, with visitor numbers increasing from 1.05 million in 2021 to approximately 8 million by the end of 2024, while revenue from accommodation and sightseeing services exceeded VND 9,200 billion. While economic recovery and destination branding have been successful, persistent challenges remain in environmental governance, interdepartmental coordination, and community participation, as reflected by a 1.7-fold increase in waste generation in Hoi An between 2016 and 2023. The study contributes by identifying key policy implementation gaps and proposing targeted, actionable recommendations to support sustainable and inclusive tourism development.

**Keywords:** sustainable tourism, policy analysis, local development, community participation, Quang Nam Province

## INTRODUCTION

Quang Nam Province, located in Central Vietnam and bordering Da Nang City to the north and Quang Ngai Province to the south, possesses exceptional tourism potential. The province is home to two UNESCO World Heritage Sites—Hoi An Ancient Town and My Son Sanctuary—which serve as major attractions for both domestic and international visitors. Leveraging these advantages, Quang Nam has positioned tourism as a key economic pillar, supported by strategic investments in destination branding and socio-economic development. **Figure 1** presents an overview of the main tourism zones in Quang Nam Province, including coastal, heritage, and community-based tourism areas.

According to Nguyen et al. (2025), Hoi An City had received over 4.42 million visitors by November 2024, representing a 6.58% increase compared to the same period in 2023. Alongside the rise in tourist arrivals, the city experienced rapid expansion in accommodation services, dining establishments, and travel agencies, highlighting tourism's growing importance in the local economy. The city plays a central role in Quang Nam's tourism development strategy. After a

challenging period due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the city's tourism sector has demonstrated a strong recovery trajectory.



**Figure 1.** Overview of tourism areas in Quang Nam Province (Source: Authors' own elaboration)

Despite these notable successes, Hoi An and Quang Nam Province continue to face various complex challenges, particularly the mounting environmental pressures brought about by increasing tourist numbers and the rapid expansion of tourism-related businesses. According to data from the People's Committee of Hoi An City, household waste rose from 72 tons in 2016 to 120 tons in 2023—a nearly 1.7-fold increase over seven years (Vu, 2025). Issues such as flooding due to low-lying terrain, the impacts of climate change, and limited environmental awareness among some residents and visitors have emerged as significant obstacles to achieving sustainable development goals.

Resolution No. 31-NQ/TU, dated July 31, 2023, issued by the Tỉnh ủy Quảng Nam, highlights the considerable strain on the preservation of cultural heritage and ecological environments in Hoi An, especially in light of the potential loss of traditional cultural identity and developmental imbalances (Tỉnh ủy Quảng Nam, 2023).

This study examines the current state of tourism development in Quang Nam Province, with a particular focus on Hoi An City, during the period 2017–2024 through the lens of sustainable development. While existing studies on tourism in Vietnam often emphasize economic growth outcomes or environmental impacts in isolation, limited attention has been given to how local tourism policies translate into coherent governance mechanisms and sustainability outcomes at the provincial level.

By integrating policy analysis with established theoretical frameworks—including the Triple Bottom Line, Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), and Community-Based Tourism (CBT)—this study seeks to address key governance and implementation shortcomings. Specifically, it aims to identify governance challenges, policy implementation gaps, and trade-offs between economic recovery, environmental protection, and community participation. Based on this analysis, the study proposes policy-oriented recommendations to support heritage preservation and sustainable tourism development in Quang Nam and comparable heritage destinations.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sustainable tourism development has become an essential orientation in the tourism development strategies of many countries worldwide, including Vietnam. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable tourism refers to the organization and management of tourism activities that meet current needs while safeguarding resources for future generations. This tourism model requires scientific and planned resource management that balances economic, social, and aesthetic demands while preserving cultural values, protecting biodiversity, reinforcing ecosystems, and improving the quality of life for local communities (McIntyre et al., 1993).

In Vietnam, the 2005 Law on Tourism (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005) also stipulates:

Sustainable tourism is the development of tourism that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their tourism needs.

(Article 4, Chapter I)

This perspective serves as the foundational orientation for the content of this study.

The concept of sustainable development—the foundation of sustainable tourism—was introduced in the early 1980s by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and was formally defined in the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987):

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This concept was emphasized at two major United Nations conferences: The Earth Summit (McIntyre et al., 1993), where Agenda 21 - an action plan for sustainable development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - was introduced; and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, which set out clear goals for sustainable development in the new millennium (United Nations, 2002).

Sustainable tourism entails harmonizing three key components:

- 1) Economy,
- 2) Society, and
- 3) Environment,

aiming to maximize benefits while minimizing negative impacts on local communities and resources. Harris et al. (2002) regard sustainable tourism as a responsible form of tourism development in the context of globalization, making significant contributions to identifying criteria, indicators, and assessment tools for sustainable tourism. Sofield (2003) emphasizes the role of community participation and local control in ensuring the sustainability of tourism destinations.

In Vietnam, various studies have analyzed different aspects of sustainable tourism development, ranging from national strategies and resource conservation to development models tailored to the unique conditions of each locality.

Overall, sustainable tourism is built upon core principles, including:

- 1) Minimizing negative environmental and social impacts;
- 2) Preserving and promoting cultural and historical values;
- 3) Generating tangible economic benefits for local communities, thereby improving residents' quality of life;
- 4) Encouraging active participation and equitable benefit-sharing for local people; and
- 5) Developing the tourism sector in a responsible manner that considers long-term benefits for future generations (United Nations Environment Programme & World Tourism Organization, 2005).

