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BIOSPHERE RESERVES IN VIET NAM

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The term “Biosphere Reserve” may not yet be immediately familiar to most people. However, these UNESCO-designated areas have enormous potential to provide solutions to one of the world’s most significant challenges – how to balance social and economic development while addressing globally-recognized threats such as poverty, overexploitation of natural resources, environmental degradation, and climate change impacts.

**LEARNING & SHARING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Dr. Katherine Müller-Marin**
UNESCO Representative to Viet Nam and Head of UNESCO Ha Noi Office

Biosphere reserves are sites established by individual countries and designated under the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization’s (UNESCO’s) Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, whose International Co-ordinating Council consists of 34 elected member States. The MAB Programme was established in 1971 to promote interdisciplinary approaches to management, research, and education in ecosystem conservation and sustainable development based on local community efforts and sound science.

The MAB Secretariat applies the term “learning sites” to biosphere reserves and states that, “as places that seek to reconcile the conservation of biological and cultural diversity with economic and social development, they are ideal to test and demonstrate innovative approaches to sustainable development from local to international scales.”

Viet Nam has eight biosphere reserves that form a significant network across the country. Collectively, they represent a cross-section of Viet Nam’s bio-geographical, cultural and economic diversity. These reserves range...
from the rugged beauty of Cat Ba Archipelago’s land and seascapes and the subtropical mountain forests of the multi-ethnic region of Nghe An in the north to the humid tropical mangrove forests of Ca Mau Peninsula at Viet Nam’s southernmost tip. Each biosphere reserve has a management board which directly coordinates with different governmental departments. These boards are imperative for ensuring effective partnerships and full stakeholder participation by combining both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

What are the functions of biosphere reserves?

Biosphere reserves have three main interrelated and complementary functions. The first is to conserve the diversity of species, ecosystems, and landscapes and to maintain the ecosystem services (e.g. clean water, climate regulation, healthy soil) provided by such diversity. The second is to foster economic and human development that is environmentally and socially sustainable as well as culturally appropriate. The cultural aspect of development is particularly important because local residents in many biosphere reserves often possess centuries of intergenerational knowledge about the sustainable use of the surrounding landscape and its natural resources. The third is to provide logistical support to facilitate demonstration projects, research, monitoring, and education and training on environmental and sustainable development issues.

How did we get here?

The MAB Programme was formulated during the 1960’s at a time when it was apparent that rapid industrialization and growth were threatening not only the beauty of wild places, but also the natural processes that underpin our social and economic well-being. It was at a “Biosphere Conference” in 1968 that UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) initiated the idea of the MAB Programme, officially established in 1971. Although the concept of sustainability had been around for many generations, it wasn’t until 1987 that the now almost universally-quoted definition of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” was published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED).

The impetus provided by the WCED led to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. There, 178 countries adopted a set of agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and Agenda 21.

Biosphere reserves for knowledge, learning, and sharing

As stated in UNESCO’s five-year strategy for Viet Nam 2012 - 2016, biosphere reserves will become an increasingly important contributor to Viet Nam’s aim of building a learning society, as decided by its 11th Party Congress. These contributions will be made through fostering collaboration among all sectors of society to achieve lifelong learning through the implementation of practical sustainable development initiatives.

Biosphere reserves provide prospects for research and for undertaking concrete initiatives, whereby opportunities for learning for sustainable development are created. Examples include hands-on educational experiences in sustainable development for children, youth-initiated contributions to improve schools and local communities (such as recycling waste to produce useful classroom materials, raising awareness on endangered local species, and involving students in erosion reduction by planting mangroves), and promoting interaction between students and local occupational sectors to understand better the economic benefits that can result from conservation, such as beekeeping versus deforestation resulting from unstructured collection of honey from wild bees.

Community action plans can be utilized for building a culture of cooperation among various sectors to respond to climate change at the local level through projects such as increasing the use of environmentally-friendly equipment in hotels and restaurants, developing a system of community-based waste management in a local commune, and reforesting to absorb carbon dioxide and improve the local environment in parks.

These activities are examples of initiatives that can help to reinforce and to shrink the gap between development and conservation as well as between knowledge, learning, and sharing to achieve practical sustainable development outcomes. They show that biosphere reserves, as “learning sites”, can each generate solutions applicable to local conditions from their wide diversity of ecological and social settings. More importantly, these lessons learned can be shared between stakeholders within sites, between sites, and with the Viet Nam nation to contribute to a learning society and knowledge economy.
compulsory area of biosphere reserves subject to strict regulations is the core zone under no or minimal impacts of human activities. Besides, it is essential to boost environmentally-friendly economy, education and preserve traditional cultural values in neighbouring regions which are named the buffer zone and transition zone. Only when the local people play an active role will the conservation achieve long term and sustainable results.

NGUYEN HOANG TRI
General Secretary, MAB Vietnam National Committee
Biosphere reserves are like system model; therefore, the management of biosphere reserves are based on the principle “System thinking, Landscape planning, Inter-sector coordination and Quality economy” (SLIQ)

**System thinking**

From the perspective of systematic thinking, biosphere reserves consist of various components which reflects complicated relationships between natural and socio-economic components, between physical structures and humanity values, between cultural space and natural landscape, political ecology and creative ecology, etc. System thinking is overall approach prior to in-depth analysis of relationships between components. System thinking is an efficient tool for managers and policy makers to outline appropriate solutions to practical problems which always vary according to time and space.

**Landscape planning**

In recent years, landscape planning has been applied in many areas, especially in area of using land, modeling and forecasting changes in landscapes and the environment in the future. One area of concern for landscape ecology researchers is the impacts of fragmentation as a result of industrial, agricultural development on biodiversity conservation. Territorial division due to human activities has resulted in reduced natural habitat for plants and animals and remaining areas to be isolated. The reconnection of these remainders is in urgent need of landscape ecological study. So does the conservation of biodiversity in terms of the variety/abundance, gene sources, and species components. A typical example is the solution of establishing a corridor area of Hai Hau lying between the two buffer zones namely Nghia Hung in Nam Dinh province and Kim Son in Ninh Binh province of Red River Delta biosphere reserve which will create a favourable condition for effective conservation of migratory birds.

**Inter sector coordination**

Biosphere reserves have resulted in a new approach to conservation which requires not only consideration of the relationship between human and nature within the target area or surrounding it but also a balance to ensure sustainable socio economic development demands.

Biosphere reserves often cover large areas which encompass national parks, nature reserves, protected areas, and in some cases Ramsar sites (Ramsar convention on the conservation of migratory birds of international significance), world heritage areas. Consequently, a biosphere reserve is subject to the influence of numerous legal international, national and local documents, which suggests that the management of biosphere reserves is in fact the coordination and maximised use of locally available documents, human resources and financial resources.

Biosphere reserves assume far more functions than normal protected areas or nature reserve which therefore requires an inter-sector coordination, share of benefits and responsibilities in natural resource management of agriculture, forestry, fishery, science, local and national authorities and international community.

Biosphere reserves are models that have been seeking to solve conflicts in land use and biodiversity conservation, thus creating opportunities for education, entertainment and tourism, international unity in conserving the biosphere, our common house.

**Quality economy**

The more titles that prove international recognition are gained, the more opportunities for investment in conservation and development are created. Regions with international titles always have advantages over those without titles. In Vietnam, Cat Tien, Xuan Thuy which are national parks, biosphere reserves and Ramsar sites, Cat Ba which is a national park, a biosphere reserve and marine protected area. Cat Ba biosphere reserve was selected by UNESCO/MAB to conduct a pilot project in South East Asia. The world “using biosphere reserves as learning laboratories for education toward sustainable development” with participation of associations, private businesses and authorities at different levels.

