

Solutions of human resources for tourism development in Ninh Binh province in the new situation

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Giải pháp nhân lực cho phát triển du lịch Ninh Bình trong tình hình mới

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the current factors affecting human resources in different job positions in tourism sector in Ninh Binh province. It gives a thorough investigation into various factors affecting the quantity and quality of human resources currently as well as the future context of the tourism service industry in the province such as physical health, professional qualifications (including work experience, vocational skills and foreign language proficiency) as well as professional attitudes. By analyzing the statistical data, the paper results have indicated that, in order to enhance the local natural tourism potential and boost up the competence of the industry's workforce to meet the increasing demands of domestic and overseas tourists, one of the most crucial factors that needs to be constantly improved is human resources with quality in both physical and capability. However, due to both subjective and objective factors, the quality of human resources of the province's tourism industry is still ineffective, leading to several disadvantages on the development of local tourism. From these findings, a number of solutions and recommendations are proposed to elevate the perspectives of human resources, contributing to bringing the tourism industry of Ninh Binh province to higher level.

TÓM TẮT

Bài báo đi sâu phân tích các yếu tố tác động đến nhân lực ở các vị trí công việc khác nhau hiện nay tại các cơ sở kinh doanh du lịch của tỉnh Ninh Bình. Phân tích chi tiết các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến số lượng và chất lượng nhân lực hiện nay cũng như bối cảnh tương lai của ngành dịch vụ du lịch trên địa bàn tỉnh như sức khỏe thể chất, trình độ chuyên môn (gồm kinh nghiệm làm việc, kỹ năng nghề và năng lực ngoại ngữ) cũng như thái độ nghề nghiệp. Với việc phân tích số liệu thống kê, kết quả bài báo đã chỉ ra rằng, để tăng cường tiềm năng tự nhiên về du lịch của địa phương và nâng cao năng lực cạnh tranh của nhân lực du lịch đáp ứng yêu cầu ngày càng cao của du khách nội địa và quốc tế thì một trong những yếu tố quan trọng cần không ngừng được cải thiện là nguồn nhân lực có chất lượng cả về thể chất và năng lực. Tuy nhiên, do những yếu tố chủ quan và khách quan, chất lượng nguồn nhân lực du lịch của tỉnh vẫn còn chưa cao, dẫn đến một số tác động bất lợi đến sự phát triển của ngành du lịch tại địa phương. Từ kết quả nghiên cứu này, một số giải pháp, khuyến nghị được bài báo đưa ra nhằm nâng cao chất lượng nguồn nhân lực góp phần đưa ngành du lịch của tỉnh Ninh Bình lên tầm cao mới.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in general is really diverse and always needs many factors contributing to its performance including natural and cultural

potentials, state management, tourism infrastructure, and man power, etc. The industry's success or failure depends greatly on its human resources in terms of both quantity

and quality in response to the increasing demands of tourists. Human resources in tourism industry are the ones taking part in all activities and boosting it to develop, including both direct labors who deal with tourists and indirect ones who only hold the roles of management and regulation of tourist activities. Human resources are the decisive factor for the achievement of any economic sector in general and qualified manpower in tourism in particular, and the significant motivation producing impressive tourist products and services so as to satisfy both domestic and oversea visitors.

Ninh Binh province is a deltaic province to the Northeastern of Vietnam, about 90 km from Hanoi Capital, with its reputation for many famous tourist landscapes and hotspots. The province is regarded as an ideal destination for holidays because of its convenience with transport from the Capital and other places; its fantastic natural picturesque landscapes and cultural historical values. From the place, tourists are also able to travel to its neighboring provinces which are also famous for tourism such as Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa... so Ninh Binh has a potential to develop many categories of tourist services. The province's tourism sector has its own advantages in attracting tourists to charming natural landscapes, diverse cultures and historical heritages and scaffolds of the province to maintain its position as a "tourist satellite urban" of Hanoi as its convenience for increasing weekend trips.

