EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM OF HANOI CITY RESIDENTS, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the experiential tourism needs of the residents of Hanoi city. Data for this study were collected by surveying 200 residents in Hanoi to understand their experiential tourism needs. The study uses two main methods: descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation analysis. The research results indicate that experiential tourism is a relatively new and trending form of tourism, especially among young people. Additionally, the study identifies the activities that customers wish to experience in a travel tour. Based on the analysis results, the research proposes some appropriate recommendations for travel companies to better meet the experiential tourism needs of Hanoi residents in the future.

Keywords: Experiential Tourism; Hanoi City; Residents; Vietnam; Travel Preferences; Tourism Trends; Travel Experiences; Market Research; Tourist Activities; Recommendations.
INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism is becoming a new way of life. Tourism is not just about sightseeing but also about exploration and experiences, involving active participation and interaction rather than just listening to tour guides. Many people are seeking a new form of tourism - experiential tourism. As the name suggests, this type of tourism aims to offer customers unique experiences, even participating in activities for the first time, attracting tourists with its dynamism, novelty, attractiveness, and challenges. However, this form of tourism is not yet widespread in Vietnam. Evidence of this is that only a few provinces in our country have started paying attention to this type of tourism, and not many travel companies have ventured into it. In the North, there are experiential tours in ancient villages such as Duong Lam (Hanoi) or Yen Duc (Quang Ninh). In the Central region, there are tours to explore Cham Island and experience farming in Tra Que vegetable village (Quang Nam). The Central Highlands offers "Dalat Green" tours with activities such as harvesting vegetables and strawberries. In this tour, tourists are guided on how to trim and plant strawberries and explore gardens of various flowers such as money flowers, cosmos, and orchids. Moreover, the Central Highlands also has a tour to explore the coffee kingdom, understanding the cultivation and coffee culture in Dak Lak. In terms of experiential tourism in the Mekong Delta (Red River Delta), there are tours like "A Day as a Farmer" or hands-on activities to make traditional cakes at ecotourism destinations. In general, these tours are relatively new and not many tourists choose them because the travel preferences of the Vietnamese people are still inclined toward sightseeing and they are hesitant about exploring.

Although experiential tourism is a growing trend, it is still unfamiliar to both travel agencies and tourists. The travel needs of Hanoi residents are growing rapidly and becoming more diverse, requiring new and unique tours. However, in reality, travel companies only provide a very limited number of experiential tours. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on experiential tourism. Recognizing the significant potential of this untapped form of tourism, the topic "Studying the demand for experiential tourism of Hanoi city residents" aims to evaluate the consumer demand for experiential tourism. The research's main purpose is to provide an overview of the demand for this type of tourism, helping travel companies understand the level of interest and choice of customers, thereby planning exploitation strategies that are reasonable and effective, creating a new segment for the tourism market.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Travel Needs

Needs

Needs are inherent characteristics of living organisms, reflecting the individual's state of lack and thus distinguishing it from the living environment. The most basic need, also known as absolute necessity, has been programmed through a long process of existence, development, and evolution. Needs are a psychological attribute, the things that individuals demand to exist and develop. Every individual has needs, some of which are innate, and some are acquired. There have been many studies on human needs and motivations worldwide, helping administrators grasp the timely and accurate psychology and preferences of customers. Among these theories, the most famous and widely known is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) believed that human behavior arises
from needs, and these needs are arranged in a prioritized hierarchy from low to high into 5 levels: physiological needs (food, water, shelter, breathing, clothing, etc.), safety needs (protection, security, safety, etc.), social needs (love, friendship, etc.), esteem needs (status, reputation, etc.), and self-actualization needs.

**Travel Needs**
According to Nguyen Van Dinh and Tran Thi Minh Hoa (2009), travel needs are the desire of individuals to go to a different place than their usual residence to experience new emotions, new experiences, new understandings, to develop social relationships, restore health, and create a comfortable spiritual state.

Travel needs differ from those of tourists. Travel needs are not basic needs; therefore, travel needs are satisfied only under certain conditions, especially economic, technical, social conditions, etc. Tourists' needs include essential needs, specific needs, and additional needs. Therefore, the study of the experiential travel needs of Hanoi city residents includes research on the timing, purpose, form, means, location, activities, and services required when conducting experiential travel.

**Some Basic Theories of Experiential Tourism**

**Experiential Tourism**
Experiential tourism is a form of tourism that allows tourists to have the opportunity to experience real-life situations in new environments. Participating in experiential tourism involves immersing oneself in the reality of life at tourist destinations through the collection of information and participation in specific activities in the role of direct members of the environment and the local community. These activities help tourists gain new and interesting experiences in different environments compared to their daily lives. In addition, tourists also accumulate practical knowledge and experience about nature, culture, and society through participation in specific activities with the local community (Tran Duy Minh and Pham Duc Thien, 2016).