Some activities toward quality- based economic development include registering products brand names, controlling pollution, and restricting the number of tourists, four sector – based model (science, management, business and local people, capacity, “ecological disaster”, and principle of underlying iceberg.

Principles of sustainable management of biosphere reserves have been widely applied worldwide. Despite only its recent participation in the World Biosphere Reserve Network, Vietnam has adopted updated ideas, effective approach to build Vietnam’s biosphere reserves as models of sustainable development in the future.
LINKING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND BIODIVERSITY

NGHIEM KIM HOA

In our world today of rapid changes, biological diversity and cultural diversity are increasingly recognized as key elements for sustainable development. Dedicated to strike for a balance between conservation and development, biosphere reserves serve as testing sites to seal the link between these two keys. In Vietnam, eight recognized World Biosphere Reserves is also the home of about 1.5 million people including thousands of people belong to different ethnic minority groups. Each group has their own ways of living, which reflect their unique understandings and interpretations of the nature accumulated through their hundreds of years residing in these sites. While these minority groups are often vulnerable to the pressure of development from outside, their identity and cultural values embrace with a rich knowledge of the nature are foundation not only to their endogenous development but also to the conservation of these sites as our common home.

Biodiversity and cultural diversity as key elements for sustainable development

The complexity of different individual parts of nature forms the web of life as the foundation for the existence and development of humankind as a part of it, that no alternative is yet foreseen. Biodiversity offers fundamental conditions for livelihoods and human well-beings which are extremely important for poor people whose livings depend much and directly on the availability of natural resources. In developing countries where is often rich on biodiversity, it is the essential resource for tackling poverty, building resilience against natural and artificial shocks as well as a vehicle for sustainable development.

As much important as biodiversity for the nature is cultural diversity for human beings. Defined as “the manifold ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression”, the diversity of these expressions and their dynamic allow human beings as individuals and groups to develop, exchange and accumulate understandings and interpretations of life, including the nature. Cultural expressions, therefore, encompass rich knowledge of biodiversity, which are valuable in both scientific and spiritual terms for individuals and groups of humankind. Cultural diversity is the reflection of biodiversity in our human society. At their inter-link, a loss of a species or the degradation of an ecosystem can lead to the destruction
of a way of living, or to a great extent, the collapse of a civilization. On the other hand, a loss of a cultural expression can take away important threads to invaluable knowledge of the nature. The modern path of development, however, resulted in severe loss of biodiversity and cultural diversity with irreversible consequences. This threat to the loss of diversity as our most universal quality is increasingly recognized and addressed through several instruments and collective efforts. The framework for world biosphere reserves was set up as one innovative approach toward sustaining human development based on and for both biodiversity and cultural diversity.

**Integrating biological and cultural diversity in the management of biosphere reserves.**

Biosphere reserves are the model designated to realize a vision of which man coexists in a more harmonized relationship with the environment. One of three goals for biosphere reserves as set in the Seville Strategy (UNESCO, 1996) is to conserve natural and cultural diversity. Actions are taken to integrate biological and cultural diversity in the management of biosphere reserves, especially through enhancing the role of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage.

**Biosphere reserves in Viet Nam: initiatives to seal the linkage between cultural and biodiversity**

The network of eight biosphere reserves in Viet Nam covers diverse natural settings, from marine and coastal ecosystems to the rain forest, which is also the home of about 1.5 million people. Thousands of these residents belong to about 16 ethnic minority groups. On the other hand, like most indigenous groups, they have developed invaluable knowledge and spiritual values toward the natural environment, which is important not only for their own group but also for the wider community. Addressing their special needs and aspirations needs a flexible approach, while Vietnamese biosphere reserves were recognized based on the national legal framework for protected areas where the conventional approach focusing on strict conservation dominated. Moving towards the vision designated for Biosphere Reserves, therefore, requires efforts on capacity building, testing and demonstration of models that harmonise conservation and human development.

From 2009 to 2011, UNESCO and the MAB Vietnam National Program initiated a project to promote customary use of natural resources by local groups in Biosphere Reserves and World Natural Heritage sites in Vietnam. The project created a platform for dialogue among site managers, local communities and decision makers from a broad level on tools and approach for managing their sites to specific measures on handling individual practice.

Such initiative demonstrated that sealing the linkage between cultural diversity and biodiversity can bring in positive solutions for conservation and development in biosphere reserves. It was also confirmed that nurturing dialogue and participation requires more time and effort from all relevant stakeholders. In a context like Viet Nam where economic development has high pressure on conservation, ensuring sustainable outcomes from introducing a new approach to these biosphere reserves requires continuous investment both technically and financially in improving capacity for better management of these sites.

*The shrimp harvesting season. Photo: Huynh Kim Hai*
Biosphere reserves, learning laboratories which support the scientific research, education and training, and supervision of ecosystems, bring numerous benefits for the local community, the country and the world. Good conservation of core zones of national parks, heritage zones, and ecology park or nature reserve will facilitate economic development, especially through ecotourism and culture tourism. Additionally, economic activities in the buffer zones and transition zone will contribute to improvement of living standards and residents’ awareness of responsibilities. Accordingly, financial resources from tax collection will be available to fund conservation activities.

Sustainable development focuses on the following basic contents:

**Sustainable Environment:** along with strict conservation of core zones, it is necessary to introduce policies and guidelines on exploitation of appropriate natural resources, economic and efficient use of resources and protection of biodiversity.

**Sustainable Economy:** make sure an efficient investment in the buffer zone and the transition zone and high economic growth rate in the long run.

**Sustainable Cultural-society:** This means that economic growth accompanies poverty alleviation, increased welfare, social equalities and protection of national cultural identity.

Three aspects are well connected and mutually related. Accordingly, while in certain period one aspect may be more important than others, a balance is regarded as a must according to principles of sustainable development.

Biosphere reserves create opportunities to apply principles of sustainable development in local residents’ life and enable them to realise possible impacts of their behaviours and attitudes. Biosphere reserves will contribute to the implementation of 15 basic contents of education for sustainable development, especially contents on the environment.

*Natural resources include water, energies, agriculture and biodiversity:* Understanding the relationship between biosphere reserves and the issue of nature conservation and socio economic development will help learners to apply new approaches in protecting world’s natural resources, necessities for humans’ well being and survival.

*Climate change:* Biosphere reserves need to adopt global principles and drastic measures to minimise dangers for the atmosphere and control negative impacts of climate change. Educating sustainable development is instrumental in the global campaign.

*Transition in the agriculture structure:* educational activities in biosphere reserves aim at specific objectives in terms of skills and capacity to capture economic opportunities improve livelihoods and enhance living standards of local residents. This will help to minimise illiteracy, school drop out, gender inequality in education, and poverty. The widening gap between urban investment in education and the rural one needs to be adjusted soon.

*Sustainable urbanisation:* Development of biosphere reserves will ease the pressure in cities already faced with global economic changes; increase the status of cities from the perspective of sustainable development.

*Natural disaster prevention and reduction:* Biosphere reserves will help to reduce natural disasters in places where certain communities have always been dealing with. Previous experiences and programs suggest that education has enormous effect on risks of natural disaster. Education and knowledge provide learners with strategies to help themselves and therefore reduce risks.

Biosphere reserves have delivered a new mindset about conservation. They help people to realise the relationship between men and nature and suggest ways to achieve the goals of socio-economic development in a sustainable manner. However, given the starting point and low living standard, we have to deal with various intellectual challenges and lack of experience in this daunting field.
ENvironMentallY AND SOciAlLY RESPONSIBLE TOURISM CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (ESRT)

BUDGET
The European Union sponsors 11 million EUR and the Vietnamese Government contributes 1.1 million EUR

OVERALL OBJECTIVE
To promote the delivery of environmentally and socially responsible tourism services as part of Vietnam’s tourism sector strategy.

