

HO CHI MINH NATIONAL ACADEMY OF POLITICS

BUI XUAN TUNG

**COMPETITIVENESS OF THE TOURISM DESTINATION
IN NINH BINH PROVINCE**

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

FIELD OF STUDY: ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT

ID: 9340410

HANOI - 2025

**The work was completed at
Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics**

Academic Advisor: Assoc.Prof., PhD Nguyen Manh Hung



1st reviewer: Assoc.Prof., PhD Hoang Xuan Binh

Foreign Trade University

2nd reviewer: Assoc.Prof., PhD Do Anh Duc

National Economics University

3rd reviewer: Assoc.Prof., PhD Phan Minh Duc

Academy of Journalism and Communication

**The dissertation was defended before the Academy-level
Dissertation Assessment Council meeting at the Ho Chi Minh National
Academy of Politics**

At the beginning 08:30 AM on July 17, 2025



**The dissertation can be accessed at: The National Library and the Library of
the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics**

INTRODUCTION

1. The necessity of the topic

In the context of globalization and integration, tourism has become one of the fastest-growing service industries and a fiercely competitive sector among destinations. The competitiveness of a destination depends not only on its natural and cultural resources but also on infrastructure, services, human resources, technology, safety, and visitor experience. In Vietnam, tourism is identified as a key economic sector, with impressive growth before the pandemic and strong recovery in 2023.

Within this landscape, Ninh Binh has emerged as an attractive destination thanks to its favorable location, distinctive natural and cultural resources particularly the Trang An Landscape Complex, a UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage Site. In recent years, Ninh Binh's tourism industry has grown rapidly, with increased investment in infrastructure and services, earning multiple international recognitions as a leading destination. However, this fast growth also presents challenges: tourism products remain overlapping and lack differentiation, infrastructure is not yet fully synchronized, high-quality human resources are insufficient, promotional efforts are still ineffective, while the pressure of heritage and environmental conservation is increasingly intense.

Provincial authorities play a crucial role in enhancing destination competitiveness through policymaking, planning, management, and coordination among stakeholders. Nevertheless, from a research perspective, there remains a theoretical gap, as few in-depth and systematic studies have been conducted on provincial-level destination competitiveness, particularly regarding state management roles. Most existing studies focus on assessing potential and current situations, lacking the application of modern theoretical models to measure and analyze the components of competitiveness.

Therefore, studying the destination competitiveness of Ninh Binh's tourism is both scientifically and practically significant. Scientifically, it helps clarify the concept, structure, evaluation criteria, and interrelations among factors; practically, it supports the province in formulating development strategies and enhancing its competitive position regionally and globally.

For these reasons, the author has chosen "Competitiveness of the Tourism Destination in Ninh Binh Province" as the doctoral dissertation in Economic Management.

2. Research Objectives, Tasks, and Questions

Research Objective: The dissertation systematizes and supplements the theoretical framework on provincial-level destination competitiveness. Based on the analysis and assessment of the current state of Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness, the study identifies the achievements, limitations, and underlying causes, and simultaneously proposes solutions and recommendations to enhance Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness, contributing to the province's socio-economic development toward 2030, with a vision to 2035.

Research Questions

- What are the contents, constituent elements, and evaluation criteria of provincial-level tourism destination competitiveness?
- What are the roles of provincial governments in enhancing destination competitiveness at the provincial level?
- What is the current situation of Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness? What are its limitations, and what are the causes of these limitations?

- In which direction should Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness be improved? What are the proposed solutions to enhance Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness in the coming period?

Research Tasks

To achieve the above objective, the research process accomplished the following tasks:

First, it provides an overview of domestic and international studies related to the research topic, thereby identifying theoretical and practical gaps in the existing literature, which serve as the foundation for proposing the research orientation of the dissertation.

Second, it systematizes, supplements, and clarifies the theoretical framework of provincial-level tourism destination competitiveness, with a focus on analyzing and elucidating the concepts, characteristics, and components of destination competitiveness, as well as the roles of provincial governments in enhancing it.

