



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Evaluation of Community Tourism Activities in Cai Lay district, Tien Giang Province Based on ASEAN Community Tourism Standards

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ABSTRACT

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Particularly in the ASEAN area, community tourism is crucial in terms of socioeconomic development and cultural preservation. The stated objective of the ASEAN community tourism standards is to promote sustainable tourism development. With its distinctive river landscape and culture, the Cai Lay district of Tien Giang province is gradually discovering the potential of community tourism, nevertheless infrastructure and service quality issues persist. Through survey and data analysis, this article assesses Cai Lay's community tourist offerings in accordance with the ASEAN Community tourist Standards. According to the findings, 58.06% of the 186 variables that were observed were "fully responsive," 34% were "partially responsive," and 8% were unresponsive. Notably, the requirements for the standard of lodging and restrooms have been satisfied with accomplishment. Standard procedures remain required to be enhanced, though, and the team needs to be strengthened. In order to satisfy ASEAN criteria, the article suggests strategies to enhance community consultation and service quality, support cultural preservation, and advance Cai Lay's sustainable economy.

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INTRODUCTION

Community tourism is emerging as a sustainable development trend in numerous locations worldwide, particularly in the ASEAN area. The "ASEAN Tourism Development Strategy 2016-2025" seeks towards establishing ASEAN as a sustainable and responsible tourism destination of superior quality. As a result, ASEAN community tourism standards have grown into a valuable instrument that member nations may utilize to safeguard the environment, strengthen their local economies, and preserve indigenous cultural values.

Cai Lay district, Tien Giang province is steadily establishing itself on the map of community ecotourism owing to its distinctive river and cultural scenery. Visitors can experience traditional agricultural life and folklore activities at Tan Phong islet, which is dedicated to a garden and ecotourism concept. However, Cai Lay's community tourist industry has not yet grown significantly due to numerous organizational and infrastructure-related obstacles. In order for community tourism to continue developing in the proper direction and satisfy ASEAN standards, it is imperative to assess, concentrate on, and propose solutions.

With an eye toward enhancing quality, drawing in visitors, and fostering the sustainable growth of the local economy, this article seeks to assess and analyze community tourism operations in the Cai Lay district in accordance with ASEAN community tourism standards.

2. Research content

2.1 Theoretical basis

Community tourism

A type of tourism that involves local communities' involvement and control and aims to promote sustainable development on all fronts—economic, social, and environmental—is known as community tourism, or CBT (ASEAN, 2016). While a significant portion of profits are retained for the community, community tourism enables the local community authority and participation in the management of tourism-related activities (Nicole Häusler and Wolfgang Stasdas, 2000). Community tourism, according to Bui Thi Hai Yen (2012), is a form of sustainable development in which the local community benefits from tourism while additionally actively participating in the development process with the assistance of both domestic and international organizations. According to the 2017 Law on Tourism, community tourism is tourism that is created around local cultural values and is managed, utilized, and profited from by the community.

In conclusion, local communities are crucial to the planning and administration of tourist-related activities under the sustainable development paradigm known as community tourism. Alongside to providing financial advantages, this strategy assists in preserving cultural heritage, environmental resources, and community involvement.

ASEAN Community Tourism Standards

A fundamental guiding framework that promotes the responsible and long-term development of community tourism in the ASEAN area is the ASEAN Community Tourism (CBT ASEAN) standard. This standard, which is extensively established and implemented with the primary goal of producing a quality tourism experience while safeguarding the local culture and environment, is derived from the ASEAN tourism development strategy for the period 2012-2015.

The ASEAN CBT standard set consists of 10 standards with 28 criteria, concretized through 186 variables, divided into three main groups: 96 basic variables, 53 advanced requirements variables, and 37 best practice requirements variables. To ensure comprehensiveness in assessment, each variable is classified based on four levels of responsiveness: “Fully responsive”, “Partially responsive”, “Not yet met” and “Not applicable”. This decentralization helps to assess in detail the level of improvement of each community in the implementation of tourism activities (ASEAN, 2023).

One of the principal objectives of this set of recommendations is to promote equitable benefit sharing and active community involvement in tourism management. The set of standards also emphasizes expanding community involvement in tourism resource management, protecting natural heritage, and maintaining cultural values. This promotes sustainable development by assisting the community preserve its cultural identity and safeguard the environment in addition to generating economic benefits.

The evaluation process according to this set of standards is based on three main score levels (Vietnam National Tourism Administration, 2023): Registration level: The tourism community (CBT) needs to fully meet at least 50% of the minimum requirements and 40% of the advanced requirements corresponding to the indicators in each criterion. Approval Level: CBT is required to fully meet 60% of the minimum requirement and 50% of the advanced requirement. Certification level: CBT needs to fully meet 70% of the minimum requirements and 60% of the advanced requirements to achieve this certification.