PURPOSE
To provide consulting services for the project with the purpose to promote the delivery of environmentally and socially responsible tourism services as part of Vietnam’s tourism sector strategy.

INFORMATION
Executing Authority: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism
Implementing Authority: Vietnam National Administration of Tourism
Project duration: 5 years (November 2010 - November 2015)
Location: Nationwide

SYNERGY WITH OTHER PROJECTS
• Lux-Development Project VIE/031
• International Labour Organisation (ILO)
• The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID)
• The Netherlands Development Organization (SNV)
• United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
• Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
• The Asian Development Bank (ADB)

BENEFICIARIES
• Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism
• Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (Vietnam Tourism Certification Board, Tourism Information and Technology Centre, Tourism newspaper and magazine, Institute of Tourism Development and Research)
• Vietnam Tourism Association, Travel and Hospitality Associations and Clubs
• Education and Training Institutions
• Owners of tourism enterprises
• Minority Ethnic People and women

IMPACTING POSITIVELY ON
• The tourism sector through the development of responsible tourism policies and legislation, product development; improved Human Resource Development and development of public-private partnerships.
• Adoption of environmentally and socially responsible tourism practices
• Gender equity, social inclusion and poverty alleviation
The livelihoods of local communities living in and around most protected areas in Viet Nam are often based on small-scale agricultural production activities. Many farmers that own a small land holding have, in spite of high efficiency, difficulties making a sustainable income when they are faced with strong competition, unpredictable harvest yields or market price fluctuations. Balancing sustainable economic development with biodiversity conservation in such areas is a complex task, yet it is the main priority of Biosphere Reserves that are places designated by UNESCO but remain under national sovereign jurisdiction. An innovative approach to achieving this balance is the development of “quality economies”. These economies are based on the development of local product brands that are environmentally friendly and reflect local characteristics and cultural traditions.

Experiencing a quality economy

Many recent rural development studies and initiatives have focused on a concept referred to as the “experience economy”. In a rural development context this means the cultural or rural experience that can be added to local products. The benefits of adding “experience” to the local economy are that it combines a tourist experience with the purchase, or even the production, of a local product (or service).

The term “quality economy” differs slightly as it focuses more on the quality of the product. For example, this could mean the product’s organic features and flavor, or its social, economic or ecological benefits to its locality, whereby the perceived value of the product adds to its sale price.

Quality economies in biosphere reserves

The Man and the Biosphere Program originated 40 years ago to stress the importance of humans and nature coexisting to ensure a sustainable future. According to UNESCO, Biosphere Reserves act as learning sites for sustainable development where innovative approaches to sustainable development can be tested and demonstrated by policy makers, researchers and local people.

Adding quality to agricultural products and services within biosphere reserves is an important component of the sustainability process. Quality economies can benefit local communities and support biodiversity conservation efforts within and around protected areas by sustaining local livelihoods that can become stable and less dependent of illegal sources of income such as poaching and deforestation.

Activities in Viet Nam

The eight biosphere reserves have many local products with great potential for “quality” branding. Products such as natural honey from...
Building Quality Economies

Economies

The honey season. Photo: Quach Ngo Thanh Thuy

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

A NEW OPPORTUNITY IN BIOSPHERE RESERVES

ULRIK PEDERSEN

“To travel is to live”, these are the words of the famous Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen more than 150 years ago. Today, this philosophy is being lived out by people more than ever before. International tourism arrivals are expected to reach one billion in 2012 and 1.8 billion by 2030, according to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) making the need for sustainable tourism planning urgent. Worldwide, tourism has become a popular leisure activity that relies mainly on the physical environment. Sustainable tourism is defined by the UNWTO as “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”.

Natural pristine environments are the foundation of most tourism destinations. The World Wildlife Fun (WWF) states that 80 percent of all travel destinations are coastal areas which are often home to unique coastal ecosystems including coral reefs. In many cases these destinations are in low or middle income countries such as Viet Nam whose lower costs are an attraction for tourists. However, if not managed properly the tourism industry can seriously damage the asset that attracted visitors in the first place.

Tourism impacts

The tourism industry generates jobs and income for more than 250 million people around the world according to UNWTO. From street vendors that earn their living from day to day, to managers of multi-national hotel chains, they are all dependant on the tourist’s enthusiasm for travel. But sustaining this enthusiasm for a particular site requires careful planning and vigilance.

For example, in some areas the extraction of water for swimming pools, golf courses and hotels has resulted in severe damage to the environment and local livelihoods. In some cases mangrove forests are cleared for artificial beaches and wastewater from hotels and tour boats is often released untreated into rivers or near coral reefs. In other cases vulnerable ecosystems are cleared for large-scale tourism developments such as resorts and hotels when the temptation of short-term profit over-rides

Possibilities for expansion

The quality of rural products and their links with the tourism industry, as the world’s largest and fastest growing industry, need to be seriously considered in efforts to make biosphere reserves living sites for sustainable development. In biosphere reserves there are enormous opportunities for lasting beneficial partnerships between farmers, local authorities, business and tourism companies through establishing “quality economies”

In Cat Ba Archipelago Biosphere Reserve, a new initiative was recently introduced by the local authorities where quality products and services received official certification and thereby the right to carry the official Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve logo. The initiative was developed through cooperation between the Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve Management Board, the Hai Phong Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, as well as local businesses and the community. The aim was to build a cache of premium “green” products and services that promote the biosphere reserve and its aims of achieving sustainable development. At the first awards ceremony last year seven goods and services were eligible to be certified including bottled forest honey from Cat Ba, and a number of hotels and tourist services with minimum environmental impacts.

The quality of rural products and their links with the tourism industry, as the world’s largest and fastest growing industry, need to be seriously considered in efforts to make biosphere reserves living sites for sustainable development. In biosphere reserves there are enormous opportunities for lasting beneficial partnerships between farmers, local authorities, business and tourism companies through establishing “quality economies”

■
considerations of long-term environmental and socio-economic benefits.

Tourism development often does not consider local cultural settings and can create tensions due loss of heritage values. The money from package tours seldom reaches the local economy but stays with foreign-owned or outside enterprises such that it does not benefit those who may be experiencing the most negative impacts.

Despite these challenges, many poorer countries are seeking to boost their economies through tourism investments. Sound tourism planning is therefore of high importance in such areas, including Viet Nam.

Statistics from Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism show that the country’s annual international tourist arrivals have grown by more than 250% over the last 10 years, reaching more than 6 million in 2011. Viet Nam is also expected to be one of the top 12 tourism-growth countries in the next 10 years. However, Viet Nam presently has one of the lowest return rates for visitors in South-east Asia. It is therefore important that Viet Nam takes the opportunity to apply a sustainable tourism approach to ensure that tourism development is targeted at the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry and tourist sites.

**Biosphere reserves - a place for sustainable tourism**

Biosphere reserves, as places to trial innovative approaches to sustainable development, are also ideal places to contribute to sustainable tourism development. Viet Nam’s eight biosphere reserves maintain and/or preserve extremely scenic and unique landscapes and ecosystems. At the same time they are also home to many poor people that live within their buffer and transition zones. If sustainable tourism is to be successful, it is necessary for these people to be included and consulted when tourism planning strategies are formulated. UNESCO in Viet Nam has with success developed a strategy for community participation using the Public Use Planning Methodology in the province of Quan Nam that can serve as example for such development initiatives.

In many instances the extra appeal of experiencing local culture, rural landscapes and villages and local products can complement the experience of visiting a national park. In recent years, the development of home-stay accommodation has become extremely popular in Viet Nam, especially with international tourists. The idea of home-stay accommodation is that tourists visit a local family in the countryside to experience their farm life and/or ethnic cultures compared to the noise and pollution of the city. Here tourists can participate in daily work and enjoy fresh farm produce.

This is one example of sustainable tourism as it makes use of existing infrastructure and facilities at a given location, and at the same time contributes directly to the local economy.

