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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysis of Factors Influencing the Decision to Choose Dong Thap Ecotourism Destination

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the influence of various factors on the decision-making process of domestic tourists when choosing Dong Thap ecotourism destination. Data for the research were collected from 193 survey questionnaires from domestic tourists. The research results show that there are seven factors influencing the decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination for domestic tourists, arranged in descending order of influence as follows: (4) Ecotourism barriers; (2) Tourist outreach activities; (3) Reference groups; (6) Attitude towards the ecotourism destination; (1) Ecotourism destination image; (7) Tourism motivation; (5) Ecotourism knowledge. Based on these findings, the authors propose several managerial implications to enhance the attractiveness of Dong Thap ecotourism destination.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Destination choice in tourism has been a research direction that has attracted significant scholarly attention. This trend began to emerge in the 1980s with seminal works by Woodside and Lysonski (1989) and Um and Crompton (1990). However, tourists' destination choices vary significantly according to their needs. In recent years, the term "ecotourism destination" has emerged with a clear orientation towards development and the ability to meet the ecotourism demands of tourists. Therefore, researching the factors influencing the decision to choose an ecotourism destination plays an important role in providing a basis for proposing managerial implications to enhance the attractiveness of this type of tourism.

Dong Thap is a locality rich in ecotourism resources. In recent years, ecotourism has played an important role in the development of the locality. For instance, Tram Chim National Park, a key tourism site in the locality, has generated over 10 billion VND per year, significantly contributing to the socio-economic development of Dong Thap. According to the "Project on Tourism Development to Promote the Image of Dong Thap Province for the Period 2023-2025, with Orientation to 2030," ecotourism is identified as the primary type of tourism, ranked third in the system of tourism types prioritized for development by the locality (People's Committee of Dong Thap Province, 2023). However, the practical development of Dong Thap ecotourism destinations has shown that the

locality still faces many limitations such as ineffective promotion, low-quality services, overlapping tourism products, and a lack of distinctive features compared to other destinations in the Mekong Delta region.

For these reasons, this paper aims to identify, measure, and analyze the impact of various factors on the decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination, providing a scientific basis for proposing managerial implications to enhance the attractiveness of this destination.

2. OBJECTS, METHODS, AND RESEARCH MODEL

2.1 Research objects

The research objects are identified as the factors influencing the decision of domestic tourists to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination. The subjects of the survey are domestic tourists at tourist sites: Tram Chim National Park, Gao Giong ecotourism area, Xeo Quyt historical site, and Sa Dec flower village.

2.2 Methods

The primary research method in this paper is mathematical statistics, performed using SPSS 29.0 software with Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and linear regression testing to evaluate the degree and direction of the influence of the factors on the decision of domestic tourists to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination.

2.3 Research model

The study inherits the research model of Tuyet, T. T. and Manh, N. V. to survey, analyze, and evaluate. According to this model, seven factors are identified: (1) Ecotourism destination image (EDI); (2) Tourist outreach activities (TOA); (3) Reference groups (RG); (4) Ecotourism barriers (EB); (5) Ecotourism knowledge (EK); (6) Attitude towards the ecotourism destination (AT); (7) Tourism motivation (TM) (Tuyet & Manh, 2023) (see Figure 1). The hypotheses are as follows: H1, H2, H3, H5, H6, H7 positively influence the decision of domestic tourists to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination (DET), while H4 has a negative influence (see Figure 1).

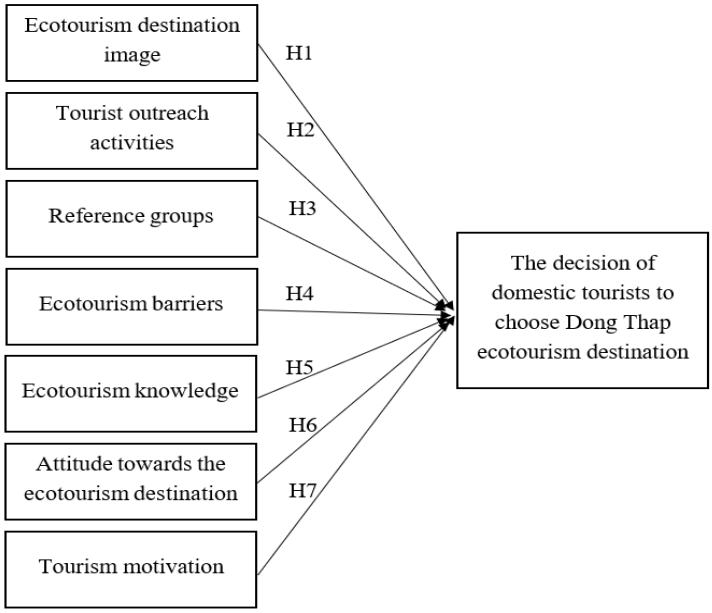

Figure 1: Proposed research model

Source: Proposed by the authors, 2024

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Overview of Dong Thap ecotourism destination

Dong Thap is a province in the Mekong Delta region, located in the Dong Thap Muoi area. The total natural area of the province is 3,382 km^2. Dong Thap has relatively diverse natural and cultural ecotourism resources, along with a basic infrastructure system that meets the needs of tourists.