The ASEAN CBT standards influence the growth of tourism communities in addition to functioning as an evaluation instrument. It promotes positive interactions between tourists and the local population and places an enormous value on hygiene, security, and service quality. Thus, this collection of criteria guarantees that tourist-related activities are not harmful to natural resources and traditional values, rather foster a sustainable and healthy tourism environment which aids the local community in ways that are practical.

2.2 Practical basis

One of the most promising places in the Mekong Delta for the growth of community tourism is the Cai Lay district in Tien Giang province. The district, which includes 16 commune-level administrative units, has a total natural area of 29,482.88 ha and is situated in the western economic-urban region of Tien Giang province. With a strategic transportation network that connects via National Highway 1A and significant provincial roads like provincial roads 864, 865, and 868, Cai Lay district is perfectly positioned to facilitate both road and waterway traffic, particularly through the Tien and Ba Lai rivers.

With alluvial geology deposited by the Mekong River and a comparatively level topography, the Cai Lai district offers favorable circumstances for agricultural development, particularly the production of rice and fruit trees including durian. As the province of Tien Giang's principal agricultural producing area, it performs an important part in the strategy for food security and the export of agricultural products. Apart from that, the territory boasts an extensive river system that contributes to community and ecotourism development in addition to agricultural.

In terms of culture and society, Cai Lai district has a rich cultural foundation with 11 historical and cultural relics, including Long Trung communal house – national relic, along with many typical traditional festivals such as Ky Yen festival. The community here stands out for its solidarity and industriousness, and its active participation in socio-economic development. The district population is about 195,183 people, mainly living in rural areas, with an average density of 662 people/km². The main economic sectors of the district focus on agriculture, industry and trade – services, in which tourism is gradually becoming a potential economic sector with the development of community tourism in islet communes such as Tan Phong.

Community tourism is an essential aspect of the socio-economic development assistance programs that the Cai Lay district is using to establish new rural regions and enhance people's quality of life. The Cai Lai district's advantageous natural, cultural, and geographic circumstances are progressively confirming the promise of community tourist development, fulfilling ASEAN requirements for sustainable tourism, and enhancing local culture and quality of life.

2.3 Research methodology

The method for obtaining the information on the surveyed area

The researcher directly observed and collected data from community tourism sites in communes such as Tan Phong, Phu An, Tam Binh and Cam Son. Through meetings and discussions with tourism business owners and local residents, the author understands the operating model, community participation and sustainable development level.

The method of document collection and analysis

Analyze the reports of the District People's Committee and tourism development projects in comparison with the set of ASEAN community tourism standards. This aids in assessing the degree of adherence to environmental protection, community involvement, and sustainable development requirements.

Statistical and data analysis methods

Statistical techniques based on 10 and 28 ASEAN standards criteria were employed for handling and analyzing survey data. After that, generate quantitative conclusions, compare them with ASEAN standards, evaluate how effectively the standards are being met, and suggest strategies to raise the standard of community tourism.

1. Outcome and Discussion

3.1 Situation of community tourism exploitation in Cai Lay district, Tien Giang province

In Cai Lay district, Tien Giang province, community tourism is progressively regaining and expanding following the severe consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite an enormous decline in tourists

compared to pre-pandemic levels, 11/14 tourism service establishments in Tan Phong, Phu An, and Tam Binh communes resumed in 2022. The initial phase of prosperity following the interruption period was demonstrated by the 19,262 total guests, the majority of whom were domestic visitors. . The main reason for this decline, especially for international visitors, comes from the late opening of the tourism industry and the lack of a full recovery in international tourism demand (Cai Lay District People's Committee, 2023).

By 2023, community tourism in Cai Lay district will record significant growth. The total number of tourists visiting nearly doubled, reaching 36,905, including 20,623 international visitors, an increase of 474% over the same period last year. This is a positive sign for the recovery and sustainable development of local tourism (Cai Lay District People's Committee, 2023). In particular, Tan Phong islet commune has emerged as an important destination with great potential in community tourism development. The district has invested heavily in infrastructure, including landslide prevention projects, the construction of tourist wharves, food courts, walking streets, and night markets, in order to enhance the experience for visitors and promote tourism development.

Nevertheless, despite the achievements, the Cai Lay district's community tourism still faces numerous obstacles. The variety and attractiveness of tourism products are lacking, the level of competition remains insufficient, and the quality of services does not fully satisfy the expectations of tourists. Furthermore, there are numerous restrictions on the resources and stakeholder cooperation available for tourism promotion. Due to inadequate training and a lack of professional skills, tourism's human resources have not developed as efficiently as they could. A comprehensive strategy to enhance service quality, encourage promotion, and particularly invest in human resource training is required to overcome these constraints and better meet the demands of sustainable community tourist development in the Cai Lay district.