**According to UNWTO sustainable tourism should:**

1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

2) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.
n summer 1997, at the international conference on world’s biosphere reserves at Thailand’s Ranong Mangrove Biosphere Reserve, international representatives expressed concerns over the potentials in Viet Nam and asked Vietnamese representatives to talk about the chance to participate in the world network of biosphere reserves. The Vietnamese representative then was Doctor Nguyen Hoang Tri expressing Vietnam’s determination to be included in this significant network.

Immediately following the event, the groundwork to establish Viet Nam’s first biosphere reserve started. After five revisions, the formal nomination form was sent to UNESCO Paris to be considered. The nomination of Can Gio – Ho Chi Minh city mangroves to be a world biosphere reserve was highly appreciated and approved thanks to its outstanding value. Can Gio mangroves is considered the best planted mangrove in South East Asia which has been rehabilitated. It has become the “green lung” of Ho Chi Minh city and the “green wall” to minimize impacts of climate change and rising sea level both in the short term and in the long term. On 2nd January 2000, Can Gio - Ho Chi Minh city was designated to be the first world biosphere reserve in Vietnam.

With successful experience of the procedure to nominate the first biosphere reserve, UNESCO approved Cat Tien biosphere reserve as the second biosphere reserve in
Following the first two successful nominations of Vietnam biosphere reserves, eight biosphere reserves have been approved until now. Cat Ba archipelago biosphere reserve and Interprovincial Coastal Wetland of Red River Delta biosphere reserve were approved in 2nd December 2004. The Interprovincial Coastal wetland of Red River Delta biosphere reserve (Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve for short) was recognised by the idea of combining the six coastal wetland districts namely Thai Thuy, Tien Hai (Thai Binh province), Giao Thuy, Nghia Hung and Hai Hau (in Nam Dinh province) and Kim Son in Ninh Binh. The remarkable value of this wetland is the level of biological diversity with a wide range of internationally important migratory birds especially the platalea minor. Then, Kien Giang biosphere reserve was recognised on 27th, November, 2006. Western Nghe An Biosphere Reserve which was recognised on 18th September 2007, adopted the idea that employed biosphere reserve like a model for sustainable economic development. The idea was realised during the design and implementation process by the MAB Vietnam Cu Lao Cham - Hoi An and Mui Ca Mau Biosphere Reserves were approved on 26th May, 2009.

Cu Lao Cham - Hoi An Biosphere Reserve reflects a connection between the nature - the core zone – Cu Lao Cham marine protected area and the the world culture heritage – ancient Hoi An quarter. Tourism basing on culture heritage and nature is instrumental to the development of this biosphere reserve. Mui Ca Mau Biosphere Reserve exhibits the connection of characteristic tropical coastal ecosystems: mangrove ecosystem of Mui Ca Mau National Park and Tay Ca Mau protection mangrove forest and melaleuca ecosystem of seasonal submerged swamp. On 29th June 2011, UNESCO formally designated Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve as a world biosphere reserve. Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve consists of 3 core zones covering an area of approximately 1 million ha, 80% of which is within Dong Nai’s boundaries. This biosphere reserve is characterized by its high level of biodiversity and home to more than 10 ethnic minorities and many historical sites. The general population, a variety of private businesses and social organization has made contributions to Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve.

Most biosphere reserves in Vietnam have a management board headed by a Vice Chairman of City’s or Provincial People’s Committee and other related agencies, societies, and businesses. This managing model for biosphere reserves in Vietnam is different from other countries. Despite initial successes, especially the inter-sector coordination, this method of managing a biosphere reserve has also its limitations, especially in terms of obtaining funding from the government. Even though this model has been highly appreciated by other countries, the improvement in the management capacity poses an urgent need for a sustainable development of Vietnam’s biosphere reserve network.
Features of 8 world biosphere reserves in Viet Nam and its potential for ecotourism:

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<td>- Longstanding communities, Typical island town, Unique cultural identity, festivals and craft village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Mui Ca Mau Biosphere Reserve, Ca Mau</td>
<td>- Cuu Long river alluvial sedimentation. Typical acidic mangroves.</td>
<td>- Typical communities living in sedimented lands, Agriculture, fishing and forestry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Can Gio mangrove was designated as the World’s Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO on 21st, January 2000. Can Gio Mangrove Biosphere Reserve is located 50km in the South East of Ho Chi Minh city. The mangroves which were formed on the large delta of the downstream of Dong Nai river and Sai Gon river cover an area of 75,740ha. Its population of 70,000 people has their livelihoods tightly connected to the mangrove ecosystem. The biosphere reserve is divided into three zones: the core zone, the buffer zone and the transition zone which serve three primary functions of a biosphere reserve, namely conservation, development and support considering the particular cultural, historic and natural values of the coastal and estuarine land and people.
Can Gio Biosphere Reserve has its own visible and invisible characteristic values: a long history of fighting for the boundary extension and land protection. Traditional religious culture remains strong. In particular, the network of pagodas, communal houses in the village, temples spread across communes. So do traditional festivals and religious customs such as the festival of Can Gio fishermen taking place every August. Archaeological relics of the era prior to Sa Huynh, and Oc Eo culture (especially “giong ca vo”, “giong phet”) as well as victorious historical relics of the fighting against enemies which is compared to a “Floating Cu Chi” (a famous historical site) and legendary sites such as heroic Sac forest war site are still well preserved.

Besides, a contributing factor in the entitlement of world biosphere reserve is the process to revitalise the mangroves with its mangrove ecosystem characterised by its valuable diversity of plants and animals after the war which is considered a miracle of the innovation era. The recovery of more than 32,000ha mangrove within just 30 years against the drastic natural condition, the shortage of seed sources, man resources funding and in the general difficult condition of the nation after the war proves that Can Gio deserves to be first biosphere reserve in Vietnam.

Can Gio Protection Forest Management Board has adopted a wide range of policies, programmes and activities toward better protection, development of the mangrove ecosystem, thus increasing its biodiversity. One of sound policies which have proved its effectiveness in protecting forests is the forest allocation for local residents. A strong network to protect the mangroves with the main role assumed by 174 households across the mangroves has been established.

Other major activities toward protection and development include scientific research activities, short-term and long-term programmes on environmental education adopting either single-dimensional or multi dimensional approach target a variety of audience. Club “I love nature” or contest “Toward better understanding of Can Gio mangrove”, communication programme “improving community’s awareness” have contributed to enhanced sense of environmental and forest protection among the population.

These programmes which have been coordinated by national universities, national and foreign research institutes have delivered fruitful results in forest protection and development, indigenous people’s cultural and historical preservation, thus creating a sense of belongings among Can Gio local people. In recent years, as an effort to maximise values of the biosphere reserve, the Management Board has coordinated with tour operators to develop tourism activities, especially sustainable ecotourism. Marine, sightseeing, adventure, community-oriented, camping tours have established Can Gio Biosphere Reserve a brand name as attractive destination for domestic and foreign visitors.

Can Gio Protection Forest Management Board aged more than 10 years has conducted a series of effective programmes to protect and develop forests, improve living standard for the local community, which are highly appreciated by authorities and relevant agencies. Can Gio Biosphere Reserve is a destination for many world’s prestigious scientific conferences on ecosystems, and mangrove’s livelihoods. Also, its communication campaigns have widespread effects thanks to its high quality and committed man power. These initial successes after unlimited efforts suggest a sustainable growth of Can Gio Protection Forest Management Board who gained Can Gio Mangrove Biosphere Reserve the status of the pioneer of the biosphere reserve network in Vietnam.
Dong Nai was recognized by UNESCO as a World Biosphere Reserve in 2011. Covering an area of almost 970,000ha, the site has a corezone of approximately 172,000ha including Dong Nai Culture and Nature Reserve (100,000ha) and Cat Tien National Park (70,000ha). The bufferzone of this biosphere reserve covers 347,000ha and the transition zone is about 451,000ha. Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve is about 40km from the North of Bien Hoa City and about 70km from Ho Chi Minh City.