Third, it analyzes the experiences of several provinces and cities in improving destination competitiveness, drawing lessons applicable to Ninh Binh.

Fourth, it analyzes and evaluates the current situation of Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness, identifying the achievements, limitations, and underlying causes of those limitations.

Fifth, based on the new context, development goals, and orientations for Ninh Binh's tourism sector, the dissertation proposes directions and solutions to enhance the province's tourism destination competitiveness toward 2030, with a vision to 2035.

3. Research Subject and Scope

The object of this dissertation is the theoretical and practical issues related to the tourism destination competitiveness of Ninh Binh Province.

Regarding the scope of the research subjects: The study focuses on the provincial government (the Provincial People's Council and the Provincial People's Committee), along with specialized agencies whose functions and responsibilities are related to the tourism sector - primarily the Department of Tourism and several other relevant departments and sectors that assist the Provincial People's Council and the Provincial People's Committee in managing this field.

Regarding the content scope: The research mainly concentrates on clarifying the key aspects of tourism destination competitiveness in Ninh Binh Province, including: the components of destination competitiveness, the role of local government in enhancing tourism destination competitiveness, and the criteria for evaluating provincial-level tourism destination competitiveness. The research subject is approached from the perspective of economic management.

Regarding the spatial scope: The study focuses on tourism destinations at the provincial level, specifically by collecting and analyzing data and statistics related to the tourism sector within Ninh Binh Province.

Regarding the temporal scope: The dissertation focuses on the period from 2015 to 2023 and proposes solutions to enhance tourism destination competitiveness toward 2030, with a vision to 2035. The choice of 2015 as the starting point for the research period is associated with two key milestones. First, 2015 marks the time when the Trang An Landscape Complex—officially recognized by UNESCO in 2014 as Vietnam's first mixed Cultural and Natural World Heritage Site—became the

focus of intensified efforts in conservation, promotion, and utilization of its values in Ninh Binh's tourism development strategy. Second, 2015 also marks the beginning of a new term of the Provincial Party Congress, during which Ninh Binh's tourism development orientation was more clearly defined as an important economic sector with targeted investments and specific support policies. This period is therefore a crucial stage in planning and implementing provincial tourism development policies, reflecting the local government's commitment and role in promoting destination competitiveness.

4. Research Methodology

- Regarding the research overview, the author applies synthesis and analytical methods to identify existing results and issues that have been clarified in previous studies, thereby determining the gaps and questions that the dissertation needs to further investigate and develop.

- Based on theoretical and practical foundations related to destination competitiveness, the dissertation combines descriptive, analytical, and synthetic methods to identify the core components of provincial-level tourism destination competitiveness.

- The dissertation employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing secondary data collected from reputable sources. Based on statistical data from relevant agencies and organizations, the author analyzes and evaluates information and compares it with primary data obtained from independent research findings. After data collection, the information is classified, selected, and organized into statistical tables and diagrams for analysis. In addition, to reinforce the qualitative assessments, the author applies a quantitative method using a linear regression model to evaluate the factors constituting the tourism destination competitiveness of Ninh Binh Province.

- Based on the collected data and the combination of synthesis and analytical methods, the dissertation proposes solutions to enhance Ninh Binh Province's tourism destination competitiveness toward 2030, with a vision to 2035.

5. Scientific Contributions of the Dissertation

**** Theoretical Contributions:***

Building upon previous research findings, the dissertation inherits five components that constitute the provincial-level tourism destination competitiveness, while adding and emphasizing four key roles of the provincial government in enhancing destination competitiveness from the perspective of economic management: Formulating policies and planning; Destination management; Destination development; Inspection, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation.

The dissertation also inherits and further develops an evaluation criteria framework across three dimensions: Assessment of tourism performance outcomes; Assessment of the constituent factors of provincial-level destination competitiveness; Assessment of the roles of the provincial government in enhancing tourism destination competitiveness.