Natural tourism resources: Dong Thap ecotourism destinations are characterized by typical wetland ecosystems of the Dong Thap Muoi area, primarily distributed in Tram Chim National Park, Gao Giong ecotourism area, Xeo Quyt historical site, and Go Thap historical site, with a total area of about 11,000 hectares. Tram Chim National Park alone has over 7,313 hectares of wetland forest, recognized as one of the nine Ramsar sites in Vietnam and the 2000th in the world. Dong Thap is also a region with high biodiversity, featuring about 910 terrestrial plant species belonging to 545 genera of 152 families, approximately 231 terrestrial animal species with 141 genera in 48 families of 11 orders, 129 fish species in 11 orders of 31 families and 79 genera, including many species listed in the Vietnam Red Book and the IUCN Red List such as wild rice (found in Tram Chim National Park, Gao Giong ecotourism area); Sarus crane, and yellow-headed tortoise (found in Tram Chim National Park) (People's Committee of Dong Thap Province, 2020). The wetland ecosystem also forms many unique habitats, especially wetland grasslands (reed grass, sedge grass, wild rice, etc.).

Cultural tourism resources: Dong Thap is a land with a rich history and long-standing tradition of reclamation and land development. It possesses unique indigenous cultural values developed as ecotourism resources. Cultural ecotourism resources often develop in conjunction with natural ecotourism resources, complementing each other to create distinct features for tourist sites such as exploring and experiencing the local lifestyle during the flooding season in Tram Chim National Park; exploring historical values and rural cuisine in Gao Giong ecotourism area; learning about the Funan civilization, the worship of Ba Chua Xu, and the veneration of heroes Doc Binh Kieu and Thien Ho Duong at Go Thap historical site.

Infrastructure for Dong Thap ecotourism: In Dong Thap, tourism infrastructure in general and ecotourism infrastructure in particular are developed on the province's common infrastructure foundation. The basic infrastructure system is relatively stable but still has many limitations in terms of quality. The bus station system and roads are relatively well-constructed, distributed along the province's main traffic routes, with Cao Lanh, Sa Dec, and Hong Ngu bus stations being the central stations connecting intra-provincial and inter-provincial routes. According to the general assessment of the People's Committee of Dong Thap Province, the province's national highways have not been fully invested in, degrade quickly, and investment is affected by geological and river factors, resulting in low load capacity and transport volume (People's Committee of Dong Thap Province, 2022). Dong Thap has 96 private tourism accommodation establishments with over 2,000 rooms. Of these, 53 establishments with 1,351 rooms are classified according to lodging standards (People's Committee of Dong Thap Province, 2023).

Facilities for Dong Thap ecotourism: Facilities at ecotourism sites in Dong Thap are well-equipped and regularly inspected. The tourist sites are equipped with parking lots and clean restrooms. Recreational and experiential activities are relatively well-invested, with safety equipment. Lodging facilities, including rest and overnight stays at tourist sites, are quite limited, with small room capacity and relatively low service quality, lacking prominence.

3.2 Results of the analysis of factors influencing the decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination for domestic tourists

3.2.1 General description of the research sample

Sample size: In the study, the author conducted Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). For this method, the minimum sample size must be at least 4 or 5 times the number of observed variables in the factor analysis (Trong and Ngoc, 2008). In the article, there are 33 observed variables across 07 factors included in the factor analysis, so the required sample size is 128 or 165. Therefore, the author determined the number of samples issued for the study to be 200 to meet the requirements of the factor analysis (EFA).

Survey locations: Interviews were conducted at prominent tourist sites according to document 389/UBND-THVX, including Tram Chim National Park, Gao Giong ecotourism area, Xeo Quyt historical site, and Sa Dec flower village (People's Committee of Dong Thap Province, 2021) with 100 survey questionnaires. Additionally, the research team also conducted online surveys with domestic tourists who have visited Dong Thap ecotourism destinations, with a total of 100 questionnaires.

Data collection period: The data collection for primary and secondary research took place from December 2023 to January 2024. After cleaning the data, the processing results showed that 200 survey questionnaires were collected, of which 192 were valid and included in the data analysis, and 8 were invalid because the respondents did not answer all the survey questions.