Currently, experiential tourism has become a term that includes a series of other types of tourism such as cultural tourism, eco-tourism, educational tourism, adventure tourism, heritage tourism, and nature tourism. Experiential tourism minimizes the impact on the environment, shows respect for different cultures, demands active and flexible participation to experience and learn rather than just standing still and admiring the scenery as in traditional sightseeing tourism. Therefore, tourists need to be more active and engaged, participating in various activities, and using all their senses to perceive and create their own stories and memories. Naturally, this will leave tourists with a deeper impression and memory of the trip than any sharing on advisory websites or from others.

**The Difference Between Experiential Tourism and Other Types of Tourism**
As mentioned, experiential tourism can be cultural tourism, heritage tourism, eco-tourism, or adventure tourism, among others. In other words, experiential tourism can be any type of tourism that includes the element of "experience." The experience is demonstrated through tourists directly participating in activities, using their senses to perceive, and then drawing their own experiences or creating unique memories. The only and most important difference is that experiential tourism does not follow conventional norms. It is not based on any usual destination or mundane activities far from the traditional sightseeing tourism with the purpose of enjoyment, sightseeing, and
souvenir photography. It requires tourists to be more active, more proactive, and to do everything themselves. Tour guides are no longer continuous speakers or ordinary entertainers. They play the role of facilitators, guiding tourists in activities, observing, and providing support when needed. Even tourism service providers see the development potential of this form of tourism. They believe that many tourists are impressed with experiential tourism because it seems simple but is the trend of future tourism (traveling with a sense of not being restricted, not being imposed by a closed program, not just sleeping and resting as in traditional tour packages). For those who are passionate about travel, especially foreign tourists, they want to explore and experience the places they visit, feel the true tourism space while ensuring safety compared to backpacking tourism. In addition, with reasonable prices and compact schedules, experiential tourism is becoming the preferred choice for both domestic and international tourists.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

**Data Collection Method**
Secondary data was synthesized from statistical reports of tourism organizations both domestic and international, such as the World Tourism Organization, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, Institute for Tourism Development Research, and the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Hanoi City during the period from 2013 to 2016. Additionally, data were also collected from online surveys and relevant scientific research articles published in journals related to experiential tourism and travel demands. The study used absolute and relative comparison methods to analyze the situation of tourism in both domestic and international contexts, the structure of tourism activities, and the comparison of tourism development rates over the years. Primary data were collected through surveys of 379 residents living in Hanoi using pre-prepared questionnaires through two methods: face-to-face interviews and online interviews on the Internet. The aim was to analyze the demand for experiential travel based on criteria such as time, travel mode, transportation, travel purpose, travel destination, reasons for choosing destinations, duration of stay, desired activities, and travel costs.

**Data Analysis Method**
The study primarily utilized descriptive statistical methods and cross-tabulation analysis to examine the relationship between the demand for experiential travel and demographic variables (gender, age, place of residence, occupation, income, and marital status). Based on the research findings, combined with the local context, the authors conducted an analysis, evaluation, and deduction to propose appropriate recommendations for travel companies to meet the experiential travel needs of the residents of Hanoi.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**The Current Status of Resident Participation in Experiential Tourism in Hanoi**
A total of 146 respondents (accounting for 73%) had participated in at least one experiential travel trip, with 66.4% of them falling in the age group of 20 to 34, and the lowest percentage being those aged 50 and above (only 6.2%). Among these 146 respondents who had experienced experiential travel, 123 had organized their trips themselves, while the rest had joined tours organized by travel companies. This is a new form of travel, predominantly organized by young people to have comfort and freedom in arranging their itineraries according to personal preferences.
Experiential travel encompasses various types of travel, including cultural tourism, ecotourism, educational tourism, exploratory tourism, heritage tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and community-based tourism. According to statistics, 77.4% of respondents had participated in ecotourism, while 53.4% had engaged in cultural tourism. Other forms of tourism such as craft village tourism, adventure tourism, heritage tourism, exploratory tourism, and community-based tourism were less popular among the residents of Hanoi. The reason for this is that the Red River Delta region does not have many natural conditions favorable for these activities, and participants would need to travel to other places, which would increase the cost of the trip and extend the duration of stay.