The clarification and addition of the four roles of the provincial government in improving tourism destination competitiveness, together with the development of the tourism destination competitiveness evaluation framework, represent the novel contributions of this dissertation.

**** Practical Contributions:***

Based on the analysis and assessment of the current situation, the dissertation

identifies five achievements in Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness (Tourism performance has been positive, with the destination's appeal continuing to grow. The province has effectively utilized and promoted its inherent advantages in natural and cultural resources. The Ninh Binh provincial government has paid close attention to formulating development strategies and provincial planning, while simultaneously implementing comprehensive destination development strategies. Inspection, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation activities have also been given due attention) and four limitations (The province has not yet attracted major partners or large international corporations with strong financial capacity and experience in tourism development; There are still limitations in physical and technical infrastructure, especially in high-end services and entertainment areas; There is a shortage of human resources with appropriate professional qualifications and skills for the tourism sector; Some organizations and individuals have not fully complied with legal regulations in tourism activities). The dissertation also clearly identifies two groups of causes for the above limitations, thereby proposing solutions to enhance the tourism destination competitiveness of Ninh Binh Province in the new stage of development.

6. Structure of the Dissertation

Apart from the introduction, conclusion, list of references, and appendices, the main content of the dissertation is structured into five chapters.

Chapter 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. STUDIES RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

1.1.1. Overview of Studies Related to Provincial-Level Tourism Destinations

* *Studies on the concept of tourism destinations:* There have been many studies with different approaches to interpreting the concept of a tourism destination. One of the more widely accepted definitions is provided in the Vietnam Law on Tourism (2017), which defines a "tourism site" as "a place with tourism resources that are invested in and developed to serve tourists."

* *Studies related to the structure and characteristics of tourism destinations:* Depending on the specific study and methodological approach, the structure and characteristics of a tourism destination are identified differently. International studies often focus on a structure that includes the following key components: Attractions, Accessibility, Amenities, Ancillary services. Meanwhile, some studies on tourism destinations in Vietnam tend to emphasize natural and cultural resources as the most significant factors.

1.1.2. Overview of Studies Related to the Competitiveness of Provincial-Level Tourism Destinations

* *Studies related to the concept and components of tourism destination competitiveness:* Crouch and Ritchie (1999), in their study "Tourism, Competitiveness, and Societal Prosperity," define tourism destination competitiveness as the ability of a locality to provide unique tourism experiences that meet visitor expectations while maintaining or enhancing the economic and social well-being of the local community. The study "Destination Competitiveness: Determinants and Indicators" by Dwyer and

Kim (2003) expands on this concept, emphasizing that competitiveness is not solely based on natural and cultural resources but also includes supporting capabilities such as infrastructure, governance policies, and effective marketing. According to Pham Trung Luong (2015), destination competitiveness is the ability to effectively utilize natural and artificial resources to deliver tourism products that meet domestic and international visitors' demands while generating socio-economic benefits. In the context of Vietnam, destination competitiveness largely depends on coordination among stakeholders, with a particular emphasis on the role of the State.

Components of Tourism Destination Competitiveness: By synthesizing previous research findings, this dissertation classifies the key components of tourism destination competitiveness into five main groups: Core resources and attractions; Supporting factors and resources; Destination policy, planning and development; Destination management; Qualifying and amplifying determinants.

**** Studies Related to Models and Theories of Tourism Destination Competitiveness:***

According to Michael Porter's (1990) analysis, competitive advantage can only be achieved through cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. Applying Porter's Five Forces Model to the analysis of a tourism destination's competitiveness, we can consider the following key factors: the threat of substitute destinations, the pressure of substitute products, the bargaining power of tourists, the bargaining power of suppliers, and industry rivalry. According to the Resource-Based Theory, a tourism destination must identify and develop unique resources and capabilities to maintain competitiveness. An effective combination of leveraging existing assets, enhancing management capacity, and fostering innovation enables a destination to attract visitors and create a competitive advantage in the market. Applying the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, a destination's competitiveness depends not only on available resources but also on its ability to respond quickly to changes in tourist demands and market trends.