A prominent theoretical model used to analyze the sustainable development of tourist destinations is Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model (Butler, 1980) which divides the development process of a destination into stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and either decline or rejuvenation. Each stage presents different environmental, cultural, and economic



**Figure 2.** The triple bottom line framework for sustainable tourism development (Source: Adapted from Elkington, 1997)

challenges, requiring destination managers to adopt appropriate strategies to maintain sustainability.

Additionally, the Triple Bottom Line approach proposed by Elkington (1997) stresses that a development strategy can only be considered sustainable when it simultaneously creates value in three dimensions. The three pillars of sustainability, illustrated in **Figure 2**, include:

- 1) Social (people),
- 2) Environmental (planet), and
- 3) Economic (profit).

This approach is particularly well-suited to tourism, a sector deeply affected by environmental concerns, cultural conflicts, and local community acceptance.

One specific and practical approach to sustainable tourism development is Community-Based Tourism (CBT), in which residents play a central role in managing, operating, and benefiting from tourism activities. This model enhances participation, builds local capacity, and improves community livelihoods while safeguarding and promoting traditional cultural values (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2017). CBT is particularly suitable for destinations with significant heritage and cultural potential, such as Quang Nam Province.

These theoretical models complement each other in explaining sustainable tourism. While Butler's TALC model illustrates the dynamic stages of destination evolution (Butler, 1980), the Triple Bottom Line framework provides a normative lens to evaluate economic, social, and environmental outcomes (Elkington, 1997). Meanwhile, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) operationalizes these principles at the grassroots level, emphasizing local participation and benefit-sharing (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2017; Sofield, 2003).

Together, they offer an integrated foundation for assessing and promoting sustainable tourism in Quang Nam Province.

However, these frameworks also reveal inherent tensions between rapid tourism growth and governance capacity, highlighting the need for adaptive and context-specific policy responses rather than one-size-fits-all solutions. As argued by Bramwell and Lane (2011), tourism governance is inherently complex and political, involving multiple actors, competing

interests, and fragmented institutional arrangements, which often lead to gaps between policy intentions and implementation outcomes.

Drawing on these theoretical foundations, sustainable tourism development can be understood as an objective necessity requiring coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders. In this context, the government acts as a coordinator, the local community is a key actor, and businesses are growth drivers. Applying these interrelated theoretical perspectives—TALC, the Triple Bottom Line, CBT, and governance—collectively provides a comprehensive analytical lens to evaluate how Quang Nam can transform sustainable tourism principles into practical policy actions.

Based on Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, Quang Nam—particularly Hoi An—can be positioned in the late development to consolidation stage. This stage is characterized by high tourist volumes, increasing environmental stress, and growing pressure on governance systems. The sharp rebound in visitor numbers after COVID-19, combined with infrastructure strain and waste management challenges, suggests that the destination is approaching its carrying capacity, requiring timely policy recalibration to avoid stagnation or decline.

From a Triple Bottom Line perspective, Quang Nam's tourism policies have prioritized economic recovery and destination branding, yielding strong revenue growth and employment generation. However, social and environmental dimensions have lagged behind economic outcomes. Environmental indicators such as waste generation and ecosystem pressure have worsened, while community-based tourism initiatives face uneven benefit-sharing and capacity constraints.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) theory helps explain why several grassroots tourism initiatives remain vulnerable. Although CBT projects have improved household income and cultural preservation, the absence of standardized training, financial support mechanisms, and clear regulatory safeguards has increased the risk of cultural commodification and over-commercialization. Together, these theoretical lenses provide a coherent framework to interpret both the achievements and persistent gaps in Quang Nam's sustainable tourism governance.

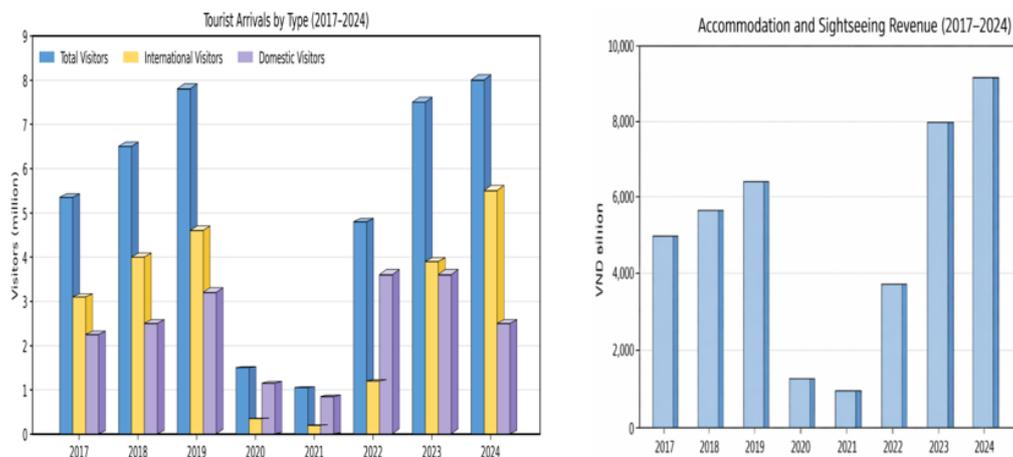
## METHODOLOGY AND POLICY CONTEXT

This paper adopts a qualitative policy analysis design, drawing on secondary data from official reports of the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Quang Nam Province, the Hoi An People's Committee, and the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism. The study also draws on relevant policy documents, including Resolution No. 31-NQ/TU (Tỉnh ủy Quảng Nam, 2023) and the Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy (2020–2030) (Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2025; Tran, 2025). Data were analysed using a policy-oriented, SWOT-based framework to evaluate tourism performance, institutional challenges, and the alignment between local initiatives and national sustainability goals.