The residents of Hanoi mainly participated in experiential travel in the southern region, with a very high percentage (88.4%). This is due to the southern region's favorable geographical location for experiential activities related to ecotourism and cultural tourism. Travelers can experience and explore with low costs during a suitable period. The central and northern regions of the country are famous for their beautiful landscapes and diverse nature, as well as a long-standing cultural history, but due to unfavorable geographical locations and costs, they were less chosen by respondents. Furthermore, the residents of Hanoi still prefer domestic travel over international travel due to factors such as language, culture, economic conditions, and time. A few respondents who had traveled abroad were generally young and combined their trips with studies in some Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia.

Each type of tourism and each destination will have unique activities. According to statistical results, the majority of respondents participating in ecotourism engaged in activities such as rowing on rivers, lakes, or canals, mountain climbing, exploring biodiversity at high altitudes, trekking or cycling through forests, and significant participation in coral reef diving (25% - 45%). Cultural tourism activities were also popular among the residents of Hanoi, with a significantly high percentage (30% - 50%) participating in activities such as exploring local cuisine, personally preparing special dishes, enjoying folk songs and poetry, and participating in daily activities and folk games with ethnic minorities. However, few respondents chose to participate in agricultural and fisheries tourism activities.

### Travel Experience Preferences of Hanoi Residents

#### Desired Travel Time

The majority of respondents expressed a desire to engage in experiential travel during summer vacations (38%) and anytime they wish (32%). Lunar New Year and holidays accounted for a relatively lower percentage at 21%. Few respondents chose weekends for travel (8%), and a small number mentioned they would only travel when they have the economic means to do so (1%). However, different demographic groups have varying leisure times available for travel. To assist travel companies in obtaining specific information about desired travel times for each age group to create suitable travel programs, cross-tabulation analysis was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 3.

Individuals under the age of 20 are predominantly students, so their leisure time primarily falls during the summer months. Those aged 35 and above are mostly married with children, limiting their leisure time. Therefore, they prioritize traveling during long breaks like Lunar New Year, major holidays, or the summer season to include their children. The age group of 20 to 34 has the
most leisure time, is flexible, and actively manages their time for personal experiential trips. Furthermore, this age group prefers to travel whenever they want. Their youthful, dynamic, adventurous, freedom-loving, change-seeking nature, and reluctance to be constrained by fixed schedules significantly influence their travel behavior. This poses a challenge for travel companies trying to understand their psychology and actual needs.

**Means of Transportation for Experiential Travel**

Nearly half of the respondents (47%) preferred using motorcycles for their future experiential travel. For them, motorcycles are the most cost-effective and convenient means of transport, providing genuine experiences on the roads and clear insights into the changing natural landscapes and local life in the places they pass through. Buses were chosen by a significant number of respondents (32%), followed by private cars at 14.5%. Buses and private cars offer comfort and convenience, allowing travelers to rest during their journeys, especially for those with limited physical strength, long-distance destinations, or families with elderly members and children. Other means of transportation accounted for 4.5%.

**Preferred Travel Destinations for Experiential Travel**

The favorite destinations for Hanoi residents in terms of experiential travel were, in order: provinces and cities outside the Red River Delta region (69%), provinces within the Red River Delta region (56%), foreign countries (28%), and lastly, Hanoi city itself (21%). Since most respondents had already explored experiential tourism in Hanoi city and some provinces within the Red River Delta region, they desired to visit newer and more attractive destinations. The cost of trips played a role in their choices, with destinations in the Red River Delta region being less expensive than those outside it. Moreover, those with better economic conditions sought to travel abroad to broaden their knowledge and explore the differences between countries.

**Desired Experiential Activities**

Based on responses from 200 respondents, the study categorized the desired experiential activities into different groups. The first group is cultural exploration activities, including cooking and tasting local specialties, engaging in local activities, crafting souvenirs in traditional craft villages, cultural exchange, participation in traditional folk games, and festivals, as well as listening to stories about historical relics and heritage sites. Learning about different cultures, especially culinary cultures, has always been an attractive aspect of tourism for travelers. They not only want to taste but also delve into the process of cooking and the unique ingredients of each dish and region, guided directly by locals. This way, even after the trip, they can prepare these dishes for themselves, their families, and friends.

The second group comprises adventure and exploration activities, favored mainly by respondents in the 20 to 34 age group. Activities in this group include jungle or mountain exploration, cave exploration, cycling or trekking through forests, and exciting activities such as bungee jumping, river crossing in rubber boats, and cable sliding. These activities require physical fitness, skills, endurance, flexibility, determination, and courage to conquer challenges. To ensure safety in these adventurous activities, travelers are willing to invest more in terms of expenses compared to typical tours. They believe this is a reasonable cost to have unique and exciting experiences not accessible to everyone while ensuring their safety and peace of mind.
The third group encompasses sea and island-related experiences such as watching the sunrise at the beach, participating in water sports and beachside games, and coral reef diving. Some female respondents even mentioned watching the sunrise on the beach combined with yoga exercises as a special and worthwhile activity. Male respondents, on the other hand, preferred various water sports by the sea. Coral reef diving was a popular choice due to the allure and uniqueness of colorful coral reefs found in different marine regions. Each marine area offers different coral reefs, providing travelers with diverse experiences.