3.2 Evaluation of community tourism activities in the area based on the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards

3.2.1 Overall evaluation

Analyze the overall evaluation findings of Tien Giang province's Cai Lay district's community tourism in light of the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards. Overall, the results of evaluating Cai Lay district's community tourist operations applying the ASEAN Community tourist Standards portray a largely positive picture. 58.06% (108 variables) of the 186 variables assessed achieved the "fully responsive" level, indicating the exceptional efforts of the local community to adhere to and fulfill the ASEAN requirements. 34% (63 variables) achieved the "partial responsive" rating, suggesting that while progress has been made, certain aspects still require work. Notably, only 8% (15 factors) have not been met, which is noteworthy and illustrates the obstacles that must be removed in order to meet the sustainability criterion.

An excellent sign that the Cai Lay district has completely incorporated the components needed for community tourism activities as mandated by the ASEAN Standards is the absence of variables at the "not applicable" level. Nevertheless, the findings additionally demonstrated that none of the criteria were satisfied 100%, highlighting the necessity of keeping up the local community tourist management and service quality improvements.

In particular, Standard 7 (Quality of accommodation facilities) and Standard 9 (Safety and hygiene in the community) stand out when there are no unmet variables. Standard 7 has 20 full-responsive variables and 7 partial-responsive variables, while Standard 9 has a ratio of 2 full-responsive variables to 6 partial-responsive variables. This result reflects the efforts of Cai Lay district in ensuring the quality of accommodation facilities and safety and hygiene factors – important factors that directly affect the experience of visitors.

In addition, all variables under Standard 1.2 (Legal Establishment Recognition) of Standard 1 (Community Ownership and Management) and Standard 10.3 (Skills Development) of Standard 10 (Innovation, Creativity, and Application of Technology in the Community) are "fully responsive". This shows that Cai Lay

district has done a good job of legally ensuring community ownership and management, while focusing on skills development and innovation in tourism activities.

Overall, the assessment results indicate that the Cai Lay district's community tourism operations have met the majority of the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards and accomplished numerous significant accomplishments. However, additional efforts and commitments remain crucial to enhance the quality of community tourism activities, particularly in variables that have not been fulfilled or have only been partially met, in order to reach the level of accomplishing 100% of all standards.

3.2.2 Evaluate variables that are included of the minimum required group.

In the process of assessing the current situation of community tourism activities in Cai Lay district, the results show that the group of 'Minimum Requirements' plays an important role, accounting for 42.47% of the total 186 variables in the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards. Specifically, there are 96 variables in this group, of which: 79 variables (82.29%) have reached the full response level. This result reflects the commitment and efforts of Cai Lay district in meeting the most basic and essential requirements for sustainable community tourism development. Achieving such a high rate shows that the fundamental elements of infrastructure, management, services and community participation have been focused and properly invested; 16 variables (16.67%) reached the level of partial response. This shows that, despite efforts to implement community tourism activities, there are still some limitations in meeting the minimum requirements. These aspects need to be carefully considered to devise improvement measures, ensuring that all variables in the "minimum requirements" group can be met in their entirety. With 1 variable (1.04%) has not been met. Notably, this variable relates to "10.1.1 Establishment of a working group to present the implementation of new ideas to community members", which falls under Standard 10.1 (Encouragement of Implementation of Initiatives) of standard 10. This reflects some limitations in encouraging creativity and community participation in the tourism development process. This shortage may affect the flexibility and adaptability of community tourism to new changes and requirements.

Overall, the Cai Lay district's accomplishment of exceeding 80% of the variables in the group of "minimum requirements" is noteworthy. However, incomplete and unresponsive factors should be improved, particularly the promotion of community projects. In addition to advancing the sustainable development objective outlined in the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards, this is expected to enhance the standard and effectiveness of community tourism.