**Table 1.** Growth of the total number of visitors to Quang Nam Province

Year	Total visitors (million)	International visitors (million)	Domestic visitors (million)	Revenue from accommodation and sightseeing services (VND billion)	Main events / notes
2017	5.35	3.10	2.25	5,000	Strong pre-pandemic growth
2018	6.50	4.00	2.50	5,800	Expansion of Hoi An tourism
2019	7.80	4.60	3.20	6,500	Peak before COVID-19
2020	1.50	0.35	1.15	1,200	COVID-19 pandemic hit
2021	1.05	0.20	0.85	910	Severe disruption
2022	4.80	1.20	3.60	3,800	Partial recovery
2023	7.50	3.90	3.60	7,950	Strong rebound
2024	8.00	5.50	2.50	9,200	Tra Que Vegetable Village recognized in UN Tourism (UNWTO) Best Tourism Villages 2024 initiative

Source: Quang Nam Statistics Office (2017–2024)



**Figure 3.** Tourist arrivals by type and revenue from accommodation and sightseeing services in Quang Nam Province, 2017–2024 (Source: Author’s compilation based on Quang Nam Statistics Office (2017–2024))

Note: Tourist arrivals are measured in million visitors; revenue from accommodation and sightseeing services is measured in VND billion

This approach is appropriate for capturing policy coherence, institutional arrangements, and governance dynamics that are not readily observable through quantitative indicators alone.

## THE CURRENT STATE OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN QUANG NAM PROVINCE

### Continuing the Recovery of Growth Momentum After the COVID-19 Pandemic

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Quang Nam had a period of strong tourism development from 2017 to 2019, with visitor numbers increasing from 5.35 million in 2017 to 7.8 million in 2019, including over 4.6 million foreign visitors. In 2019, tourism revenue topped VND 6,500 billion, and Hoi An City was a significant factor in solidifying Quang Nam’s place on the national and international tourism map. However, the pandemic caused a severe crisis for the tourism industry; as in 2021, visitor numbers fell to just 1.05 million, tourism revenue dropped to about VND 910 billion, many companies were forced to halt operations, and the tourism ecosystem was severely disrupted (Nguyen et al., 2025).

Due to reopening policies and other stimulus programs, Quang Nam’s tourism industry has recovered quickly since

2022. In 2023, the province received over 7.5 million visitors, generating an estimated VND 27,000–30,000 billion in total tourism-related revenue. By the end of 2024, the tourism industry had surpassed pre-pandemic levels, with over 8 million visitors, including 5.5 million foreign visitors, and revenue from lodging and sightseeing alone exceeding VND 9,200 billion. Tra Que Vegetable Village (Hoi An City, Quang Nam Province) was recognized by UN Tourism (UNWTO) in the 2024 Best Tourism Villages initiative, reaffirming the province’s commitment to sustainable development. In addition, the province has continued to invest in infrastructure, enhance transportation connectivity between destinations, draw in lodging and resort facilities, and promote tourism through many exciting cultural events (Báo Đà Nẵng, 2024).

Overall, the evidence suggests that Quang Nam’s tourism industry has not only recovered strongly after the pandemic but is also progressing toward sustainable development. As shown in **Table 1**, tourism in Quang Nam experienced strong recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching over 8 million visitors in 2024. **Figure 3** illustrates the trends in tourist arrivals and tourism revenue in Quang Nam Province from 2017 to 2024.

### Strengthening the Development of Tourism Products

In line with the global trend toward sustainable tourism, Quang Nam Province has been actively developing new

tourism products with an emphasis on community-based, ecological, and localised experiences since 2010. These destinations have emerged in rural and mountainous areas in recent years, including Tra Que Vegetable Village, Thanh Ha Pottery Village, Kim Bong Carpentry Village, Cham Islands, Tra Nieu Village, My Son, Bho Hoong and Dhroong (Dong Giang), and Zara (Nam Giang). The rapid development of homestay accommodations, particularly in Hoi An, has also contributed to extended visitor stays and increased tourist spending.

Transportation and cultural infrastructure investments, such as the Monument to Heroic Vietnamese Mothers and the Cua Dai Bridge, have allowed Quang Nam's tourism industry to grow, especially in areas like Dien Ban, Duy Xuyen, and the southern part of the province. Hoi An continues to be a leader in developing new tourism products by researching consumer demand and fusing natural resources with unique cultural elements, such as the creation of products from the red Bombax ceiba trees of the Cham Islands, and the planning of festivals, promotional events, and traditional art performances (Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2025).

To control visitor flows, improve visitor experiences, and support the sustainable growth of the local tourism sector, the city has focused on developing new forms of tourism, including river, coastal, and folk arts tourism, and maintaining the historic town.

### **Fostering a Professional Tourism Environment**

To attract many tourists, create a welcoming and professional tourism environment, and gradually build the Quang Nam tourism brand, Quang Nam province has been investing in improving tourism infrastructure, human resources and service quality, diversifying tourism products, and stepping up marketing and promotion efforts.

The province has recognised the need for a long-term vision in planning and governance. As a result, the Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Quảng Nam issued Directive No. 19/CT-UBND (Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Quảng Nam, 2013) and Directive No. 07/CT-UBND (Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Quảng Nam, 2023), which aim to strengthen tourism environment management by ensuring safety and hygiene, transparent pricing, the application of innovative tourism solutions, the promotion of cultural behaviour, and raising community awareness on responsible tourism. Notable destinations like Hoi An, My Son, and the Cham Islands have implemented professional management models and seen notable positive results.