The fourth group consists of group activities and outdoor activities, such as team-building activities, camping, bonfires, outdoor barbecues, singing, and dancing. The monotony of group activities discourages travelers from choosing tours provided by travel companies. They always desire more group activities to bond group members. Camping and sleeping in tents by the beach or in the forest were preferred by many respondents, especially those aged 20 to 34. This age group is energetic, adventurous, and enjoys exploring, making these activities attractive to them.

The last group includes other activities, such as agricultural activities, rowing boats, and fishing. Some respondents, mostly females, mentioned shopping in famous traditional markets. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City were chosen by respondents for cultural exploration and personal shopping experiences. The ancient streets of Hanoi, contrasting with the modern shopping districts of Ho Chi Minh City, attract tourists for exploration and appreciation. Additionally, Thailand was a foreign destination chosen by respondents for shopping, with its famous night markets.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion
The analysis results have revealed the current status of participation in experiential tourism activities and the demand for experiential travel among the residents of Hanoi. In recent years, Hanoi has seen significant development in tourism activities, with an increasing standard of living among its residents, resulting in a substantial growth in the demand for travel. However, this demand goes beyond traditional leisure and sightseeing activities; it requires experiences, learning, exploration, and more challenges. Consequently, the residents of Hanoi are shifting towards a new trend in travel - experiential tourism. Culinary tourism, adventure tourism, and island tourism are the preferred forms of tourism for many travelers. Nevertheless, despite the high consumer demand, the majority of residents tend to organize trips independently, with fewer participating in tours offered by travel companies. Furthermore, the demand for experiential tourism varies among different demographic groups, with the age group of 20 to 34 being the most active in experiential travel. Within this category, motorbike usage is the most prevalent means of transportation. Additionally, the research results indicate that most of the desired experiential travel destinations for Hanoi residents are within the country. The desired activities for experiential travel include cultural exploration, adventure and exploration activities, island-related experiences, outdoor group activities, and some agricultural-related activities.

Recommendations
Travel companies operating in Hanoi should conduct surveys and explore experiential tourism products in Hanoi as well as in other provinces. They should establish strong connections with the distinctive characteristics of each region to help travelers perceive the uniqueness and novelty compared to traditional tours. Travel companies should design tours that are compatible with the
timing of departure (holidays, Tet, summer vacations) and the duration of stay (from 3 to 7 days) to ensure that travelers do not become bored or fatigued. Offering distinctive and unique tour programs with new and captivating experiences is essential to attract self-organized groups and solo travelers. Companies should design separate tours for different demographic groups, especially female travelers and families traveling together, as female travelers are increasingly traveling more and are willing to spend more than male travelers. Therefore, creating tours tailored to their preferences is likely to attract the attention of this potential customer group. For families, tours should include activities that allow family members to experience together in a comfortable and cozy environment, combined with outdoor group activities to foster social relationships within the group.

Culinary tourism, island tourism, and adventure tourism are preferred choices for Hanoi residents, gradually replacing mundane and monotonous agricultural activities in the past. Therefore, travel companies should consider and incorporate related experiential activities into their tour programs to stimulate the interests of residents. Moreover, companies should offer alternatives to traditional accommodation options such as camping, tenting, or unique homestays to enhance satisfaction and attract customers.

Collaborating with reputable domestic airlines ensures finding the best routes and prices for customers. Partnering between travel companies and established domestic airlines is a common method to stimulate tourism demand. This enables the creation of tours in provinces outside of the Red River Delta region at reasonable costs, thus garnering the attention of interested residents. Travel agencies must establish close cooperation with partners at the destination points where experiential activities take place, including homestay facilities, to ensure the provision of services to customers, achieve the highest levels of satisfaction, and anticipate and promptly resolve any potential issues, creating a sense of security and trust among customers. In addition, travel companies should select destinations suitable for different demographic groups, design unique and characteristic experiential activities for their company, and offer activities that align with the purpose of experiential travel and the age group of the customers. Suppliers of food services, such as restaurants and hotels, should ensure food safety and security for customers during food preparation and consumption of local dishes. For adventurous and exploration activities, mountain climbing, and other outdoor activities, having professional guides and ensuring the absolute safety of tourists are imperative.

Travel agencies also need to enhance the promotion of new experiential travel tours, exciting activities, and unique natural and cultural destinations through various means of communication, including brochures, social media platforms, and well-crafted video clips to attract viewers.

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