3.2.1 Evaluate the variables that are included of the advanced requirements group.

The group of "advanced requirements" in the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards Set plays an important role in determining the outstanding level of development and sustainability of community tourism activities. In Cai Lay district, the assessment results show that there are 53 variables in this group. The specific results are as follows: 23 variables (43.39%) met the entire level, showing that Cai Lay district has made significant efforts in improving service quality and community tourism management at a level higher than the basic requirements. This is a positive sign, reflecting the continuous development and improvement in local tourism activities; 23 variables (43.39%) achieved partial satisfaction. This figure shows that there are still some factors in community tourism activities in Cai Lay that need to be further improved to reach the completion level. Although there has been interest in the enhanced requirements, the partial response shows that there are many opportunities for the locality to push further in these areas; 7 variables (13.22%) have not been met. The unmet variables include important factors such as: 1.4.4: Procedures for regular stakeholder consultation, 2.2.2: Having community development funds used for initiatives that benefit the whole community, 3.1.2: Having funds to support community conservation programs and activities, 5.1.4: Guides to facilitate visitors' sensitive experiences with the environment, society, and culture while protecting natural resources and cultural values, 6.1.5: Providing food and beverages that provide opportunities for knowledge exchange between hosts and guests, 6.2.14: Having quality control and improvement systems in place, including feedback from guests about dining

experiences, 8.4.4: Tour Operators (FTOs) with knowledge of the cultural and natural values of the community tourism area and the transfer of knowledge to the staff member.

The constraints in the implementation of sophisticated aspects of community tourism activities in the Cai Lay district are reflected in the fact that 13.22% of the variables did not meet and 43.39% of the variables were partially met. The unresponsive variables specifically relate to community involvement, management, and tourism support services. This calls for a greater emphasis on creating consultation processes, creating community development funds, preserving resources, and enhancing the standard of services.

Some outstanding standards, such as 2.3 (Associated with regional economic activities), 4.2 (Sustainable Community Tourism Products), 9.1 (FTO's commitment to community tourism ideals), and 10.2 (Providing knowledge and applying technology), have reached the total level of response for all variables in this group, even though none of the standards met the overall level for the "advanced requirements" group. This indicates that the Cai Lay district's community tourism operations have some positive aspects, particularly when it comes to strengthening connections with the local economy, creating environmentally friendly products, and utilizing technology in management.

Overall, even though Cai Lay's community tourism has made some strides toward fulfilling the "advanced requirements," there are still an abundance of actions that could be accomplished better. In order to further raise the standard for local tourist operations and comply with the ASEAN Community tourist Standards, emphasis must be placed on enhancing service quality, managing resources, and boosting community involvement.

3.2.2 Evaluate the variables that are included in best practices requirements.

The group of "best practice requirements" in the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards represents the highest criteria for quality and sustainability in community tourism activities. In Cai Lay district, out of 186 variables evaluated, 73 variables belong to the group of "best practice requirements", accounting for 3.23% of the total number of variables. The specific evaluation results are as follows: 6 variables (8.22%) met the overall satisfaction level. This result shows that a number of community tourism activities in Cai Lay district have achieved the highest standards in best practice, showing efforts in maintaining service quality and towards sustainable development; 24 variables (32.88%) have achieved partial satisfaction. This indicates that, although there has been interest and investment in improving the criteria at the highest level, there are still some limitations and further refinement needed to fully meet the best practice requirements; 7 variables (9.59%) have not been met. The unresponsive variables include: 2.3.4: Strong cooperation with other community tourism (CBT) and private organizations and local authorities to promote tourism activities in the region, 4.2.4: Having appropriate and unique products and services to protect and enrich environmental and cultural resources, 4.2.5: Having an effective marketing program to attract the target market, 5.2.10: The ratio of local guides, 8.2.10: Tour operators (FTOs) assist the community tourism (CBT) management in training local guides, 8.3.4: FTOs, employees and customers involved in local development activities, 8.4.5: FTOs provide accurate pre-trip information on community tourism.

The findings indicate that the Cai Lay area remains has some obstacles in meeting the highest standards, even with efforts to comply with best practice requirements. There is a need for a strategy to enhance management capacity, cooperation, and the development of tourism products and services, as evidenced by the failure to meet significant requirements pertaining to collaboration with other organizations, the creation of distinctive tourism products, efficient marketing, and assistance for training local guides.

Therefore, Cai Lay district should concentrate on enhancing the caliber of collaboration with private organizations and agencies, creating efficient marketing campaigns, and creating distinctive tourism products and amenities in order to meet the "best practices" mandated by the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards. In pursuit of sustainable tourism development, these enhancements not solely contribute to improving the standard of locally based tourism activities but additionally support the safeguarding and improvement of regional environmental and cultural resources.