Significant Values

Located in the centre of Southeastern, Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve plays an important role in the diversity of this area. Its ecosystems offer essential services in particular maintaining a stable watershed hydrology in the upper reaches of Dong Nai river, which ensures clean water supply in the dry season and minimizes flooding in the rainy season for a large area of the river basin in the South East including Ho Chi Minh city and various important industrial zones as well as residential areas. The biosphere reserve is also significant with rich cultural diversity from 11 ethnic groups. During the war the forests of the area hosted “Revolutionary Base D” which made a significant contribution to Viet Nam’s final victory.

Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve has a significantly high biodiversity with many rare and special species. Its records recognized 1,610 species of plants, 105 species of animals, 351 bird species, 109 reptile species, 41 amphibian species, 1,189 insect species and 199 species of fish. Some of these species are unique and extremely rare in Viet Nam and in the world, such as the Asian elephants, sun bears, gaur and leopards; and many rare plant species such as Camlai tree (Dalbergia Bariaensis), Godo tree (Afzelia xylocarpa etc) and Gianghuong tree (Pterocarpus macrocarpus).
A popular tourist destination

Cat Tien National Park is the main draw-card for tourists to Dong Nai for its natural beauty, rich biodiversity and pristine forests. Tourists can explore Cat Tien’s distinguish biodiversity values from giant trees such as the 400-year-old Tung tree (*Tetrameles nudiflora*) or Godo tree (*Afzelia xylocarpa*) with a diameter of more than 2 meters to wildlife discovery at night, or visit Bau Sau, a wetland area recognized as a Ramsar site for its international significance for migratory birds.

Besides natural beauty, visitors can also experience other cultural values in the reserve by paying a visit to Oc Eo, an archeological site in the Biosphere Reserve presents its history from the 3rd to the 6th century, with the largest Linga-Yoni in the South East Asia or to communities of ethnic minorities such as Ma or Stieng people in Ta Lai.

Dong Nai Culture and Nature Reserve is a new destination besides Cat Tien National Park. Situated very close to big cities in the region, the reserve offers a rich combination of natural beauty and historical sites: The South - Eastern of Party Committee (1962 - 1967), The South Central Bureau (1961 – 1962) and Suoi Linh Tunel (1962 – 1967), and natural forest and lakes. Tri An lake covers an area of 32.000ha has 72 islands. The site also has a stone park of more than 300ha where a combination of rocks and forest makes a wild and exotic landscape. Tourists coming to the Dong Nai Culture and Nature Reserve also have opportunities to observe wildlife during the day. Visitors can also experience local rituals and explore wisdoms of traditional customs and festivals through joining events such as Sayangva, a ritual to respect the God of Rice (Sayangva), visiting the traditional longhouse of Choro people and enjoying the taste of traditional foods such as glutinous rice cake, rice cooked in bamboo stem, grilled meat, green rattan, and Can wine (Ruou Can).

The site is also potential for different types of tourism activities ranging from rest and leisure to discovery, visiting historical sites, community tourism and adventurous

Dongnai Biosphere Reserve

Mada Commune, Vinhcuu District, Dongnai Province
Tel: (84-61). 3961140 –Mobile: 84-978.259; 84-986.941379; 84-0918.997085
Fax: (84-61) 3961683
Email: dongnaireserve@gmail.com; trungtamckd@gmail.com
Website: http://www.dongnaireserve.org.vn
Situated in a scenic landscape, Buu Long is recognized as a national beauty spot given its blue Long Van lake, mysterious Long An lake, compared to a small-size Ha Long bay, Buu Phong ancient pagoda, Long Son cave, ancient temples and green trees. Green Buu Long is also located in the cultural relics of the famous Tran Bien temple of literature.

Buu Long Investment and Development One Member Company Limited (DRAGONLAND) with Co Dau restaurant, Du Long restaurant, Buu Long hotel... The parking space accommodates more than 200 cars, and 1000 motorbikes. Buu Long, therefore becomes an ideal destination for companies as well as individuals to hold events such as conferences, celebration, weddings as well as those with recreation and entertainment purposes.

At Buu Long, many games of various kinds (on land and waters) including crash trams, water park, continuous movement games, moving bouncing animals, swan water cycling and free traditional games are all available.

Co Dau restaurant, which was built with Western style, is suitable for events such as weddings, buffet parties for as many as 1000 guests. Its professional staff can hold customized events, chefs can prepare both Asian and Western cuisine and helpful serving staff and cool space promise to guarantee any customer’s satisfaction.

Du Long restaurant located by Long An lake, Du Long restaurant, possessing an Asian bamboo and rattan architectural style with and well reflecting Vietnamese culture is another ideal choice for customers who wish to organize weddings, buffet parties and conferences.

In addition, Buu Long Investment and Development One Member Company Limited (DRAGONLAND) is an unit specialized in organizing domestic and international travel package such as Bien Hoa city and Dong Nai tours etc; further more, DRAGONLAND also provides other services namely consulting for visa registration, booking air-ticket, temporary residence, travel, tour manager, tour guide ...

Contact address:
BUU LONG INVESTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ONE MEMBER COMPANY Ltd (DRAGONLAND)

Address: 4 quarter, Huynh Van Nghe street, Buu Long ward, Bien Hoa city, Dong Nai province

Tel: (84-618) 3850917 - Fax: (84-618) 3850916
Cat Ba Archipelago Biosphere Reserve was designated by UNESCO in December 2004 due to its important biodiversity, landscape, cultural and socio-economic values. It has a total area of 26,241ha (17,041ha of land and approximately 9,200ha of marine ecosystems).

It lies within most of Cat Hai District of Hai Phong City and comprises 90% of Cat Ba Island including its surrounding waters and 366 karst limestone islets. Cat Ba Island has a resident population of 15,000. The majority live in main tourist centre of Cat Ba Town while around 6,000 people live in the six farming and fishing communes within the boundary of the biosphere reserve.

A rich and precious biodiversity

Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve is recognized both nationally and internationally as an extremely significant site for the conservation of biodiversity (both marine and terrestrial) in the North-eastern region of Viet Nam. Its high biodiversity value is a result of it having the largest area of continuous evergreen and primary forest in the northern coastal region, adjacent to some of Asia’s most northern coral reefs. These rich ecosystems are recorded as having at least 3,156 species of plants and animals including 1,843 land species and 1,313 marine species. Land species include 54 mammals, 160 birds, 47 reptiles, 21 amphibians and 1,561 higher plants. Marine species consist of 196 fish, 193 corals, 538 zoobenthos, 89 zooplankton, 199 phytoplankton, 23 mangroves and 75 species of seaweed/algae. It most well-known species is the Cat Ba (or yellow-headed) Langur which is considered among the 25 most endangered primates in the world. In 2011, UNESCO also nominated Cat Ba Archipelago as a potential World Natural Heritage Site.

Long standing historical and cultural identity

Cat Ba Archipelago’s most dramatic feature is its vegetation-clad limestone karsts, often fringed by white mangrove forest.
sand beaches which make it a popular draw-card for tourists. Its geological formations also indicate a transition boundary of three tectonic formations formed during three main geological time zones. These features have made Cat Ba a candidate for listing as a UNESCO World Geopark.

Cat Ba Island has 77 important archaeological relic sites. For example, the Cai Beo site has human cultural remains dating from 6,400 to 4,200 years ago, while Da Hoa limestone cave contains fossilized orangutan, porcupine and rhino bones. Remains of a citadel dating back to the northern Mac monarchy of the 16th century can also be found on the island. More recent historical heritage includes a fort perched above the main township that guarded against foreign sea invaders for several decades.