The Ritchie and Crouch model of destination competitiveness views competitiveness as a synthesis of comparative advantage and competitive advantage. Comparative advantage is determined by the destination's resource base (natural or cultural attractions) and supporting resources (infrastructure, etc.), while competitive advantage focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency of managing and utilizing those resources. The Kim (2003) model emphasizes that destination management including the effectiveness of policies, strategies, and service provision is the core factor determining competitiveness. The Heath (2003) model focuses on developing specific, long-term competitive strategies tailored to the actual context of each destination, which helps sustain and enhance competitiveness. At the same time, close collaboration is considered a key element to ensure support and consensus throughout the implementation process.

From the above perspectives, it can be seen that the concept of competition is diverse. However, there is a common understanding that competition serves as one of the essential driving forces promoting economic, social, and innovative development. Therefore, the Ritchie and Crouch model of tourism destination competitiveness is considered a suitable framework for analyzing, testing, and evaluating the factors that constitute provincial-level tourism destination competitiveness, thanks to its

comprehensive and flexible nature.

**** Studies Related to Evaluation Criteria for Provincial-Level Tourism Destination Competitiveness***

The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) developed by the World Economic Forum (WEF) analyzes the key factors determining tourism competitiveness, which are grouped into four main categories: improvement of the business environment, enhancement of tourism policies and enabling conditions, infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources. The Vietnam Tourism Competitiveness Index (VTCI) is an evaluation tool developed to measure and compare the competitiveness of the tourism industry across provinces and cities in Vietnam. The index groups include indicators assessing the business environment, health and hygiene, human resources and labor market, priority given to travel and tourism, sustainability of the environment, tourism infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources.

**** Studies Related to the Role of Provincial Governments in Enhancing Tourism Destination Competitiveness***

According to Dwyer (2000), the provincial government serves as the central authority responsible for developing tourism policies and destination planning. According to the Law on Tourism, the State implements policies to mobilize all available resources for tourism development in order to ensure that tourism becomes a key economic sector of the country. Planning not only helps localities attract tourists but also ensures that tourism development does not negatively affect the environment or local communities.

In studies related to destination management, provincial authorities are responsible for the conservation of tourism resources. They must establish an effective tourism management apparatus, responsible for advising on and implementing tourism development policies within the province. In addition, provincial governments need to properly manage tourism business activities. In destination development strategies, there must be diversity and innovation in tourism product development. As highlighted in Nguyen Le Phuc (2022), collaboration and partnerships are essential to promote sustainable tourism development.

**** Studies on Tourism in Ninh Binh***

In the study “The Role of Provincial Governments in Sustainable Tourism Development in Ninh Binh Province” by Nguyen Manh Cuong (2016), the author provides an in-depth analysis of the role of the Ninh Binh provincial government in policymaking and management aimed at promoting sustainable tourism. Nguyen Anh Dung (2019) conducted a study assessing sustainable tourism development in Ninh Binh Province, developing a set of criteria encompassing economic, social, and environmental aspects. The dissertation by Nguyen Thi Minh Tan (2021) focuses on the integration between tourism economic development and environmental security in Ninh Binh. These studies have contributed to a better understanding of the relationship between sustainable development and tourism in Ninh Binh. However, all three have not yet delved deeply into analyzing the destination competitiveness of Ninh Binh Province. Further research in this area will provide a foundation for Ninh Binh to achieve stronger development and enhance its competitive position on both

the domestic and international tourism map.

1.2. ACHIEVED RESULTS AND RESEARCH GAPS

1.2.1. General Evaluation of Related Studies

The doctoral candidate conducted a review of previous studies related to the dissertation topic and drew several key findings from the existing research:

First, the studies have clarified the concept and components of provincial-level tourism destinations, providing a clear understanding of their definition and structure.

Second, the research works related to destination competitiveness at the provincial level have established a theoretical foundation regarding the concept, components, competitiveness models, as well as evaluation criteria and some roles of provincial governments in enhancing tourism destination competitiveness.