3.2.2 Cronbach's Alpha reliability test

The Cronbach's alpha test results for 38 observed variables showed that the Cronbach's alpha values of the factors were all greater than > 0.6, and the corrected item-total correlation coefficients of the 38 observed variables were all > 0.3 (see Table 1). Therefore, the scale ensures reliability and meets the conditions for performing the subsequent analyses.

Table 1: Results of Cronbach's alpha test

Code	Number of observed variables	Corrected item – total correlation (Minimum)	Cronbach's alpha
EDI	5	0,757	0,945
TOA	5	0,713	0,944
RG	5	0,714	0,899
EB	4	0,819	0,941
EK	4	0,631	0,896
AT	4	0,781	0,937
TM	6	0,614	0,927
DET	5	0,706	0,921

Source: Author's processing, 2024

3.2.3 Results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Based on the research model and the results after performing the Cronbach's alpha test, the author conducted EFA with 33 observed variables. The results of the parameters are as follows: KMO = 0.896 (0.5 ≤ KMO ≤ 1) indicates that performing exploratory factor analysis with the research data is appropriate, and Sig < 0.01 (< 0.05) shows that the observed variables are correlated with the representative factor (see Table 2). Additionally, the total variance explained of the last factor is 1.245 (> 1), indicating that 07 factors are extracted from the observed variables, and the cumulative percentage is 80.636% (> 50%), showing the ability to explain 80.636% of the variance of the observed variables.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's test for independent factors

Kaiser – Meyer – Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0,896
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	**Approx Chi-Square**	6956,556
	df	528
	Sig.	< 0,001

Source: Author's processing, 2024

The rotated factor matrix with a loading factor of 0.4 shows that 33 observed variables converge into 07 factors (see Table 3). The factors extracted from the rotated factor matrix remain the same as the proposed research model, so there is no need to rename them.

Table 3: Results of exploratory factor analysis for independent factors

Observed Variable	**Factor**							**Factor Description**
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	
TM 4	,892							Tourism Motivation (TM)
TM 3	,857							
TM 2	,807							
TM 5	,791							
TM 6	,727							
TM 1	,598							
EDI 3		,838						Ecotourism Destination Image (EDI)
EDI 2		,834						
EDI 4		,819						
EDI 1		,814						

EDI 5		,745					
TOA 2			,864				Tourist Outreach Activities (TOA)
TOA 3			,846				
TOA 1			,843				
TOA 4			,812				
TOA 5			,691				
RG 4				,845			Reference Groups (RG)
RG 5				,803			
RG 1				,783			
RG 3				,773			
RG 2				,748			
EB 3					-,861		Ecotourism Barriers (EB)
EB 2					-,857		
EB 4					-,793		
EB 1					-,781		
AT 3						,877	Attitude Towards Ecotourism Destination (AT)
AT 2						,847	
AT 1						,806	
AT 4						,803	
EK 4							,785	Ecotourism Knowledge (EK)
EK 1							,769
EK 2							,767
EK 3							,741

Source: Author's processing, 2024

3.2.4 Results of regression analysis

The evaluation of the model's fit shows that the adjusted R^2 is 0.773, indicating that the model explains 77.3% (> 50%) of the variance in the decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination for domestic tourists. This also shows a fairly strong relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables, with these 07 factors contributing to 77.3% of the difference in the

decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination. Additionally, the Sig. coefficient < 0.001 (< 0.05) indicates that the regression model is appropriate (see Table 4).

Table 4: Model fit evaluation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	,884[a]	,781	,773	,28522	93,985	<0,001[b]

Source: Author's processing, 2024

For the regression results, it can be seen that there is no multicollinearity phenomenon because all factors have a variance inflation factor (VIF) < 2. Additionally, the Sig. coefficient of the 07 factors is < 0.05, so all factors meet the conditions for inclusion in the regression equation (see Table 5). The standardized beta coefficients of the factors are all positive, except for the factor (4) Ecotourism barriers, which is negative. Therefore, it can be concluded that the factors (1) Ecotourism destination image, (2) Tourist outreach activities, (3) Reference groups, (5) Ecotourism knowledge, (6) Attitude towards the ecotourism destination, and (7) Tourism motivation have a positive impact, and the factor (4) Ecotourism barriers has a negative impact on the decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination for domestic tourists.