The Cat Ba culture of today is also embedded in the historical traditions of unity of the Vietnamese people of the northern coastal region, especially the fishing people, some of whom originally settled the valleys of the main island after calamities such as storms. Many traditions still remain strong in modern life in festivals such as the fishing festival, boat rowing festival, and the wooden horse festival. Cat Ba (formerly named Cac Ba or ‘ladies’ island’) is also well-known for its women’s temples built to honor the women who cultivated and protected the island centuries ago.

Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve- a model for sustainable development

Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve is considered one of the most dynamic in the Man and Biosphere (MAB) network in Viet Nam. Supports by the Hai Phong City Government, UNESCO/MAB, donor NGOs, researchers, private and community stakeholders has allowed the reserve to instigate many sustainable development initiatives such as:

- The official certification of ‘quality’ products or services with the providers granted the right to carry the official Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve logo
- The establishment of a Sustainable Development Foundation to fund sustainable development initiatives with the participation of, and/or contributions from, concerned governmental agencies, institutes, private businesses, non-governmental organizations and the local community. This is the first fund of its kind in biosphere reserves in South-east Asia, and
- Using a ‘systems’ management approach for biosphere reserves to act as living and learning sites for effective planning and management for sustainable development.

Tourism opportunities in Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve

Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve provides tourists with a wide range of activities including participating ecological community-based tours to villages such as Viet Hai, Xuan Dam, Khe Sau and other communes in the buffer zone. Here tourists can taste local specialties grown and prepared on site, such as Gia Luan orange, Lien Minh chicken, forest honey, hibiscus tea or Cat Hai fish sauce. Similarly tourists can choose environmentally friendly tours such as visiting caves, hiking or bird and animal watching in Cat Ba National Park; or kayaking, scuba diving and fishing.

Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve, a living laboratory for exchanging new ideas and experiences, conducting research and implementing initiatives to reconcile conservation and development challenges, is a worthwhile destination for tourists.

Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve

No 5 Chieu Hoa street, Kien An district, Hai Phong city
Tel: (84-313) 3877298
Website: www.catba.gov.vn
The Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve is an inter-provincial biosphere reserve whose core zone of 14,842ha is comprised of Xuan Thuy National Park and Tien Hai Wetland Nature Reserve. The Xuan Thuy Ramsar Site is also located within Xuan Thuy National Park. This Ramsar site was recognized in 1989 as the first in Viet Nam.

With the total area of 7,100ha, Xuan Thuy National Park is a wetland mud flat situated in the South of the Red River estuary, including part of Con Ngan (outside Vanh Luoc dyke), the whole Con Lu and Con Xanh in Giao Thuy district, Nam Dinh province.

Ramsar, is an intergovernmental convention signed in 1971 in Ramsar city (Iran) by member countries to maintain the ecological character of their "Wetlands of International Importance". The Ramsar Convention is particularly important for protecting the natural habitats and feeding grounds of migratory birds. Xuan Thuy was the first Ramsar site in South-east Asia and the 50th in the world. Therefore, the Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve has a high biodiversity value with many rare species of international significance. With the total area of 7,100ha, Xuan Thuy National Park is situated in the south of the Red River estuary and includes mangroves, wetlands and mud flats. It includes part of the islet of Con Ngan (outside Vanh Luoc dyke), the whole islets of Con Lu and Con Xanh in Giao Thuy District, Nam Dinh Province.

Situated only 100km from Ha Noi, the coastal estuarine wetland area of the Red River Biosphere Reserve is easily accessible by road and water. This biosphere reserve has significant ecotourism potential based on bird watching and cultural tourism. The journey along the Red River to the Red River Delta passes through many communes that have their own temples, craft villages and folk festivals. There is great potential for tours that allow
tourists to experience the nature, culture and history of the Red River Delta.

Xuan Thuy National Park is home to more than 120 higher plant species, including 20 mangrove species that cover over 3000ha. Mangroves provide numerous benefits for the whole biosphere reserve including acting as a nursery and habitat for aquatic species. The fishing industry in the area generates hundreds of billions of VND every year making the local economy largely dependent on this natural area.

Xuan Thuy National Park is home to more than 220 bird species, which include 150 migratory ones, 50 aquatic birds and 9 species listed in the international Redbook including: black-faced spoonbill, spoon-billed Sandpiper, Chinese Egret, Grey-headed Lapwing, Semipalmated Plover, and Saunder’s Gull. The number of birds at any one time can reach as high as 30,000 – 40,000 individuals. Xuan Thuy National Park is now the only place in Viet Nam where you are likely to see the black-faced spoonbill or spoon-billed sandpiper. At peak times of the year the number of black-faced spoonbill in Xuan Thuy National Park can account for 26% of the remaining world population.

The value of protecting the mangroves and wetlands is highlighted by the fact that there are more than 500 species of aquatic zooplankton, phytoplankton and zoobenthos. Many of these are the larvae of, or food for, high-value economic species such as shrimp, crab, oyster and clam. Such species support much of the local economy contributing to positive economic changes for the community in the buffer and transition zones of the Red River Biosphere Reserve. Xuan Thuy National Park

Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve

Xuan Thuy National Park
Giao Thuy district, Nam Định province
Tel: (84-350) 3741501 – (84-91) 2200602
Fax: (84-350) 3895125
Kien Giang Biosphere Reserve includes much of the Southern area of Viet Nam’s most South-western province of Kien Giang. It shares a land and sea border with Cambodia to the West, a sea border with Thailand to the South and is endowed with a system of rivers, mountains, deltas, sea, coral reefs and islands. Kien Giang was recognised as a World Biosphere Reserve in 2006 with 1,118,104ha of land, sea and islands. This biosphere reserve has five protected areas that constitute the three core zones - U Minh Thuong National Park, Phu Quoc Island National Park, Phu Quoc Marine Protected Area, Hon Chong Nature Reserve and the Western Coastal Mangrove Belt. The total population of the biosphere reserve is 354,000 people.

Kien Giang Biosphere Reserve contains a comprehensive representation of Viet Nam’s tropical ecosystems including marine and coastal ecosystems, mangroves, islands, coral reefs, swamps, seasonal melaleuca wetland, and primary and secondary tropical forest. The secondary forest on Phu Quoc Island is the only remaining forest on limestone mountains in the South. Kien Luong limestone range is of particular biodiversity importance including the recent discovery of plant and animal species new to science. The marine environment is recognized as of international importance due to the movement between borders of economic fish species as well as endangered marine species. The biosphere reserve has been referred to as a peace ambassador since Kien Giang province and neighboring Kampot province in Cambodia signed a cooperative agreement on the conservation of seagrass beds that support dugong populations, as well as turtles, coral reefs and mangrove forests. Coastal mangroves are of particular importance due to their role in minimising the effects of tsunamis and rising sea levels due to climate change.

Recently the government has approved a tourism development plan with the aim of making Phu Quoc Island a high quality ecotourism destination for Viet Nam and the region and to develop key tourism zones such as Kien Luong, Ha Tien and Rach Gia. Neighbouring zones such as Hon Dat, Kien Hai and U Minh Thuong are also highlighted in the plan. The geographical location of Kien Giang is also favourable for open-door economic development due to the availability of ports, airports and close proximity to...
other ASEAN countries.

Phu Quoc Island

Kien Giang Biosphere Reserve has more than 140 islands, of which Phu Quoc Island with an area of 590 square km is the largest in Viet Nam. Its beautiful natural landscapes and rich biodiversity make it extremely important for conservation and give it significant potential for tourism development. The island is also famous for a number of trademark products as pepper, sim (myrtle) wine, dried sea food, lacquer paintings and pearls. Its fish sauce is also famous throughout Viet Nam. Such products have enormous potential to grow Kien Giang’s “quality economy”. Phu Quoc is also a key zone identified by the Government for investment and development planning. It is expected that Phu Quoc will soon be a high quality ecotourism zone which can compete well in the region and the world. It is therefore important that development is carefully planned and implemented so as not to damage the features that make it such as desirable destination.