Third, the studies on Ninh Binh's tourism mainly focus on sustainable tourism development and ensuring environmental security in the province.

Fourth, the solutions for enhancing destination competitiveness proposed in previous studies are quite diverse, including aspects such as destination linkage and cooperation, and destination image and brand development.

1.2.2. Research Gap and Research Orientation of the Dissertation

From the overview and analysis of previous studies related to the dissertation topic, several research gaps can be identified as follows:

First, there is a lack of studies that clearly identify the characteristics, contents, and evaluation criteria of tourism destination competitiveness at the provincial level from the perspective of economic management. Previous research has mostly focused on identifying influencing factors or assessing only a few components, without conducting in-depth studies that apply modeling or quantitative methods to specifically evaluate the competitiveness level of the constituent factors of tourism destination competitiveness in Ninh Binh Province.

Second, there has been no separate or specific study on the roles of provincial governments in enhancing destination competitiveness. In particular, the roles of local authorities in policy-making, planning, destination management, and destination development have not been thoroughly discussed or analyzed in previous research.

Third, there has been no comprehensive or systematic study on the current state of Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness during the period 2015–2023 and in the following years. There is also no research proposing solutions to enhance Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness in the new context of the province and the country as it enters a new development phase.

The research gaps above reveal substantial unexplored areas. Based on these gaps, the dissertation focuses on the following research issues:

First, the dissertation approaches the topic from the perspective of economic management.

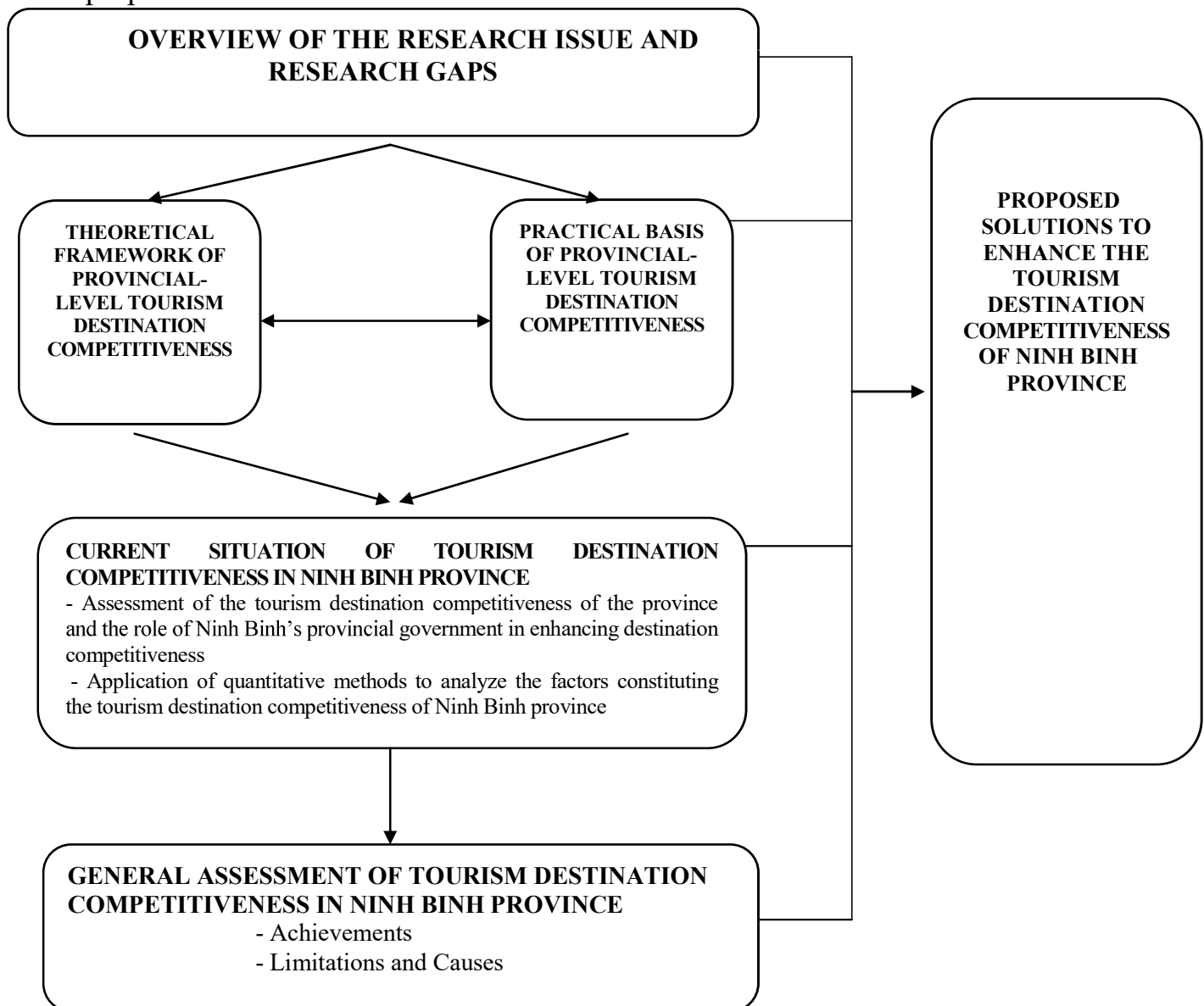
Second, based on constructing a theoretical framework for provincial-level tourism destination competitiveness, the dissertation analyzes and evaluates the current situation of Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness, with the provincial government as the main actor. It focuses on the government's roles in enhancing destination competitiveness, examined through four management functions: Policy formulation and planning; Destination management; Destination development; Inspection, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation.

