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Tourism as a Poverty Alleviation Strategy:
Opportunities and Barriers for Creating Backward Economic
Linkages in Lang Co, Vietnam.

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the potential for using tourism as a poverty alleviation strategy in the context of Vietnam and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). The theoretical basis for this research stems from the growing recognition within development rhetoric of the place of tourism as a key industry in many developing nations, and the formation of a Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) approach. The fieldwork section of this thesis looks at the barriers and opportunities for those in the poorer communities of Lang Co, a small town on the central east coast of Vietnam, to supply the burgeoning tourism industry with locally produced products that are compatible with their current livelihood strategies.

Results show that there are many opportunities for the poor to benefit from the rapidly growing tourism industry in Vietnam and the region. There is a strong recognition of tourism in national and regional development strategies, there is a rich cultural, environmental and social context driving the tourism industry and there are several initiatives taking place, such as the Vietnamese National Tourism Law, which include many elements of pro-poor tourism principles. However, this thesis has found many barriers also prevent poorer people from benefiting from tourism. In the case of Lang Co, the poor were often limited in their ability to participate in the industry by debt and lack of access to credit, lack of education and training opportunities, a declining natural resource base and by a lack of awareness and participation in the planning of the tourism industry. More widely, the tourism industry is centrally driven and focused on high growth and large infrastructure type developments which in some cases conflict with the principles of PPT and the ability of people at the ground level to participate.

This research highlights the complexity of attempting to use tourism as a poverty reduction strategy given the wide range of stakeholders involved and various levels involved in the planning and implementation of the tourism industry. The potential applicability of a concept of pro-poor tourism in a rapidly changing context such as Vietnam is contingent on the ability of the poor to have influence on an industry which is having an increasing effect on their lives and livelihoods.

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Glossary of Abbreviations Used

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APEC	Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation Group
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BIC	Bank Information Center
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CBT	Community Based Tourism
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPC	Commune People's Committee
DFID	Department For International Development (U.K)
<i>Doi Mo</i>	Renovation
DOT	(Vietnamese) Department of Tourism
DPI	Department for Planning and Investment
DPC	District People's Committee
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
GAD	Gender and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
GTZ	German Development Organisation
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
IIED	International Institute for Economic Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund

ICRT	International Center for Responsible Tourism
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MTCO	Mekong Tourism Coordination Office
NTA	National Tourism Association
NGO	Non Government Organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPT	Pro Poor Tourism
SPS	Safeguard Policy Statement
SME	Small to Medium Enterprise
SNV	The Netherlands Bilateral Development Organisation
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
ST-EP	Sustainable Tourism – Eliminate Poverty (programme of the UNWTO).
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
VCA	Value Chain Analysis
VND	Vietnamese Dong (currency)
VNAT	Vietnamese National Association of Tourism
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council