U Minh Thuong National Park

U Minh Thuong National Park lies close to the border of Ca Mau province in the South-east and contains seasonally submerged melaluca forest growing on peat swamp. Local products include melaluca honey, dried fish (ca sac) and fish sauce (mam ca luoi trau). Presently tourists engage in a number of popular activities such as kayaking, fishing, picking forest fruit and eating food made from recipes dating back to the Funnan (pre-Kymer) culture. The area also has a number of Funnan heritage relics associated with Oc Eo archaeological site (250AD) such as Canh Den, Nen Vua and Ke Mot. U Minh Thuong also served as a revolutionary base during the wars against the France and the USA. This area has enormous potential to combine natural and cultural tourism.

Ha Tien – Kien Luong Landscape

Ha Tien - Kien Luong is well-known its coastal mangrove forest and limestone ecosystems. Ha Tien is commonly compared to a “natural silk picture” for its mountains, caves, pagodas and islands in close proximity to each other. It also contains important historical and cultural sites such as Mui Nai, Thach Dong, To Chau mountain, Da Dung mountain, Dong Ho lagoon and Hang pagoda. Phu Tu islet, Duong beach, Mo So mountain, Trem islet, Hai Tac archipelago and Ba Lua island are popular tourist destinations due to their natural and scenic qualities.

Culture And History

Kien Giang Biosphere Reserve contains rich cultural heritage with 43 archaeological and cultural sites designated at national and provincial level. The province has 389 annual festivals, of which 91 are traditional, 235 religious, 62 historical and one celebrates the unity of the Kinh (ethic Vietnamese), Khmer and Chinese ethic groups living in Viet Nam.

In order to promote the local potential of cultural tourism, in recent years Kien Giang has made numerous attempts to preserve and enhance high value traditional craft villages. For example, when tourists visit Phu My commune in Giang Thanh district, they can see a variety of products such as mattresses, bags, and household items being made from sedge (bang) grass - a readily available material. Products made from this sedge have been widely exported internationally.

A project to conserve this sedge in Phu My Wetland is supported by the International Crane Organisation with the aim of achieving effective conservation and sustainable harvesting. Such modest yet effective projects are helping Kien Giang Biosphere Reserve to maintain its unique natural and cultural identity and have created employment for many ethnic Khmer people. Many researchers, businessmen, and domestic and international students have visited Phu My to view the threatened species such as the Sarus Crane and Stork-billed Kingfisher and to visit the Khmer traditional craft village. Such interest creates favourable conditions for developing programs to promote sustainable tourism and to attract investors from the local area and from other provinces in Mekong River Delta.
Western Nghe An Biosphere Reserve is characterized by its biodiversity. The conservation value of the Biosphere Reserve is well reflected in the presence of 70 species of plants and 80 species of animals listed in Viet Nam Red Book, many of which are exceptionally valuable, endemic to the region such as *Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*, *Pygathryx nemaeus*, *Muntiacus vuquangensis*, *Nesolagus temminckii*, and *Cunninghamia konishii*.

Western Nghe An Biosphere Reserve is located in nine mountainous districts in the West of Nghe An province, Western Nghe An Biosphere Reserve is regarded as the largest in South East Asia with the total area of 1,303,285ha. The biosphere is divided into 3 regions including the core zone of 191,922ha, the buffer zone of 503,270ha and the transition zone of 608,093ha. This is a green corridor linking Pu Mat National Park, Pu Huong Nature Reserve and Pu Hoat Nature Reserve creates a continuity of living environment and habitat.

This biosphere reserve is home to a population of 884,000 residents of 7 ethnic groups including Kinh, Thai, Kho Mu, Tho, Mong, Dan Lai, O Du. In particular, the O Du minority group consists of merely about 340 people. The combination of natural landscape and its cultural identity has created an incredible attraction. This biosphere reserve is also an important place for biodiversity conservation, culture and sustainable socio-economic programs in Nghe An province.
Pu Mat National Park.

Pu Mat National Park covers an area of 94,804.4ha located in three districts of Nghe An province, namely Anh Son, Con Cuong, Tuong Duong, which are 130km away from Nghe An city. Key functions of Pu Mat National Park include conservation, protection of North Truong Son natural tropical forest, protection of biodiversity of 2,494 plant species, 132 animal species, 361 bird species, 53 reptile species, 33 amphibian species, 83 fish species, 39 bat species, and 1,080 insect species.

Among these species, many animals and plants are endangered: 69 plant species and more than 70 animal species are listed in Vietnam Redbook and Redlist. Another major role of the forest is to enhance protection ability for Ca river system in order to accommodate the production as well as life of the population in the whole region and promote ecotourism, improve the community’s awareness of environmental protection, attract foreign investment in nature conservation and economic development.

Moreover, Pu Mat National Park plays an important role in strategic local socio-economic development, especially in sharing benefits from forest resources, encouraging the local people to participate in ecotourism activities to improve their income. The local people are also instrumental in promoting and consuming locally made products.

Pu Huong Nature Reserve

Pu Huong Nature Reserve covers an area of 40,327.7ha encompassing 11 communes in the districts of Que Phong, Quy Chau, Quy Hop, Con Cuong and Tuong Duong. Pu Huong Nature Reserve is the protection home to 1,122 vascular plant species of 175 families and 584 genera, 46 of which such as Cunninghamia konishi, Fokienia hodginsi, Nageia wallichiana, Cephalotaxus mannii Paphiopedilum spp are especially rare; 63 mammal species, 176 bird species, 62 reptile species, 25 amphibian also live here. 45 animal species are listed in Viet Nam Red Data book and IUCN Redlist.

Western Nghe An Biosphere Reserve is built on the conservation principle of protecting the overall landscape with 3 nature reserves connected by green corridor being buffer zones where elements of animals, plants and geography are well blended. The exotic culture of Western Nghe An has been increasingly attracting tourists to spend their holidays, to discover nature myths and to visit national cultural and historic relics.

The fact that Western Nghe An was recognised as a world’s biosphere reserve has contributed to sustainable development and improved living standard through ecotourism activities, scientific research, environmental education, ethnic culture preservation.

The land that connects special use forests spreading from Pu Mat, Pu Huong and Pu Hoat is home to characteristic cultural values. The upstream of Ca river spreading from the border to Southern Sea is home to characteristic culture of Western Nghe An mountainous minorities as well as biodiversity.

The characteristic culture - humanity of this region is especially highlighted by exotic cultural values of Thai, Kho Mu and Mong minorities. It is undeniable that it is rare for a place that combines such a richness of indigenous culture heritage and the nature with thousands of rare species and plants.
he Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An Biosphere Reserve combines one of Viet Nam’s most significant World Cultural Heritage sites of Hoi An town (including its coastal estuary) with the important marine and island ecosystems of Cu Lao Cham archipelago. This area was designated as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO in May 2009 and has a total area of 331 km². It has a population of almost 40,000 engaged in fishing, craft-making, tourism and farming.

Landscape of Cu Lao Cham.
Photo: Tuan Kiet >>
The Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An Biosphere Reserve is endowed with rich historical architectural and culture combined with dramatic landscapes including islands, caves, springs, beaches, beautiful coral reefs and clear water.

**The Management Zones**

The core zone is home to 3,000 residents and includes most of the largest island of Cham and important coastal, marine and reef areas fringing the other seven smaller islands. The key function of the core zone is to conserve landscapes, ecosystems, biodiversity and natural process with minimal impact from human activities. The buffer zone contributes to the revitalization of marine and forest ecosystems in the region and includes all of the non core-zone areas of the islands and the sea that connects them.