Notably, Hoi An has been actively working to improve the quality of tourism services by reorganising its urban transportation system, which includes moving parking lots, installing signage, and fortifying local security networks. At the same time, Quang Nam Province has partnered on a project to declare the Cham Islands a national tourism area. With a total budget exceeding VND 160 billion, the province also approved a tourism infrastructure investment support plan for 2016–2020, which focused on upgrading critical infrastructure for about 40 tourist sites throughout the region. These extensive efforts have established a strong basis for the province's tourism industry to grow sustainably, especially in light of the region's growing international integration.

### **Promoting Tourism Marketing Activities**

Under the direction of the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, Quang Nam has stepped up its tourism marketing efforts in recent years, with numerous strategic cooperation programs involving major enterprises. Notable initiatives include the “Central Heritage Road,” which links UNESCO heritage sites like Phong Nha–Ke Bang, the Imperial City of Hue, My Son, and Hoi An; and the “Three Countries – One Destination” program, which links My Son and Hoi An with Angkor Wat (Cambodia) and Luang Prabang (Laos) (Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2025).

The province has also actively promoted tourism through significant events like the Japan–Hoi An Cultural Exchange Festival, the Heritage Festival, and the “Summer Emotions” series. In the first eight months of 2023, Quang Nam received 5.9 million visitors, a 59% increase from the previous year, and generated nearly VND 6,000 billion in tourism revenue, a 98% increase.

To expand international marketing channels, large hotel groups have joined regional marketing campaigns like “Vietnam's Central Coast.” Since 2016, Hoi An has implemented several tourism stimulus programs, including giving out sightseeing vouchers, providing free or discounted tickets to Cu Lao Cham, and assisting businesses in implementing digital marketing and digital transformation. In 2023 alone, more than 70 trainees received intensive training in this area.

In addition, the province has set up representative offices in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, attended about five tourism fairs a year, and hosted dozens of delegations on press trips and familiarization trips (fam trips). It has also stepped up its online marketing, using the Internet, which is accessed by 60% of foreign tourists, and actively recruited domestic and foreign film crews to promote its tourism and cultural image further.

As a result of these coordinated marketing efforts, Quang Nam welcomed over 7.5 million visitors in 2023 (a 160% increase compared to 2022), with tourism revenue reaching VND 7,950 billion and estimated tourism-related social income totalling VND 18,683 billion (Báo Đà Nẵng, 2024; Cục Thống kê tỉnh Quảng Nam, 2017–2024).

While these marketing efforts have significantly improved destination visibility and visitor growth, their effectiveness remains uneven across sub-regions, highlighting the need for a more data-driven and coordinated marketing strategy. Recent studies on digital transformation in Vietnam emphasize that the adoption of data-driven tools and digital capabilities can significantly enhance organizational decision-making and support sustainable development objectives, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Tang, 2023). This paradox reflects a broader tension in sustainable tourism marketing, where promotional success may unintentionally intensify environmental and social pressures if not aligned with governance capacity and sustainability objectives (Font & McCabe, 2017).

In addition, prior research suggests that intensified tourism promotion and social media exposure can encourage risk-taking visitor behaviors, such as unsafe self-photography practices, creating additional safety and management challenges at popular destinations (Weiler et al., 2021).

## Tourism Development in Tandem with Environmental Protection

The province has implemented several environmental protection policies to reduce the impact of tourism on natural resources, especially in heritage areas. One notable initiative is the “No Plastic Bags” campaign in Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An, which was started in 2009 and has helped reduce plastic waste by 40% while spreading the message of eco-friendly tourism. Tourism growth in heritage and coastal destinations often intensifies pressure on water resources, wastewater systems, and aquatic ecosystems, particularly in regions facing climate variability and seasonal demand peaks (Gössling et al., 2015). Quang Nam places a high priority on green and sustainable tourism in addition to its growth objectives (Nguyen et al., 2025).

Quang Nam has also received non-refundable aid from Japan (VND 225 billion) to build a wastewater treatment plant near the Japanese Covered Bridge and to implement several projects aimed at solid waste treatment and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Hoi An City has invested more than VND 836 billion in environmental projects and implemented Directive 15 and a long-term Environmental Protection Plan through 2035 (Nguyen et al., 2025).

The province has actively increased public awareness through initiatives like “For a Cleaner Hoi An,” waste separation at the source, environmental education in schools, and creating the associated fund. Notably, Quang Nam was the first locality in Vietnam to issue a set of Green Tourism Criteria (2021–2025), and 25 businesses have been certified. In 2022, when the province hosted the National Tourism Year with the theme “Green Tourism,” it welcomed 4.8 million visitors and generated VND 3,800 billion in revenue. In 2023, the number of visitors increased to 7.5 million, including nearly 3.9 million foreign visitors, bringing in close to VND 8,000 billion in revenue. The province maintained its upward trajectory throughout 2024, with visitor numbers exceeding 8 million by the end of the year and tourism-related income of about VND 9,200 billion. In 2023, Quang Nam’s Provincial Green Index (PGI) reached 22.84 points, placing it third in the Central Coast region and 16<sup>th</sup> nationally, an improvement of nine spots from 2022. Environmental compliance and pollution reduction indicators received high ratings, confirming the province’s sound strategy of tying tourism development with environmental protection and advancing its image as a clean, green, and welcoming destination (Nguyen et al., 2025).