Bảng 5: Kết quả hồi quy

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
		B	Standard error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1		,875	,252		3,471	<,001		
	EDI	,114	,037	,142	3,041	,003	,543	1,843
	TOA	,152	,035	,200	4,296	<,001	,546	1,830
	RG	,173	,039	,193	4,484	<,001	,645	1,552
	EB	-,213	,032	-,312	-6,750	<,001	,556	1,798
	EK	,094	,044	,100	2,141	,034	,548	1,824
	AT	,129	,035	,162	3,661	<,001	,609	1,641
	TM	,078	,035	,101	2,199	,029	,564	1,773

Source: Author's processing, 2024

Based on the absolute value of the standardized beta coefficient, the influence on the decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination for domestic tourists is ranked in descending order as

follows: (4) Ecotourism barriers (Standardized coefficients beta = -0.312); (2) Tourist outreach activities (Standardized coefficients beta = 0.200); (3) Reference groups (Standardized coefficients beta = 0.193); (6) Attitude towards the ecotourism destination (Standardized coefficients beta = 0.162); (1) Ecotourism destination image (Standardized coefficients beta = 0.142); (7) Tourism motivation (Standardized coefficients beta = 0.101); (5) Ecotourism knowledge (Standardized coefficients beta = 0.100).

Based on the threshold values of the parameters, combined with the standardized beta coefficients, the regression equation for the research model of factors influencing the decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination for domestic tourists is as follows:

Y = -0.312*EB + 0.200*TOA + 0.193*RG + 0.162*AT + 0.142*EDI + 0.101*TM + 0.100* EK + e

Where:

Y: Decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination for domestic tourists;

EB: Ecotourism barriers; TOA: Tourist outreach activities; RG: Reference groups; AT: Attitude towards the ecotourism destination; EDI: Ecotourism destination image; TM: Tourism motivation; EK: Ecotourism knowledge;

e: Factors outside the model.

3.2.5 Some managerial implications to enhance the attraction of Dong Thap ecotourism destination

For the ecotourism barriers factor*:* Dong Thap ecotourism destination needs to maintain the quality of activities, minimize ecotourism barriers by regularly organizing inspections, evaluations, and reminders for activities at tourist sites, and improving the services and quality of the workforce.

For the Tourist outreach activities factor: There should be an emphasis on promoting, diversifying services, and the role of tourism human resources, such as: organizing practical evaluations of ecotourism product promotions at the destination; utilizing the local brand identity system in destination promotion strategies; strengthening existing promotional tools on local websites, updating and supplementing reference information at the destination; building and expanding overnight rest spots at ecotourism sites; investing in various forms of tours and explanations (QR codes, automatic narration through headphones and transmitters); arranging thematic exhibits, using 3D technology to describe the images of characteristic flora and fauna.

For the reference groups factor: Research to integrate sub-items to record and display tourists' comments on reputable websites managed by the management boards of tourist sites; establish departments to receive and address tourists' feedback on the quality of ecotourism sites; focus on improving the quality of products, services, and other supporting factors, avoiding discrepancies between tourist expectations and experiences that could affect the destination's reputation.

For the attitude towards the ecotourism destination factor: The destination should maintain tourists' positive attitudes by creating a friendly, clean ecotourism image; actively promoting destination communication to approach and create goodwill among tourists; regularly organizing thematic sessions, training, updating trends in ecotourism, and building standard practices for staff at tourist sites.

For the ecotourism destination image factor: The destination image needs to be researched and managed regarding environmental quality, maintaining landscapes in a green-clean-beautiful state to ensure sustainable development of ecotourism in Dong Thap.

For the ecotourism motivation factor*:* It is evident that these tourists have a high interest in the environment, seek experiences, and immerse themselves in wild nature. Therefore, tourism products

should consider these characteristics to build suitable attributes, research, and propose tourism models suitable for different tourist groups.

For the ecotourism knowledge factor: Developing in-depth products to meet the high professional demands of tourists alongside traditional products, diversifying ecotourism products, and approaching experts, students, and schoolchildren interested in ecotourism to contribute to environmental awareness and biodiversity conservation in the locality closer to tourists.

4. CONCLUSION

The processing and analysis results show that the factor (4) Ecotourism Barriers has the highest influence, and the factor (5) Ecotourism knowledge has the least influence on the decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination for domestic tourists. All proposed hypotheses are accepted. Additionally, the authors propose some managerial implications to enhance the attraction of Dong Thap ecotourism destination based on the influence level of the factors derived from the analysis results.

However, the paper has some limitations such as a small sample size and a relatively short survey period, resulting in a lower explanatory ability of the model. Moreover, besides the factors in the model, there are many other factors that affect the decision to choose Dong Thap ecotourism destination for domestic tourists. Therefore, future studies need to expand the sample size, increase the survey period, and improve the sampling method to overcome some limitations of the paper.

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