Third, based on the Ritchie and Crouch (2003) model and additional factors

proposed from the theoretical framework, the dissertation employs quantitative methods and in-depth interviews to analyze and assess the competitiveness of the constituent factors of Ninh Binh's tourism destination competitiveness. However, many criteria in the Ritchie and Crouch (2003) model are more suitable for larger scales (regions or nations) and are not entirely applicable to a provincial context such as Ninh Binh. Therefore, to simplify and avoid duplication, some sub-criteria are streamlined or combined. The study proposes five constituent factors of provincial-level tourism destination competitiveness: Core resources and attractions; Supporting factors and resources; Destination policy, planning, and development; Destination management; Qualifying and amplifying determinants.

Fourth, the dissertation proposes specific solutions aimed at improving state management functions, including policy-making, planning, destination management, destination development, inspection, monitoring, and evaluation, to enhance Ninh Binh Province's tourism destination competitiveness.

Based on the above research issues, the analytical framework of the dissertation is proposed as follows:



Chapter 2

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL BASIS OF COMPETITIVENESS OF PROVINCIAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS

2.1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PROVINCIAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS

2.1.1. Concept of provincial tourism destination

Based on the synthesis of relevant definitions, this dissertation adopts the following definition: A provincial-level tourism destination is a locality-a province or city-that possesses attractive tourism resources, offers a variety of tourism products, and can attract and satisfy tourists who stay for at least one night.

2.1.2. Characteristics of Provincial-Level Tourism Destinations

A provincial tourism destination is shaped by two main groups of characteristics: natural and socio-economic. Natural characteristics play a crucial role in shaping and developing tourism destinations and include three key elements: natural resources, natural heritage, and geographical location. The socio-economic characteristics of a tourism destination reflect its level of development and potential to attract visitors, based on factors such as population, labor force, employment, GRDP scale, and total state budget revenue.

2.1.3. Constituent Elements of a Provincial-Level Tourism Destination

A tourism destination is composed of various elements, each playing an important role in creating its attractiveness and unique value. These elements include tourism resources, infrastructure, tourism technical facilities, amenities, and supporting activities.