The transition zone is composed of the ancient quarter of Hoi An World Heritage site down to the famous Cua Dai beach and the 15km of sea separating the mainland from the islands. Within the transition zone, eco-services support the recovery of degraded natural ecosystems through the wise and sustainable use of natural resources such as the soil, water, and the integration of biodiversity into agriculture, forest and construction activities.

**Biodiversity**

There are currently 947 marine and terrestrial species found in Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An Biosphere Reserve. It is an extremely important area for marine biodiversity with over 723 recorded species comprised of: 200 species of fish in 85 genera and 36 families; 261 coral species (59 genera); 47 seaweed/algae species (26 genera) and 215 species of plankton (including 87 species of zooplankton). Cham Island is very unique in Viet Nam and an important reservoir of island biodiversity due to it retaining 60 - 70% of its vegetation cover. The higher points of the island's mountain are covered in tropical evergreen rainforest and contain tree species listed in the Viet Nam Red Data Book for threatened species. Cu Lao Cham has 12 species of mammal, 13 bird species, 130 reptile species and 5 amphibian species. Several species such as long-tailed macaques and swiftlet birds are listed in Vietnam's Red Data Book.

**Culture and History**

Both the Cu Lao Cham Islands and Hoi An is of immense historical and cultural importance. The islands contain archeological relics of human occupation dating back 3000 years, with 25 religious structures dating from the 18th to 20th century situated along the East side of Lao islet. Rich traditions customs, food, lifestyles, and folk music are still preserved.

Hoi An’s rich history as one of South-east Asia’s best harbors has made it centre of regional trade since the first century and the one time commercial capital of the Cham empire (14th century). It has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1999 and today is one of the most popular sites for overseas visitors due to traditional architecture and crafts such as textiles and ceramics.

**The Future**

Maintaining the historical and natural features that attract visitors to this biosphere reserve is the main challenge for managers. Upgrading infrastructure, solving issues such as water and electricity, and improving the livelihoods of the local residents is the best solution for conserving natural ecosystem and cultural heritage values.
Ca Mau Biosphere Reserve is primarily mangroves grown on alluvial soil thus creating an area where different marine species can be bred and then later nurtured in Thailand bay. A model to promote sustainable development through biodiversity conservation, economic development and cultural value maintenance surrounds 3 core zones, namely Mui Ca Mau National Park, U Minh Ha National Park and Western Ca Mau coastal protection forest.

The buffer zone and transition zones surrounding the core zone create a corridor consisting of varied landscapes and ecosystems such as mangrove forest, beaches, submerged peat swamp, and marine ecosystem. Protection of biological resources and geological resources of high conservation value has presented a major concern to world’s organisations for natural reserve.
Outstanding values

**Economic returns:** significant economic benefits gained from forest-based production and business activities, aquaculture, and tourism activities derive from clean environment. Mangroves help to reduce wave strength, protect the coast, conserve natural resources, minimize water, air and soil pollution. Melaleuca forests contain a high level of peat which absorbs carbon, thus mediating the climate and reducing environmental pollution. Biosphere reserve is also ideal for conducting scientific research and serving national welfare.

**Conservation value:** the listed flora names 239 species belonging to 76 families, the fauna 36 species belonging to 17 families, 7 of which are recorded in Vietnam Red Book, 4 species are banned from export in Cites Index, 208 bird species belonging to 51 families (migrating birds account for 56 species of 17 families).

According to statistics, Ca Mau is now home to 19 bird sanctuaries, which play a critical role in Ca Mau mangrove habitat. Therefore, given its rich biodiversity, it is essential that Ca Mau natural environment be strictly supervised and protected.

**Environmental value:** Mangrove forests along the coast and rivers is instrumental in preventing sea level rise, land slide, and salinization. Mangroves are significant particularly for responding to climate change, protecting human welfare and life in a sustainable way.

**Directions toward sustainable tourism development**

Always being a prosperous land with great potential for tourism development, effectiveness of tourism activities remained low due to lack of long term strategies, low competitiveness, high price tours, failure to exploit existing advantages. With a view to meet socio-economic expansion demands as well as national tourism development goals, Ca Mau tourism management board need to implement key tasks below:

**First of all,** it is necessary to conduct surveys on tourist companies in order to analyse existing strengths and weaknesses, explore potentials in terms of culture, history, beauty spots, festivals, historical sites, and traditional craft villages. Accordingly, overall planning of specific tours can be outlined, and capital raising can be carried out. Given the mangrove ecosystem and brackish mangroves ecosystem, developing ecotourism accommodates the provincial socioeconomic planning.

Specifically, tours which centres around marine life, mudflats, mangroves, the coast, the islands attached with historical events and appreciate local characteristic will have their own attraction.

**Secondly,** to facilitate the travel of the local residents as well as tourists it is urgent to upgrade the transportation system, especially important roads from Ca Mau to U Minh Ha National Park, from Nam Can to Ngoc Hien to Mui Ca Mau, key marine routes including one from Mui Ca Mau to Ong Trang – Nam Can mudflat, Song Doc town to Da Bac islet, Khoai islet, King 5, Khai Long. Also, it is recommended to build restaurant and hotels in national parks, entertainment centres, health care facilities as well as adventure entertainment facilities. Domestic and foreign investment in approved plans should be encourages as well. Plans for botanical garden, collection of plant specimen, and intended for forest growing are necessary to accommodate the needs of tourists who wish to study mangroves and participate in environmental protection.

**Thirdly,** due attention should be put on human resource development as well as an increase in governmental supervision in tourism activities, and a coordination with tourism training institutions to make sure that tourism staff including tourguide, presenters, hotel, and catering staff can meet the growing demands of the field in the upcoming years.

Another task is enhancing the community capacity in delivering tourism services, maintaining a relationship between local people and ecotourism management agencies to create more appealing tours. For example, local people can participate by guiding tourists to catch crabs, snails, oysters, throw fish net or take forest honey bee. Forming a linkage between managers and local people is necessary; gradually, local people will understand that participating in conservation and promotion of eco-tourism is not purely entailing livelihoods but being their responsibility toward the community and society.

**Fourthly,** another alternative is to organise “night” Dat Mui tour so as to enable tourists to experience real life of fishermen living at the end of the South of the country. Tourists can try catching squid, oysters, pulling fish net, appreciating the nature at night and observing sun rise at dawn and sun set in the late afternoon, joining stilt house activity where they can listen to folk songs typical of the South.

**Fifthly,** it is also essential to re-organize the traditional business villages in the biosphere reserve namely, charcoal making,... Vien An village is known for the job of making bamboo sticks, Rach Goc making dried shrimp, Kanh Binh Tay making carpet, Kanh Binh Dong producing dried banana, Coi Nam making fish sauce, Da Bac islet making “guoc” sauce, Nguyen Phich raising bee for honey, Rach Tau making dried fish.

**Sixthly,** enhancing domestic and foreign tourism promotion. Currently, local tourism companies are largely small ones. It is important for them to coordinate with major tour businesses in Ho Chi Minh, Ba Ria – Vung Tau, Can Tho. Tourism promotion should come in various forms ranging from leaflets, maps, CDs, websites. Local tourism agencies can take part in organisation of tourism events domestically and abroad. In particular, promotion of ecotourism with a focus on introducing tours to forest villages, alluvial flats, and river wasters, typical for Mui Ca Mau Biosphere Reserve should be emphasized.

**Seventhly,** partnership should be regarded an incentive for development. Tourism activities have mainly been conducted by Minh Hai tourism corporation and Labour Union. The provision of short tours and field trips has so far attracted a modest number of tourists. Interprovincial partnerships with tour agencies based in provinces in Cuu Long delta, Ho Chi Minh cities are essential for further expansion.
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