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN QUANG NAM PROVINCE

### Achievements

Quang Nam has emerged as a pioneer in implementing initiatives that connect tourism and environmental protection in practice; two notable examples are the Environmental Protection Project in Hoi An and the “Say No to Plastic Bags” initiative on Cham Islands, both of which have left a lasting impression of green tourism. In recent years, Quang Nam has

made remarkable progress in developing sustainable tourism, successfully balancing economic growth, resource conservation, and community well-being.

With a focus on enhancing product quality, infrastructure, human resources, and digital transformation, Quang Nam has successfully preserved two World Heritage Sites (Hoi An and My Son) and the Cham Islands Biosphere Reserve while promoting community-based tourism in rural and mountainous regions. The province has also released a set of Green Tourism Criteria, and as of mid-2024, 25 businesses have been certified.

Following the pandemic, tourism has recovered significantly, with 4.8 million visitors in 2022, 7.5 million in 2023, and over 8 million visitors by the end of 2024. As a result, tourism revenue and social income have increased, and homestay-based and community-based tourism models have contributed to preserving local culture and creating sustainable livelihoods. Overall, Quang Nam is increasingly recognized as a green and sustainable destination that integrates economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability.

### Challenges and Limitations

Despite significant gains, sustainable tourism development in Quang Nam still confronts numerous challenges that need to be addressed:

Weak linkages among localities, tourism enterprises, and local communities have contributed to fragmented and relatively monotonous tourism products. Although green and community-based tourism has expanded rapidly, insufficient planning and technical support have increased the risk of over-commercialization and environmental degradation.

Outside of major hubs, tourism infrastructure is still underdeveloped, especially in southern coastal and mountainous areas; marketing efforts are still dispersed and lack a long-term strategic approach and effective use of digital technologies; environmental protection in tourism is inconsistent; waste, pollution control, and encroachment on public spaces are still problems in many areas; and human resources are lacking in both quantity and quality, especially in rural and remote areas.

To attain sustainable development, Quang Nam must enhance governance systems, increase infrastructure and human capital investments, create tourism offerings linked to preserving its natural and cultural heritage, and strengthen regional collaboration and community involvement.

Building upon the internal weaknesses and external threats identified in the SWOT analysis (Table 2), Table 3 provides a more detailed, policy-oriented assessment. It highlights specific gaps between existing provincial policies and real-world implementation challenges, thereby setting the stage for targeted strategic recommendations.

These identified gaps underline the need for integrated, data-driven, and regionally coordinated policy interventions, which are further discussed in the following section.

**Table 2.** SWOT analysis of sustainable tourism development in Quang Nam Province

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Two UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Hoi An Ancient Town and My Son Sanctuary) attract strong domestic and international tourist flows.	- Limited coordination among departments and weak linkages between localities and businesses.
- Recognition of Tra Que Vegetable Village (Hoi An City) in UN Tourism’s ‘Best Tourism Villages 2024’ initiative.	- Uneven infrastructure and accessibility, especially in remote areas.
- Implementation of green tourism initiatives such as “No Plastic Bags in Cu Lao Cham”.	- Insufficient digital transformation and tourism data systems.
- Strong government commitment through policies (Resolution No. 31-NQ/TU, Directive No. 07/CT-UBND).	- Shortage of skilled workers and limited foreign language capacity.
- Expanding network of community-based and eco-tourism projects.	- Inconsistent environmental management and waste treatment.
Opportunities	Threats
- Integration into national and regional programs (e.g., “Central Heritage Road”).	- Climate change impacts (flooding, coastal erosion).
- Rising global demand for sustainable and cultural tourism.	- Over-commercialization and loss of cultural authenticity.
- Support from international partners (UNESCO, JICA, UNWTO).	- Environmental degradation and rising waste generation.
- Growth of digital marketing and international connectivity.	- Competition from neighboring provinces (Da Nang, Hue).
- Financial assistance and incentives for sustainable tourism.	- Global risks (pandemics, economic instability).

Source: Compiled by the author based on Quang Nam Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism reports (2017–2024); Resolution No. 31-NQ/TU (2023), and related policy documents

**Table 3.** Policy responses, implementation gaps, and proposed policy directions

Policy/action	Effectiveness	Observed gaps	Proposed policy directions
Directive 07/CT-UBND (2023): Strengthening tourism environment management; campaign “No Plastic Bags – Cu Lao Cham”	Raised awareness, reduced plastic waste at key sites; promoted a green destination image	Waste treatment capacity in heritage and coastal areas becomes overloaded during peak seasons; waste sorting at source remains inconsistent	Upgrade seasonal waste infrastructure; expand PPP-based recycling and the Green Vendor Program.
Regional Linkage Program “Central Heritage Road” (Hue–Da Nang–Quang Nam)	Increased international tourist flow and enhanced inter-provincial tourism products	Lack of synchronized data, unified ticketing, and coordinated event calendars; regional competition remains high	Establish an inter-provincial DMO; integrate heritage ticketing, event calendars, and joint digital marketing.
Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and Homestay Projects in mountain and craft village areas	Improved community income and visitor length of stay	Limited training in hospitality and foreign languages; absence of mandatory carrying-capacity thresholds, standardized training requirements for CBT operators, and financial reinvestment mechanisms to safeguard cultural assets	Standardize CBT training on service quality, safety, and languages; launch a Green Certification Fund.
Infrastructure Investments (Cua Dai Bridge, parking zones, signage, urban safety systems)	Improved accessibility and visitor experience	Public transport and sanitation facilities outside the Hoi An core area remain insufficient	Apply GIS-based capacity mapping; prioritize investment in bottleneck areas and minimum service standards.
Digital Transformation Initiatives (digital marketing, rep offices in Hanoi & HCMC, fam trips and press trip programs)	Enhanced visibility and marketing efficiency	Lack of shared data platform; irregular monitoring of visitor satisfaction and emission metrics	Establish a tourism data hub with a real-time M&E dashboard.