Also, Ninh Binh is a famous tourist destination with a myriad of historical lyrics built in unique architectural styles such as Trang An Complex, Hoa Lu Ancient Citedal, Phat Diem Stone Cathedral, Bai Dinh Pagoda, etc. In terms of cultural diversity, according to the statistics, the province owns over 300 intangible cultural heritages covering almost

categories of which cultural ceremonies occupying a large portion with about 220 ones. These are Hoa Lu Ancient Citedal Ceremony, Thai Vy Pagoda Ceremony, Dich Long Pagoda Ceremony, Bai Dinh Ceremony, Trang An Ceremony and so forth. Ninh Binh's traditional handicraft villages are also one of the attractive tourist destinations for tourist, especially foreign ones including Van Lam Embroidery Village, Kim Son Sedge Weaving Village, Ninh Van Stone Sculpture, Bo Bat Ancient Pottery Village... These greatly contribute to the variety of the colorful tourism of Ninh Binh. In terms of local cuisines, the province has a prestige for its many popular dishes such as goat meat, *com chay* (rice crust at the bottom of the pot), Gia Vien shrimp paste, etc. With the shelter of seven ethnic minority groups, there are a diversity of traditional cultural values, and each of which contains its own unique identities to attract tourists' interest, especially on ceremonies.

Despite its both cultural and natural potentials for the development of tourism, Ninh Binh is not able to attract tourists at its full capacity. The number of visitors is not as high as expectation; the time length of staying is short; tourist services are not diverse and satisfying as expectation, and so on [1]. One of the main causes triggering such drawbacks in the sector is the quality of human resources which are showing their disadvantageous situation in terms of mental health, mental ability and career interest. As a result, in order to support the tourism industry to thrive as it should be, it is vital for the province to pay more attention to deal with issues related to labours effectively because human resources are a significant component in any fields. From the above analysis, a deeper insight into solutions of human resources to tourism development in Ninh Binh province in the new situations is extremely necessary.

Table 1. The general statistics of tourism in Ninh Binh 2018-2023

Year	Visitors (<i>person</i>)	Revenue (<i>million</i>)	Staff (<i>person</i>)
2018	7,370,200	3,213,293	21,100
2019	7,659,000	3,671,051	21,480
2020	2,760,000	1,583,275	14,500
2021	1,325,350	681,988	9,600
2022	3,720,985	3,207,000	19,500
2023 (1 st half)	4,532,500	2,879,272	20,650

Source: Ninh Binh Department of Tourism [2]

2. RESEARCH METHODS

Carrying out the study, the researchers aim to collect data on the current factors of human resources working in different tourist premises of tourism sector in Ninh Binh province by exploring the factors affecting either directly or indirectly the development of human resources in tourism and then suggesting several feasible measures in order to boost up the quality of human resources- the key component of Ninh Binh's tourism sector. In order to implement the study, these two research questions need to be answered:

1. *What are the theoretical and practical basis to evaluate the current human resources in tourism sector?*

2. *What are the factors affecting the quality and performance of human resources in tourism sector and the solutions?*

Methods of data collection and data analysis

Secondary data: In this study, the researchers collect the secondary data covering all the information about the current situation of human resources staffing in tourism sector of the province in the period of 2018-2023 in terms of quantity, performance and structure. The data is collected mainly from the published scientific findings, issued statistics and other legal documents, reports given by the State management organizations including Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Ninh Binh Department of Tourism and other state offices.

Primary data: In order to gain information about the human resources working in the tourism sector, the researchers collect the

primary data by delivering questionnaire sheets to the managers working in the state administrative offices (10 persons) and the staff holding different positions in 20 tourist premises scattering in the province (190 persons). The study subjects to be provided with questionnaire sheets are state officials, premises' managers and workers. The total number of sheets are 200. Among which, 20 random tourist premises in the area, around 7-10 individuals of each premise are selected to do the survey with 30 samples designed for managers and the other 160 samples designed for workers. In terms of data collection method, the random sampling is preferable due to its representative features which are typical for all components. This method can be regarded as the effective one to pick out one sample which can represent for the whole. In detail, the study applies the method of stratified random sampling. Regarding data analysis, the researchers apply several methods:

Contrasting method: It is used to evaluate the surveyed results, analyze and synthesize the variables in comparison with some fixed criteria namely chronological criteria and spatial criteria.

Descriptive statistics method: This relates to the examination of features of variables in order to conclude the relationship among those variables of the same type. It is applied to describe and analyze the quantity and structure of the workforce in the tourism premises.