3.2.3 Evaluate each standard

Standard Evaluation 1: Community ownership and management

Standard number 1 was evaluated through 4 criteria: 1.1 Effective and transparent governance, 1.2 Legal establishment recognition, 1.3 Effective and transparent governance, and 1.4 Effective partnerships. In particular, this standard includes 14 variables in the group of minimum requirements, 6 variables in the group of advanced requirements, and 2 variables in the group of best practice requirements. The evaluation results show that there are 14 variables that meet the overall response level, 7 variables that meet the partial response level, and 1 variable that has not met (1.4.4: There are regular consultation procedures for participants). This indicates that although most of the variables have been well implemented, there are still aspects that need to be improved, especially regular consultation with stakeholders. Of the 4 criteria under Standard 1, only Criterion 1.2 Recognition of legal establishment achieved 100% of the fully satisfying variable results. This demonstrates how effectively legal ownership has been acknowledged and established, laying the groundwork for effective community management. In terms of the specifics of the variable group evaluation, the minimum required group consists of 12 out of 14 variables, meeting the overall satisfaction level, or 85.71%. This outcome demonstrates that the standard has satisfied the fundamental needs of management and ownership. However, only two 2/6 variables in the advanced requirements group, or 33.33%, achieved the full level of response. This indicates that efforts to boost management efficiency, particularly in the form of partnerships and frequent stakeholder meetings, need to be strengthened. Overall, even though Standard 1 has made significant progress, there are still certain things that could have addressed better, particularly in terms of fulfilling the advanced standards and best practices. This is required to support the long-term development of community tourism in the Cai Lay district and guarantee the effectiveness and transparency of community management.

Standard Evaluation 2: Social Contribution

This standard is evaluated based on four criteria: 2.1 Preserving human dignity, 2.2 Fair distribution of benefits and costs, 2.3 Connection with regional economic activities, and 2.4 Preserving cultural integrity and enhancing traditional cultural values. It includes 9 variables in the minimum requirement group, 5 in the advanced requirement group, and 5 in the best practice group. The results show that 10 variables fully meet the criteria, 7 partially meet them, and 2 do not meet the requirements (2.2.2: Establishment of a community development fund; 2.3.4: Collaboration with other CBTs and private organizations). None of the criteria met 100% of the fully satisfying variables. In the minimum requirement group, 7 out of 9 variables were fully met (77.78%), and in the advanced requirement group, 2 out of 5 variables were fully met (40%). This indicates that while the standard has had a positive social impact, improvements are needed in managing community funds and fostering collaboration with other organizations

Standard Evaluation 3: Contribution to conservation and environmental improvement

Standard number 3 is evaluated through 2 criteria: 3.1 Natural resources are being conserved and 3.2 Conservation activities to improve the environment. Includes 5 variables in the minimum requirement group, 3 variables in the advanced requirement group, and 4 variables in the best practice requirement group. The results show that there are 4 variables that meet the full response level, 7 variables that partially respond, and 1 variable that has not yet met (3.1.2: There is a fund to support conservation programs). None of the criteria met 100% of the fully satisfying variables, especially Criterion 3.1 had only 1/4 of the variables, Criterion 3.2 had only 3/8 variables that met the fully satisfying level. There are 3/5 variables in the group of minimum requirements to meet the whole level (60%), and 0/3 variables in the group of advanced requirements to meet the whole level (0%). This reflects the lack of resource conservation and the need for greater investment in finance and conservation activities.

Standard Evaluation 4: Encourage interaction between tourists and the local community

This standard is evaluated through 2 criteria: 4.1 There is interaction between guests and local communities and 4.2 Sustainable community tourism products. Includes 3 variables in the minimum requirement group,

4 variables in the advanced requirement group, and 7 variables in the best practice requirement group. The results show that there are 7 variables reaching the full response level, 5 partially satisfying variables, and 2 unresponsive variables (4.2.4: Appropriate products and services, 4.2.5: Marketing program to the target market). None of the criteria achieved 100% of the fully satisfying variables. All 3/3 variables in the minimum requirement group met the full satisfaction level (100%), and 3/4 variables in the advanced requirement group reached the full satisfaction level (75%). This shows that the interaction between visitors and the community is well maintained, but it is necessary to focus more on building the right products and services and marketing strategies.

Standard Evaluation 5: Tour quality and guiding services

This standard is assessed through 2 criteria: 5.1 Ensuring the quality and expertise of local guides and 5.2 There is interaction between guests and the local community. Includes 8 variables in the minimum requirement group, 5 variables in the advanced requirement group, and 5 variables in the best practice requirement group. The results show that there are 9 variables reaching the full response level, 7 variables partially satisfying, and 2 unresponsive variables (5.1.4: Sensitive experience of tourists; 5.2.10: Percentage of local guides). None of the criteria achieved 100% of the fully satisfying variables. There are 5/8 variables in the group of minimum requirements to meet the whole level (62.5%), and 2/5 variables in the group of advanced requirements to meet the whole level (40%). This result indicates that the quality of guides and interactions with visitors need to be improved to meet higher requirements.