Source: Compiled by the author from provincial directives and reports (2017–2024)

## RESULTS: POLICY OUTCOMES AND GOVERNANCE GAPS

The results indicate that Quang Nam’s tourism policies have produced mixed sustainability outcomes. On the economic dimension, tourism recovery has been rapid and robust, driven by effective marketing, infrastructure investment, and destination branding. Visitor numbers exceeded pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2024, confirming the effectiveness of short-term recovery measures.

However, from an environmental perspective, policy effectiveness has been uneven. Waste management systems in heritage and coastal areas have been unable to keep pace with rising tourist flows, particularly during peak seasons. Despite green tourism initiatives, environmental performance remains

largely reactive rather than preventive, reflecting capacity and enforcement gaps.

Socially, while community-based tourism initiatives have expanded, their sustainability is constrained by limited technical support, insufficient training, and weak regulatory oversight. These shortcomings highlight governance fragmentation and misalignment between policy objectives and implementation mechanisms.

These outcomes are consistent with the late development to consolidation stage of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), particularly in Hoi An, where visitor growth increasingly outpaces environmental management capacity.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

Building on the identified policy outcomes and governance gaps, the following recommendations aim to address key trade-offs between economic recovery, environmental carrying capacity, and community inclusion. While these measures are necessary to enhance sustainability, their implementation may face constraints related to budgetary capacity, interdepartmental coordination, and uneven local readiness. Therefore, the proposed strategies emphasize prioritization, phased implementation, and measurable performance indicators.

To address existing limitations and guide Quang Nam's tourism sector toward sustainable development, especially in connection with economic growth in mountainous areas, the province should prioritize a set of integrated policy actions, focusing on governance coordination, spatial planning, and capacity management.

### ***Improving tourism planning and management***

Given the identified mismatch between rapid visitor growth and limited planning capacity, Quang Nam should prioritize revising and integrating its tourism master plan with socio-economic, transportation, environmental, and infrastructure planning frameworks. A long-term, spatially balanced planning approach is necessary to redistribute tourism activities across coastal, mountainous, and inland areas, thereby reducing pressure on saturated destinations such as Hoi An and My Son. Technology to support planning, investment attraction, and destination administration should also receive more attention, especially in creating digital maps of tourist destinations. Specifically, planning efforts must incorporate technology, such as GIS-based capacity mapping, to analyze visitor flows and infrastructure strain in real-time, guiding balanced investment away from saturated zones.

### ***Diversifying tourism products linked to local resources***

To reduce product concentration and over-reliance on heritage tourism, Quang Nam should diversify its tourism offerings by prioritizing community-based, eco, agricultural, and creative tourism models that are closely linked to local resources. In addition to improving the quality of traditional products, it is essential to create new tour routes that connect destinations both inside and outside the province, creating integrated tourism value chains that will enhance visitor experiences and prolong their stay. Product development must follow the principles of resource conservation, respect for local culture, and balancing the interests of all stakeholders.

### ***Enhancing the protection of tourism resources and the environment***

Quang Nam should strengthen and operationalize integrated environmental protection programs at tourism sites, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas such as Cu Lao Cham, An Bang Beach, and the Hoai River. In parallel, the province should prioritize investment in solid waste and wastewater treatment systems and strengthen control over pollution sources resulting from tourism activities.

Additionally, public awareness and education campaigns should be intensified to raise environmental consciousness among local communities and tourists, while promoting eco-friendly products and reducing single-use plastics and plastic bags. To incentivize responsible investment and upgrade environmental infrastructure, the province should introduce a Green Certification Fund, offering financial support or tax breaks for small enterprises adopting clean technologies (e.g., waste recycling, renewable energy) and cultural preservation practices.

### ***Developing human resources and raising community awareness***

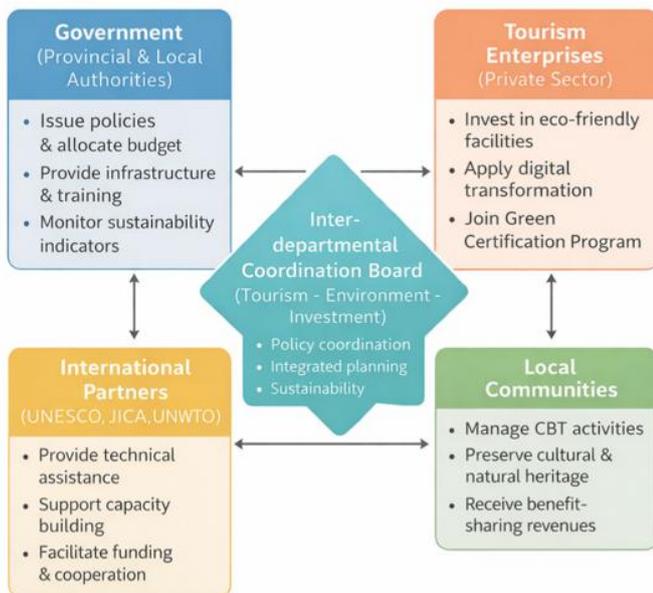
The findings indicate that limited skills, foreign language capacity, and managerial know-how remain key constraints on the sustainability of community-based tourism initiatives in Quang Nam. To address these gaps, Quang Nam Province should step up targeted training and capacity-building initiatives, emphasising foreign languages, vocational skills, and management techniques for workers in the tourism sector, particularly those in community-based tourism areas. At the same time, the province should improve communication and educational initiatives to increase public awareness of the long-term advantages of sustainable tourism, which will help locals feel more responsible for protecting landscapes, natural resources, the environment, and cultural heritage.