Exploratory Factor Analysis method (EFA): This method helps analyze the factors via principle components and allows to reduce

many related variables into typical ones which are presented in a linear relationship known as factors.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Features of tourism human resources in Ninh Binh province

According to Van Dinh Nguyen và Thi Minh Hoa Tran (2008) [3], “human resources in tourism sectors can be understood as both direct and indirect workforce impacting tourist industry and tourism premises whose”. Workforce in tourism sectors (Son Hai Tran, 2010) [4] includes all employees participating in tourism development, including direct and indirect workers to provide services to serve tourists. Human resources in the sector of the province are reflected in terms of quantity, quality and distribution. It is widely known to have its own special nature and features as it is non-material production. This sector requires a large number of staff with various levels of qualifications, expertise and professional abilities due to the fact that it does not require much of mechanization in supplying diverse types of services to distinctive customers. Hence, human resources in the field include the following typical features.

Firstly, it has high professionalization which means that its division of professional tasks and fields is relatively distinct. Each part of the system has its own effects on the others and provision of good services to tourists. As a result, it is required that each part must be

professionalized in performances of jobs done by workforce.

Secondly, there is a higher proportion of young workers, female staff and temporary workforce working in this sector as opposed to other sectors. So, it is required that working staff in tourism must be physically healthy, dynamic and active.

Thirdly, it has its own working hours which depends much on the nature of service consumption of tourists. Customers in tourism are diverse in terms of nationalities, cultures, customs and motivations for travelling so that tourism sector must have much flexibility in dealing with customers done by trained workforce.

Lastly, the majority of business in tourism relates to direct communication and dealing with customers to fulfill the satisfaction of them. As a result, the service quality provided to visitors depends on not only the knowledge and skills of staff but also their attitude to the job.

3.2. Current situations of Ninh Binh’s tourism human resources

It is widely reckoned that tourism sector has its own remarkable achievements, brings about significant incomes for local inhabitants and marks its leading position in the province’s economy. In terms of quantity of working labors, owing to the development of the sector, the number of tourist premises is increasing, which also requires higher number of workers.

Table 2. The number of tourism staff at tourism premises in Ninh Binh (2018 – 2023)

Measured in: Person

Year	Total number of staff	Staff			
		Indirect staff		Direct staff	
		Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)
2018	21,100	13,940	66.07	7,160	33.93
2019	21,480	15,950	78.30	5,530	21.70
2020	14,500	10,420	71.86	4,080	28.14
2021	9,600	7,000	72.92	2,600	27.08
2022	19,500	13,900	71.28	5,600	28.72
2023 (1 st half)	20,650	11,900	57.6	8,750	42.4

Source: Ninh Binh Tourism Department [2]

According to the statistics surveyed up to June, 2023 [2], the province has around 20,650 staff, of which 8,750 are direct workers who participated directly into doing business and 11,900 are indirect ones who hold positions as managers and assistants of the sector. However, until the end of 2021, there was a sharp decline in the number of working in the provincial tourism as the Covid-19 pandemics was spreading massively and impacted greatly on all tourism activities in the province. Because the demand for travelling of tourists decreased drastically during such period, the number of tourism enterprises and workers eventually reduced wildly. Many staff were either cut off or sacked due to less demand of vacancy or left the job owing to being redundant or low payment. Luckily, turning into the beginning of 2022, it witnessed a positively gradual recovery in tourism industry in general and the provincial sector in particular in terms of both tourist enterprises and working staff as a result of the epidemic control and treatment.

Regarding of quality of staff, according to Luong Chieu Tuan (2018) [6], it was evaluated basing on several demographic features of workers including health, capabilities (professional skills and soft skills), foreign language competency, working experience and attitudes (responsibility, psychological matters, and endurance under pressure). Mentioning health, contrasting the criteria issued by Ministry of Health, the surveyed staff working in tourism field are generally healthy enough to fulfill their working vacancies. Almost a fifth of the surveyed staff are in really good health condition (type 1), over 67% of the workers are in relatively good health condition (type 2) and the 12.5% have average health but they are still able to perform working schedules without trouble. Moreover, the quality of tourism staff is also based on their mental capabilities which

comprise general education, professional and vocational abilities, soft skills, and foreign languages. The figure for the staff who do not complete high school level accounts for a quarter while the value of those who are trained at vocational schools and colleges of tourism stands at just over 47%. The proportion of staff who complete tertiary level of tourism is insignificant (6.9%). Regarding soft skills, although this type of skills has been evolved over the time, it has not still met fully the increasing demands of the field and the group of staff owing these skills focuses mainly on management posts at tourism enterprises. Mentioning foreign language competence, around 70% of the surveyed staff are able to use English as a means of job performance although Chinese and other foreign languages are also the barrier in doing their jobs. Besides, working experiences are also a significant criterion in evaluating the staff's quality. The statistics shows that the figure for those who have over 5 years of working makes up only about 12%. Lastly, it is the attitude of tourism workers to their job fulfillment. They are generally qualified to the vacancies with good attitude such as nice behavior to customers and colleagues, good responsibility, patience and so forth.