Standard Evaluation 6: Food service quality

Standard number 6 is assessed through 2 criteria: 6.1 Food service quality assurance and 6.2 Food service quality management. Includes 15 variables in the minimum requirement group, 5 variables in the advanced requirement group, and 2 variables in the best practice requirement group. The evaluation results show that there are 14 variables that meet the full response level, 6 variables that meet the partial response level, and 2 unresponsive variables (6.1.5: Knowledge exchange opportunities; 6.2.14: Quality control and improvement system). None of the criteria met 100% of the fully satisfying variables. There are 14/15 variables in the group of minimum requirements to meet the whole level (93.33%), but none of the variables in the group of advanced requirements to meet the whole level (0%). This indicates that while the food service has been executed fairly successfully, managerial quality still has to be addressed.

Standard Evaluation 7: Quality of accommodation facilities

This standard is evaluated through 2 criteria: 7.1 Quality assurance for accommodation providers and 7.2 Quality assurance management of accommodation facilities. Includes 20 variables in the minimum requirement group, 11 variables in the advanced requirement group, and 2 variables in the best practice requirement group. The evaluation results had 26 variables that met the overall response level, 7 variables that met the partial response level, and there were no unresponsive variables. There are 18/20 variables in the group of minimum requirements to meet the whole level (90%), and 8/11 variables in the group of advanced requirements to meet the whole level (72.73%). This is an encouraging result, indicating that local lodging options are of outstanding quality, but more attention needs to be paid to the more sophisticated features.

Standard Evaluation 8: International tourists tend to be drawn by Friendly Tourism Operators (FTOs).

The standard is evaluated through 5 criteria: 8.1 FTO's commitment to the ideals of CBT, 8.2 Contribution to the community and protection of nature, 8.3 Local economic support, 8.4 Promotion of the joy of exploration, and 8.5 Providing a safe experience. Includes 15 variables in the minimum requirement group, 11 variables in the advanced requirement group, and 7 variables in the best practice requirement group. The results showed that there were 18 variables that met the overall response level, 11 variables that met the partial response level, and 4 unresponsive variables. None of the criteria met 100% of the fully satisfying variables. There are 13/15 variables in the group of minimum requirements to meet the whole level

(86.67%), and 4/11 variables in the group of advanced requirements to meet the whole level (36.36%). This result shows that the commitment of the FTO is there, but more improvement is needed in supporting the local economy and providing a safe experience.

Standard Evaluation 9: Safety and hygiene in the community

Standard number 9 is evaluated through 2 criteria: 9.1 FTO's commitment to the ideals of CBT and 9.2 Contribution to the community and protection of nature. This standard includes 2 variables belonging to the minimum requirement group, 2 variables belonging to the advanced requirement group, and 2 variables belonging to the best practice requirement group. The evaluation results show that there are 2 variables that meet the full response level, 4 variables that meet the partial response level, and there are no unresponsive variables. None of the criteria achieved 100% of the fully satisfying variables, especially criterion 9.2, none of the observed variables were evaluated at the fully satisfying level. Only 1/2 of the variables in the minimum requirement group reached the full response level (50%), and 1/2 of the variables in the advanced requirement group reached the full response level (50%). This result shows that there are many areas for improvement in safety and hygiene in the community, especially in committing to protecting nature and ensuring safe conditions for visitors.

Standard Evaluation 10: Innovation, creation and technology application in the community

Standard number 10 is evaluated through 3 criteria: 10.1 Encouraging the implementation of initiatives, 10.2 Providing better knowledge and application of technology, and 10.3 Developing better skills. This standard includes 5 variables in the minimum requirement group, 1 variable in the advanced requirement group, and 1 variable in the best practice requirement group. The evaluation results show that there are 4 variables that meet the full response level, 2 partially responsive variables, and 1 unresponsive variable. Criterion 10.3 achieves the assessment results of 100% of the fully responsive variables. However, criterion 10.1 does not have any observed variables that reach the full response level, indicating a lack of encouragement for the implementation of initiatives in the community. There are 3/5 variables in the group of minimum requirements to meet the whole level (60%), and 1/1 variables in the group of advanced requirements to meet the whole level (100%). This indicates a dedication to technology adoption and skill development, but a greater emphasis on promoting innovation to stimulate creativity and innovation within the community.

3.3 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.3.1 Discuss the findings of the initial evaluation of Cai Lay district's community tourism in accordance with the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards.

According to the initial evaluation results, the Cai Lay district's community tourism activities meet the prerequisites to be eligible for the ASEAN standards meeting title. Cai Lay achieved 82.29% for the 'Minimum Requirements' group, which is substantially greater than the ASEAN Standards' 50% requirement. This illustrates the Cai Lay district's dedication and diligence in creating and preserving the fundamental components of administration, services, and community involvement.