### ***Strengthening regional linkages and international cooperation***

To address fragmented destination governance and increasing inter-provincial competition, Quang Nam should strengthen regional linkages with neighboring provinces in the South Central Coast and Central Highlands, particularly through initiatives such as the "Central Heritage Road". To overcome data fragmentation and regional competition, establishing an Inter-provincial Destination Management Organization (DMO) is crucial to harmonize data, develop combo heritage tickets, coordinate event schedules, and launch joint digital marketing campaigns. At the same time, it is crucial to increase international cooperation by utilising financial and technical support and exchanging best practices from international organisations like UNESCO, JICA, and UNWTO, particularly in areas like heritage preservation, green tourism development, and climate change adaptation, while ensuring that such cooperation is aligned with provincial governance priorities rather than implemented as isolated pilot projects.

### ***Enhancing state governance and improving regulatory frameworks***

To address fragmented governance and ensure policy coherence and streamlined implementation, Quang Nam must establish a dedicated Inter-departmental Coordination Board involving key sectors such as Tourism, Environment, and Investment. This body would serve as a mechanism to integrate planning, coordinate decision-making, and monitor sustainability performance across institutions. The framework highlights the coordination between government agencies, tourism enterprises, local communities, and international partners under an inter-departmental coordination



**Figure 4.** Inter-departmental governance framework for sustainable tourism development in Quang Nam Province (Source: Authors' own elaboration)

mechanism aimed at promoting sustainable tourism practices, as illustrated in **Figure 4**.

The province should develop a Sustainable Tourism Development Index as a foundation for resource allocation, strategic adjustments, and risk management. Quang Nam should also continue to refine its legal and policy framework to support sustainable tourism, emphasizing incentives for enterprises investing in ecotourism, community-based tourism, and responsible tourism. Furthermore, it is critical to encourage the application of information technology in destination management and to strengthen the effectiveness of tourism inspections and monitoring, ensuring compliance with service quality, safety, and environmental protection standards. Specifically, the province must establish a unified Tourism Data Hub and implement a real-time Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) dashboard capable of tracking key sustainability metrics—such as community benefit distribution, emissions per visitor, and waste per visitor—to ensure that policy adjustments are evidence-based and data-driven.

Beyond its coordination role, this board could function as a multi-stakeholder platform for project alignment, funding allocation, and structured community consultation. Adopting a participatory planning approach—where local residents are engaged from the early stages of tourism project design—would foster local ownership, reduce conflicts, and enhance cultural authenticity. To enhance financial sustainability, Quang Nam can diversify funding sources through public-private partnerships (PPPs), green bonds, and international grants supporting eco-tourism and climate resilience. Introducing a “Green Certification Fund” for small tourism enterprises could provide incentives for adopting environmentally friendly technologies such as renewable energy and waste recycling systems. In addition, establishing a destination management organization (DMO) for Hoi An–My Son–Cham Islands would improve marketing coordination and

ensure that revenue redistribution benefits local communities equitably.

Technology should also play a central role in promoting sustainable practices. Implementing smart tourism systems that monitor tourist flows, manage waste collection, and analyze visitor satisfaction in real time could significantly optimize resource use and reduce environmental stress. The integration of GIS-based systems would further enhance spatial planning, enabling policymakers to identify overcapacity zones, track deforestation, and evaluate climate risks. This digital transformation aligns with the province's vision of developing a “Green and Smart Tourism Destination” under the National Tourism Strategy (2020–2030).

Finally, to build a culture of sustainability, education and training programs should be institutionalized at both professional and community levels. Universities and vocational schools in the Central Region could introduce specialized courses on sustainable tourism management, environmental ethics, and heritage conservation. For local communities, regular workshops and peer-learning initiatives can improve understanding of responsible tourism, customer service, and digital marketing. Over time, this comprehensive capacity-building approach will ensure that sustainable tourism becomes not just a policy goal but a shared social value embedded in Quang Nam's development model.

## DISCUSSION AND COMPARATIVE POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Building on these findings, this section examines the policy implications of sustainable tourism development in Quang Nam Province. The analysis focuses on how current achievements, challenges, and proposed measures can be translated into actionable policy directions that strengthen governance, enhance community participation, and promote long-term sustainability.

This finding reinforces the argument advanced by Bramwell and Lane (2011) that sustainable tourism governance requires coordinated action across multiple sectors and levels of government, rather than isolated or sector-specific interventions. Comparable governance challenges have been identified in Vietnam, where fragmented institutional coordination and limited cross-sectoral integration constrain sustainable tourism outcomes (Rival, 2018). This governance challenge is consistent with broader reviews of sustainable tourism policy, which emphasize persistent gaps between policy design, coordination, and effective implementation across destinations (Guo et al., 2019). Empirical evidence from Vietnam further supports this argument, showing that limited community participation, insufficient capacity building, and weak benefit-sharing mechanisms can significantly constrain the sustainability of community-based tourism initiatives at the local level (Quang et al., 2023). Recent community-level studies in Vietnam further highlight that many community-based tourism initiatives remain constrained by top-down governance structures, limited local empowerment, and weak integration with broader community development processes (Tan et al.,

2024). Strengthening the linkages between environmental, cultural, and economic policies is crucial to achieving long-term success. Compared with models in other ASEAN countries, such as Thailand's "Community-Based Tourism Network" or Malaysia's "National Ecotourism Plan," Quang Nam's policy framework still lacks systematic evaluation mechanisms and independent monitoring. Therefore, establishing clear performance indicators—such as waste reduction rates, energy efficiency scores, and community income growth—would help measure progress and improve transparency in decision-making (ASEAN Secretariat & Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, 2024).