In terms of labor distribution of staff, it is analyzed in the light of several features of workers and the tourism sector including professional abilities, professional posts, genders, and ages. There is an uneven allocation of staff of professional abilities meaning that the portion of staff who have tertiary level of education occupies a very small percentage (less 7%). In addition, the rate of direct working staff and indirect one reflects a quite big difference which reveals that the percentage of indirect labors are still much higher than their counterpart.

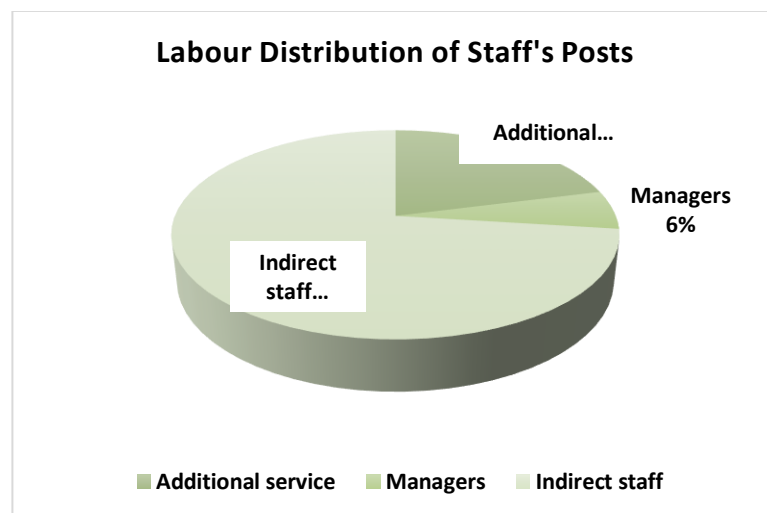


Figure 1. The labor distribution of tourism staff in Ninh Binh 2018-2023
(Measured in: percentage)

Also, there is a concentration of workers in the field of food services and restaurants accounting for nearly three-quarters (74.3%). With regard to staff's ages, it is relatively similar to other places with a typical distribution of male workers holding posts in tour guides and food processing and female workers in room services and reception. Mentioning working ages, the number of surveyed staff aged under 25% represents over 26% while the group aged 25-40 is equal to just over 60% of the total.

3.3. General evaluation of Ninh Binh's tourism human resources

Looking at the survey, it is revealed that, the current situation of tourism human resources in the province has shown relatively positive scenario over the past few years. Firstly, illustrated in terms of quantity, there has been an increase over the years with only the exception of the period when the Covid-19 attacked the province. Secondly, the quality of the working staff has also been improved relatively significantly with better qualifications, and both soft and working skills, and better attitude to job performances, etc. [1]. Thirdly, the vacancy distribution has been improved with more proper adjustment in terms of degrees, professional capabilities, genders and ages in order to meet the demand of the sector's development.

However, there has still been several downsides of tourism staff that should be seriously tackled with an aim to enhancing the sector's potentials. The first weakness is that, despite its increase of labor quantity, the speed is still in a gently slow pace in comparison with the increasing demand of development. Next, though better quality of working staff, they are not at full capacity of performance due to the barriers of professional knowledge, skills and experiences, which are always under the pressure of continuous improvement exerted by the tourism sector. Also, staff's training and retraining for fulfillment of knowledge and vocational skills are still paid little attention of both staff and employers. Moreover, the working conditions and facilities at tourism enterprises may be an obstacle for workers to utilize their abilities and performances.

3.4. Suggested solutions to improve the quality of tourism human resources in Ninh Binh province

The research's findings show that aside from the strengths of human resources in tourism sectors, there have still been many downsides that require feasible remedies, including the proper planning and reliable predictions, perfection of policies and mechanisms, tourism enterprises' solutions, labor attraction, and local authority's supports.

Firstly, it is so significant for the province's

tourism sector to make synchronic and proper plans, and perfect their own reliable predictions of labor to meet the demand of employment at tourism. Despite its development, the current situation of staff is showing several drawbacks. This is mainly because the sector does not have suitable and massive plans in order to fulfill the development tendency. Hence, proper planning and projecting for labor demand at enterprises in the next 5-10 years are crucial [5]. They must comprise roughly precise statistics, analysis, and assessment of employees in all angles of quantity, quality (professional knowledge, skills, attitudes), distribution (locations, ages, genders), and so on.