The 'Advanced Requirements' group, on the other hand, received a score of 43%, which is just above the 40% minimum needed to be eligible for the title and falls short of the 50% approval and 60% certification thresholds. This indicates that there is a crucial need for improvement in the Cai Lay district, particularly in the advanced aspects of community tourism development and administration.

Table 1: Summary of comparison results with the requirements of the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards

| Parameter | ASEAN Standards | Evaluation outcome | Initial Results | Evaluation |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Minimum requirements | 50% | 82,29% | Qualified | |
| Advanced requirements | 40% | 43% | Qualified | |

Source: Author's research outcomes

Apart from that, Cai Lay district ought to continue making certain adjustments in order to accomplish an appropriate level of ASEAN approval or certification. The 'Advanced requirements' group's attainment of only 43% indicates that certain areas, such as enhancing service quality, supporting community initiatives, and better utilization of resources, require consideration for improvement. This can be accomplished by carrying out a more thorough evaluation under each criterion, which will make it evident which areas require the most development.

In general, the initial evaluation's findings generally indicate that the Cai Lay district has potential for expansion in its community tourist industry. A solid basis for local tourism has been established by fulfilling the minimal requirements. However, the community, government, and stakeholders have to collaborate closely together to boost the quality and administration of community tourism if it is successful in earning a higher level of recognition in accordance with ASEAN criteria.

3.3.2 Discussion on the evaluation results of each standard

The results of the evaluation of 10 standards show that Cai Lay district has achieved significant achievements in meeting ASEAN community tourism standards, especially in the minimum group of requirements. However, it is still necessary to focus on improving the group of advanced requirements and best practices, in order to improve the quality and sustainability of community tourism activities.

Table 2: Results compared to the requirements of the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards

| Stand ard | Observa ble variable | Evaluatio n result (%) | ASEAN Community Tourism Standards | | | | | | Results |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| | | | Registration | | Approval | | Certification | | |
| | | | Minimum requireme nt 50% | Advanced requirement 40% | Minimu m require ment60 % | Adva nced requi reme nt50 % | Minimum requirem ent70% | Advan ced requir ement 60% | |
| 1 | Minimum requirem ent | 85,71 | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified | | Not Qualified |
| | Advanced requirem ent | 33,33 | | Not Qualified | | Not Quali fied | | Not Quali fied | |
| 2 | Minimum requirem ent | 77,78 | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified | | Registratio n level |
| | Advanced requirem ent | 40,00 | | Qualified | | Not Quali fied | | Not Quali fied | |
| 3 | Minimum requirem ent | 60,00 | Qualified | | Qualified | | Not Qualified | | Not Qualified |
| | Advanced requirem ent | 00,00 | | Not Qualified | | Not Quali fied | | Not Quali fied | |
| 4 | Minimum requirem ent | 100 | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified |
| | Advanced requirem ent | 75,00 | | Not Qualified | | Quali fied | | Qualifi ed | |
| 5 | Minimum requirem ent | 62,50 | Qualified | | Qualified | | Not Qualified | | Registratio n level |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------|-------|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Advanced requirement | 40,00 | | Qualified | | Not Qualified | | Not Qualified | |
| 6 | Minimum requirement | 93,33 | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified | | Not Qualified |
| | Advanced requirement | 00,00 | | Not Qualified | | Not Qualified | | Not Qualified | |
| 7 | Minimum requirement | 90,00 | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified |
| | Advanced requirement | 72,73 | | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified | |
| 8 | Minimum requirement | 86,67 | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified |
| | Advanced requirement | 36,36 | | Not Qualified | | Not Qualified | | Not Qualified | |
| 9 | Minimum requirement | 50,00 | Qualified | | Not Qualified | | Not Qualified | | Registration level |
| | Advanced requirement | 50,00 | | Qualified | | Not Qualified | | Not Qualified | |
| 10 | Minimum requirement | 60,00 | Qualified | | Qualified | | Not Qualified | | Acceptable level |
| | Advanced requirement | 100 | | Qualified | | Qualified | | Qualified | |

Source: Author's research results

Although the overall comparison results show that community tourism activities in Cai Lay district, Tien Giang province have reached the Registration level required by the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards, the detailed analysis of each standard shows the points to be noted. Specifically, the combined assessment results show that Standards 1, 3, 6, and 8 do not fully meet the requirements of the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards, which shows that significant improvements are needed in these areas. Standards 2, 5, and 9 have only been met at the Subscription level, which is a lack of approval to proceed to certification, reflecting the need to strengthen improvements in these standards. Standard 10 has reached the Approval level, indicating significant efforts in innovation, creativity, and application of technology in the community. Standards 4 and 7 have fully met the requirements of the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards, demonstrating the sustainable development and quality management of community tourism activities in the locality.