Compared with neighboring destinations such as Da Nang and Hue, Quang Nam demonstrates stronger integration of heritage preservation into tourism branding but weaker interdepartmental coordination mechanisms. Da Nang's centralized destination management model and Hue's heritage-focused carrying capacity controls offer valuable lessons for Quang Nam in managing visitor pressure.

Internationally, destinations such as Bali and Luang Prabang illustrate both the opportunities and risks of heritage-based tourism during rapid tourism growth, consistent with late development-stage dynamics. While Bali has benefited from strong destination management organizations (DMOs), it also faces severe over-tourism due to delayed regulatory intervention. Luang Prabang's experience highlights the importance of early enforcement of heritage zoning and visitor limits. These comparisons underscore that Quang Nam's challenges are not unique but stem primarily from delayed governance adaptation during periods of rapid tourism growth.

From a regional development perspective, Quang Nam should play a leading role in the "Central Heritage Corridor," coordinating sustainable tourism efforts with Da Nang, Hue, and Quang Ngai. By developing joint marketing packages, heritage conservation programs, and shared databases, the region can form a competitive and resilient tourism cluster that attracts high-value visitors. International collaboration with organizations like UNWTO and JICA should also be expanded to access technical expertise in climate adaptation, circular economy models, and green tourism standards.

Social inclusion must remain at the heart of sustainable tourism policy. Empowering marginalized groups—such as ethnic minorities in mountainous districts—through microcredit schemes, vocational training, and community cooperatives can transform tourism into a driver of equitable growth. This participatory governance approach aligns with the principles of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and 13 (Climate Action).

To ensure feasibility, policy implementation should be prioritized and phased. In the short term (0–12 months), Quang Nam should establish an interdepartmental coordination board led by the Department of Tourism, with clear mandates and reporting mechanisms. In the medium term (1–3 years), the province should operationalize a tourism data hub and introduce measurable sustainability indicators, such as waste per visitor, emissions per visitor, and the

proportion of tourism revenue retained by local communities. Potential barriers, including limited budgetary capacity and institutional resistance, can be mitigated through public-private partnerships and targeted capacity-building programs.

In conclusion, achieving sustainable tourism in Quang Nam requires not only visionary policy but also consistent institutional commitment, inclusive governance, and adaptive learning. Policymakers should view sustainability as a continuous process that evolves with environmental, technological, and social changes. By integrating these lessons into local governance structures, Quang Nam can become a benchmark for sustainable and culturally rich tourism development in Vietnam and across Southeast Asia.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. First, the analysis relies exclusively on secondary data sources, including official reports, policy documents, and statistical yearbooks. While data triangulation was employed to enhance reliability, such sources may reflect institutional perspectives and underreport implementation challenges or policy failures at the local level. The absence of primary data—such as interviews with local communities, tourism enterprises, or policymakers—limits the ability to validate governance effectiveness and policy impacts at the grassroots level.

Second, this study does not provide a quantitative evaluation of sustainability outcomes. Key performance dimensions, including income distribution equity, environmental carrying capacity, waste management efficiency, or carbon emissions per visitor, were identified conceptually but not empirically measured. As a result, the analysis focuses primarily on policy coherence, institutional arrangements, and governance processes rather than outcome-based effectiveness. Nevertheless, the qualitative policy analysis provides valuable insights into governance structures and implementation dynamics that underpin sustainability outcomes.

Future research should address these limitations by adopting mixed-method research designs that integrate qualitative policy analysis with primary data collection. In particular, surveys and in-depth interviews with tourism enterprises and local communities would enable validation of policy implementation outcomes and provide insight into stakeholder responses to sustainability initiatives. Longitudinal studies examining changes in community livelihoods, environmental indicators, and tourism-induced pressures would further strengthen understanding of sustainable tourism governance dynamics.

Additionally, future studies could develop and test a comprehensive set of sustainable tourism indicators tailored to the Central Heritage Corridor, incorporating GIS-based spatial analysis to assess visitor flows, environmental stress, and climate-related risks. Comparative research exploring the adaptive capacity of Quang Nam's tourism sector in response to climate change impacts—such as sea-level rise and extreme

weather events—would also provide valuable evidence to inform long-term strategic planning and policy adjustment.

## CONCLUSION

Sustainable tourism in Quang Nam Province holds significant potential for driving inclusive and environmentally responsible growth. This paper contributes to the understanding of local governance and sustainable development by highlighting key policy gaps and practical recommendations. To achieve long-term sustainability, policymakers should prioritize integrated planning, environmental protection, and community empowerment.

These findings provide policy-relevant insights for other developing regions in Southeast Asia that aim to strike a balance between heritage conservation and economic modernisation. Future research could further investigate the role of local stakeholders and policy implementation mechanisms in promoting sustainable tourism growth and social equity.

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**AI statement:** The author stated that generative AI or AI-based technologies were only utilized to provide minimal support for grammar and language improvement. The content, information, concepts, and arguments in this manuscript were not created or analyzed by artificial intelligence. All research design, analysis, and core intellectual contributions were produced and validated solely by the author.

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