2.2. COMPETITIVENESS OF PROVINCIAL-LEVEL TOURISM DESTINATIONS

2.2.1. Definition of Tourism Destination Competitiveness at the Provincial Level

** Definition of Competitiveness*

Based on the definitions of competitiveness provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Economic Forum (WEF), and Michael Porter (1990), this study defines competitiveness as:

The ability of a locality (at the provincial level) to generate added value, attract resources, and sustain its advantages over time.

** Khái niệm Năng lực cạnh tranh điểm đến du lịch cấp tỉnh*

According to Buhalis (2000), in the early stages of tourism, competition was primarily measured by price. Crouch & Ritchie (2003) argued that the competitiveness of a tourism destination is not only about attracting tourists but also about increasing tourism spending, generating economic benefits, and improving the quality of life for local residents. The competitiveness of a destination is influenced not only by its resources or management factors, but also by macroeconomic conditions, especially in the context of global integration. The competitiveness of a tourism destination can be understood as the application of technical and analytical methods to systematically evaluate and compare destinations in order to identify competitive advantages. This approach is crucial for developing evidence-based policies, helping management authorities determine strengths, weaknesses, and

opportunities to enhance destination competitiveness. *At the provincial level, the competitiveness of a tourism destination is defined as the ability of the destination to create comparative and competitive advantages that attract and satisfy tourists' needs through the development, innovation, and effective management of tourism resources, infrastructure, and services—while ensuring sustainable development principles and delivering economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits to the local community.*

2.2.2. Key Components of Provincial-Level Tourism Destination Competitiveness

Based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature, the author adopts the Ritchie & Crouch (2003) model to test and assess the key factors that constitute tourism destination competitiveness. These are grouped into five major components: Core resources and attractions; Supporting factors and resources; Destination policy, planning, and development; Destination management; Qualifying and amplifying determinants.

2.2.2.1 Core Resources and Attractions

Core resources and attractions are essential elements that form the primary appeal of a tourism destination. These features allow tourists to identify and choose destinations that match their preferences and needs. Specifically, they include: Natural environment and climate, Culture and history, Recreational activities, Events and festivals, Attractions and landmarks, Shopping.

2.2.2.2. Supporting Factors and Resources

While core resources and attractions motivate tourists to visit, their effectiveness may be significantly diminished if inaccessible or poorly supported. Therefore, supporting factors play a vital role in enhancing accessibility and visitor experience and include: Infrastructure, Supplementary resources, Hospitality and service quality, Tourism-related businesses and enterprises.

2.2.2.3. Destination Policy, Planning, and Development

This group of factors reflects the role of governing authorities in setting directions and strategies for tourism development. It includes elements that ensure the enhancement and sustainability of destination competitiveness: Prioritization of tourism in policy, Vision and planning, Destination branding and marketing strategies, Policies and initiatives promoting destination development; Monitoring, supervision, and evaluation efforts.

2.2.2.4. Destination Management

Based on established policies and plans, effective destination management ensures the proper implementation of strategies through state management bodies. This involves the coordination of multiple stakeholders and the execution of tourism governance functions, including: Tourism-related organizations; Quality management of tourism services; Information, communication, and research management; Financial and investment management; Human resource development and management; Management of natural and cultural resources; Crisis management and response capabilities.

2.2.2.5. Qualifying and Amplifying Determinants

These contextual or external factors can either enhance or limit the effectiveness of other competitiveness elements. They influence the destination's overall capacity to

compete and include: Geographical location; Safety and Security; Cost and value perception; Destination carrying capacity; Stakeholder cooperation and linkages; Market awareness and perception of the destination.

2.2.3. The Role of Provincial Governments in Enhancing Tourism Destination Competitiveness

From the provincial government's perspective, enhancing tourism destination competitiveness includes economic, socio-cultural, and environmental objectives. The role of provincial authorities in strengthening tourism destination competitiveness can be evaluated through the following key areas:

2.2.3.1. Policy Formulation and Planning

Policy formulation and planning are core, recognizable functions of provincial governments. These activities include: Prioritizing the tourism sector through specific resolutions and development plans; Developing tourism master plans; Issuing supportive policies for tourism development.