In general, according to the evaluation's overall findings, Cai Lay district still has to concentrate on upgrading a few fundamental requirements in order to advance toward more recognition while simultaneously making certain that community tourism initiatives expand more sustainably and comprehensively in accordance with ASEAN standards.

3.3.3 Recommendations

According to the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards, improving unmet variables and partially raising currently present variables to the level of full response are prerequisites for raising the cai lay district's community tourism quality. The particular solutions are as follows:

Enhancing environmental conservation and improvement (Criterion 3): This is an important criterion, reflecting local efforts to conserve resources and the environment. To upgrade the level of responsiveness, it is necessary to: Create conservation funds (3.1.2): Develop a dedicated fund to support community conservation programs. This fund can be mobilized from tourism profits, contributions from visitors, or support from non-governmental organizations, ensuring sustainable resources for long-term conservation activities. Promote environmental protection activities: Organize activities such as planting trees, cleaning at tourist sites, and raise awareness of the importance of environmental protection for the community and visitors.

Enhancing food service quality (Standard 6-Advanced requirements): None of the variables in this standard have reached the full level as of yet. How to proceed: Provide opportunities for information sharing (6.1.5): Food service companies should be encouraged to help guests and hosts interact. Visitors gain a deeper grasp of the local culinary culture through activities like cooking with local families. Create a system for feedback (6.2.14): Provide a mechanism for tourists to provide input on their dining experiences while also promoting their active involvement to enhance service quality over time.

Addressing unmet variables: Establish a consultation process (1.4.4): Develop procedures and mechanisms for consultation with stakeholders such as local residents, tourism businesses, authorities, and visitors. Organize regular meetings and seminars to collect multi-dimensional opinions, ensuring the continuous participation of the parties. Creating community development funds (2.2.2 & 3.1.2): Mobilizing capital from tourism profits, non-governmental organizations, and businesses to create community development funds and support conservation activities, contributing to sustainable tourism development. Establishing partnerships (2.3.4): Strengthening cooperation with private organizations, local governments, and other tourism communities (CBT) to share experiences, organize promotional events, and build a network of strategic partners. Unique product development and effective marketing (4.2.4 & 4.2.5): Invest in the development of unique tourism products, suitable for the target market. Set up a detailed marketing plan, focusing on promoting Cai Lay's unique experience through diverse communication channels. Improve the quality of guides (5.1.4 & 5.2.10): Organize training courses that emphasize the protection of cultural resources and values, and increase the proportion of local guides to ensure authenticity in tourism activities. Support from FTOs (8.2.10, 8.3.4, 8.4.4, 8.4.5): Tour operators need to actively support in training guides, providing information before the trip, and raising awareness of the cultural and natural values of the region. Promote creativity in the community (10.1.1): Establish a dedicated working group to propose and implement new ideas, encourage the community to develop creative initiatives together.

Currently, upgrading variables only partially satisfies: To guarantee the quality of tourism amenities and assist in the preservation of natural resources, it is indispensable that we give priority to the implementation of improvement solutions for variables in the group of advanced requirements in Criterion 3 (conservation and environment) and Standard 6 (food service).

The aforementioned solutions' coordination not only contributes to the greater enhancement of Cai Lay district's community tourism quality, but it also helps the area meet ASEAN Community Tourism Standards and foster sustainable development.

2. CONCLUSION

It is evident from the evaluation of community tourism operations in Tien Giang province's Cai Lay district using the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards that the district has accomplished a number of noteworthy feats. More than half of the factors are scored as "fully responsive," according to the results, which reflects the efforts made to manage and develop sustainable community tourism. Standards for the caliber of lodging and sanitary facilities, in particular, have produced positive outcomes, laying a strong basis for the growth of community tourism in the locality.

Nonetheless, a number of factors remain unfulfilled either entirely or partially addressed, particularly the advanced requirements and best practices, which suggests that particular modifications are required. These

include the preservation of natural resources, the creation of community support funds, the enhancement of the quality of food service, and the development of robust working partnerships with pertinent organizations. At the same time, in order to raise Cai Lay's community tourism to ASEAN standards, it is imperative to increase instructor training, encourage community initiatives, and conduct regular stakeholder consultations.

In conclusion, if the suggested solutions are put into practice simultaneously, the Cai Lay district has the potential to develop into a sustainable community tourism destination. Optimizing these standards will assist safeguard culture and environmental resources, support sustainable economic development in the region, as well as improve the quality of services and experiences for tourists. According to the ASEAN Community Tourism Standards, achieving sustainable development goals necessitates significant cooperation between the community, authorities, and tour operators.

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