Secondly, it is essential for the province to perfect its largely-scaled policies and mechanisms with the aim of attracting more high quality staff to meet the demand of enterprises. This can be regarded as a crucial and decisive measure to allure more qualified workers by issuing suitable policies of employment, education and reeducation, payment and welfare. In terms of employment policies, in the trend of development in the future, the sector's labor distribution is likely to change continuously with the emergence of new posts. As a result, the provincial authorities should issue the list of job vacancies with clear criteria applied in tourism sector to guide tourism enterprises to recruit and use workers properly. With regard to policies of professional training and labor security, there is a typical situation that although the sector uses various types of employees belonging to different fields, they must meet the criteria of providing best services with their best professional skills and nice attitudes. Therefore, they must be trained or retrained systematically, basically and continuously. It is important for the province to make plans for training in the next 5-10 years to meet the demand of the sector's development. It is much better and beneficial for the province to cooperate with educational institutions in educating and training human resources. Besides, in order to allure more qualified staff

to tourism, payment policies are also vital as it is a direct way to attract and motivate workers to devote the best effort and abilities.

Thirdly, the provincial authorities and tourism sector need to issue proposal plans in the long run to improve staff's physical and mental health and intellectual power, because this matter will decide how much effective and productive they perform. So, it is so significant for local authorities and enterprises hold regular health testing for workers, especially the direct labor in order to exert suitable measures. In carrying their jobs, staff may contact to many disease sources and suffer lots of stress and strain so the timing disease screening is a really useful tool to curb the problem. In addition, ensuring staff's mental health is really crucial as it determines the output of their jobs. With proper policies and incentives, employees will feel excited and motivated to contribute more time, effort and intellectual to their job fulfillment. They should be provided with timing praise, mental support, empathy, rewards... from their managers and local authorities. It is also important to notice the mental barriers such as stress, pressure, sadness, etc., which interfere and lower their working performance. In terms of intellectual power, regular training or retraining in exacerbate staff's knowledge and skills is an effective way to have better human resources. The local authorities and enterprises should have good long-term strategies and plans to hold training courses, programs or send staff to other educational institutions to be trained. They should also be tested on regular basis as a way to assess precisely their capabilities and skills. Enterprises need to negotiate with educational and training institutions to agree on proper training curricula to fulfill what the sector and enterprises need.

Fourthly, it is really significant for the province and tourism enterprises to attract high quality human resources and allocate labor effectively. It is undeniable that human resources play a crucial role in tourism service supplying and it affects directly on the satisfaction of tourists. As a result, qualified

human force should always be put forward in the sector's development strategies and it must be harnessed effectively and wisely. In order to create a decisive factor for the growth of tourism, the province and enterprises need to have feasible measures and strategies to attract more qualified staff in all job positions in management, hotel, restaurant, kitchen, booking office, etc. Moreover, high payments, timing rewards, good working environment and welfares are always necessary for any staff to be loyal to the job and devote greatly to their job fulfillment.

Lastly, the local authorities and organizations should be aware of the importance and roles of human resource development to catch up with the trend and criteria of the sector. When they are aware of this, they will certainly pay sufficient attention and investment in improving the labor quality because tourism enterprises or staff are not able to perform their tasks well enough themselves without clear planning and regulations, timing supports from the local government and organizations.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Ninh Binh's image of tourism has been improved much over the past years in the eyes of both domestic and international visitors with the increasing annual turnover and higher number of tourists [6]. This current situation imposes the higher pressure on the improvement of human resources at tourism enterprises in provincial scale. In this tourism industry, human resources play a significant role in boosting up the sector's prestige, local economy, employment and so on. They are the employees who perform in doing business, exploiting tourist potentials, contributing to the local revenues, especially, propagandizing traditions, customs and cultures of the country

to the world. It is really vital to analyze and evaluate precisely the features, capabilities and roles of staff in tourism industry, as all of these can be regarded as practical basis to issue feasible measures to improve the labor's quality. Although the human resources in tourism sector of the province in general have showed positive aspects of its development course, the current situation of staff still needs more improvement, in terms of both quality and quantity including professional knowledge, skills, health, etc. In order to boost up the human resources to meet the demand of tourists and society, there should be sufficient proper solutions issued by both the local government and tourism enterprises with an aim of opening a new horizon to the local tourism sector.

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