

More Tourists Green Up: Bringing the Charm back to Vietnam

Charms to be greened: Tourists as green value co-creators

More and more tourists have chosen attractions in Vietnam as destinations of their travel not only to explore their hidden charms but also make them greener through their role as green value co-creators. Vietnam is filled with hidden charms for tourists' discovery such as Sa Pa Mountains, Ha Long Bay, Phong Nha Cave, Hoi An Ancient Town, Da Nang Beach, Mekong Delta, and Phu Quoc Island. Nonetheless, these charms are increasingly less charming and losing the returns of tourists, both international and local, due to the destruction of their green. Although people and factories in the localities are the main "terminators" to the green of tourist attractions, tourists themselves also contribute to their agony. Yet, there have been more and more instances of international tourists who, on their travel journey in Vietnam, volunteered with their companions to clean a part of a beach or a river bank. They not only "planted" the green in the destinations but also shared green values with other tourists and the local community and fanned the green flames in them. Tourists, in other words, are likely to join hands with tour companies to make tours greener and return the green to tourist attractions. Here is a snapshot of how tourists green up with tour companies.

What our study found

Surveying 502 tourists who consumed tour services from 37 tour companies based in Vietnam, our research conducted in 2017 revealed the potential role of tourists in collaborating with tour companies to create green values for tourist destinations. In light of our research findings, tourists can act as "environmental activists" contributing to the green brand of tour companies by participating in environmental activities in the tour designs, encouraging and helping other tourists to partake in them, and contributing eco-initiatives to the environmental agenda of tour companies.

Our research findings further indicated that social responsibility strategies of tour companies can awaken green values in both their employees and tourists. Moreover, green behaviours of tourism employees such as tour designers or tour guides can influence tourists to be green on the tour and contribute green initiatives to green programs of tour companies. Our study¹ further found that by demonstrating their service to the green mission in their leadership (servant leadership), "captains" of tour companies can effectively fuel their crew members' drive to sail with tourists to the green destinations.

Sailing with tourists to the green

Tour companies should not look at tourists as consumers of their tour services only but as "holiday-makers" in its right sense. Tourists should be invited to design activities including green activities for their holidays. They can add activities such as beach cleaning, tree planting or showering with elephants (instead of riding and exhausting them) to their eco-tours. Tour companies should get tourists on board their green boat and sail with them to the green of the community.

Tourists can observe "green sails" (social responsibility strategies) through tour companies' green actions toward the community such as their collaboration with villagers to clean a part of the river surrounding the village as a destination of an eco-tour. They can also observe green sails through green activities that tour companies integrate into their tours. Thus, tour companies need green captains to plan "green sails" as well as adjust them in the right directions. Tour companies need to build such green captains at all tiers, who also can build

green sails inside the hearts of the crew members. Green sails sometimes may not work well, and employees may not feel fairly treated toward their green behaviours. Green captains can make up for the winds from green sails by fanning the green flames inside their crew members.

In brief, there are many forces to pull tourists to the green mission. The most proximal force resides in employees or crew members of a green boat who communicate the green mission and activities to tourists. Behind these green crew members are green captains that support their creativity in designing green tours with green activities to make tourist destinations greener. Charms in Vietnam are not only natural or cultural beauties but also efforts of tour companies to preserve their sustainability through their tourists.

Reference

Luu, T.T. (2017). Activating tourists' citizenship behavior for the environment: the roles of CSR and frontline employees' citizenship behavior for the environment. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, in press.