2.2.3.2. Destination Management

Destination management is a comprehensive process encompassing: Conservation of natural and cultural resources; Infrastructure resource management; Improvement of the business environment; Ensuring safety and security.

2.2.3.3. Destination Development

Developing tourism destinations through strategic planning is essential to achieve growth and improve competitiveness. These strategies include: Tourism product development strategies; Destination branding and promotional strategies; Human resource development strategies; Digital transformation strategies; Collaboration and partnership strategies in tourism.

2.2.3.4. Inspection, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation

Inspection, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation are key responsibilities of provincial governments to ensure sustainable tourism development, protect tourists' rights, and maintain a transparent business environment. These tasks are carried out through two main activities: Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of tourism development programs and plans; Implementing measures to prevent and handle violations.

2.2.4. Evaluation Criteria for Provincial-Level Tourism Destination Competitiveness

2.2.4.1. Criteria for Evaluating Tourism Performance

The criteria for evaluating tourism performance are grounded in the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) theory, as described by Butler (1980). Butler's model is a vital tool for regulatory agencies and policymakers to assess a destination's competitiveness and identify areas requiring strategic improvements. Accordingly, this dissertation applies Butler's framework to determine the developmental stage of a provincial-level tourism destination by analyzing specific indicators that reflect movement across the life cycle stages. These indicators include: Tourism revenue generated, Number of tourist arrivals, The average length of stay, Presence and growth of tourism-related businesses.

Butler's model identifies six stages in the destination life cycle: Exploration, Involvement, Development, Consolidation, Stagnation, Decline or Rejuvenation.

2.2.4.2. Criteria for Evaluating the Components of Provincial-Level Tourism Destination Competitiveness

The quantitative assessment method is employed based on a survey measuring the competitiveness levels of the factors that constitute the tourism destination's competitiveness. This approach requires collecting data from various stakeholder groups, including managers, leaders of provincial departments, agencies, and civil servants. The survey is conducted through structured questionnaires and data collection via online platforms.

*** Model and Research Hypotheses for the Components of Provincial Tourism Destination Competitiveness**

For this criterion, the quantitative evaluation method is applied based on a survey measuring the competitiveness level of the factors that constitute the competitiveness of a tourism destination. The research model used in the dissertation is based on the framework developed by Ritchie and Crouch (2003), consisting of five independent variables and one dependent variable. The dependent variable (or target factor) represents the competitiveness of the provincial tourism destination. Based on the theoretical foundation of tourism competitiveness, five major groups of factors are selected as independent variables in the research model, including: Core resources and attractions; Supporting factors and resources; Destination policy, planning, and development; Destination management; Qualifying and amplifying determinants.

From this model, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Core resources and attractions positively impact tourism destination competitiveness.

H2: Supporting factors and resources positively impact tourism destination competitiveness.

H3: Destination policy, planning, and development positively impact tourism destination competitiveness.

H4: Destination management has a positive impact on tourism destination competitiveness.

H5: Qualifying and amplifying determinants positively impact tourism destination competitiveness.

2.2.4.3. Evaluation Criteria for the Role of Provincial Authorities in Enhancing Tourism Destination Competitiveness

To evaluate the role of the provincial government in enhancing the competitiveness of provincial tourism destinations, it is essential to assess the effectiveness of policies based on three key criteria: Clarity and periodic relevance of the policies, Alignment with socio-economic development, and Consistency with the destination's branding and image.

2.3. Experiences and Lessons for Enhancing the Competitiveness of Provincial Tourism Destinations

The dissertation analyzed the experiences of Kyoto City (Japan), Quang Ninh Province, and Thua Thien Hue Province, thereby drawing several lessons for Ninh Binh's tourism destination development as follows:

First, it is necessary to develop specific policies and planning frameworks to

guide destination development and to adjust economic, environmental, and social objectives appropriately.

Second, conservation measures should be implemented in a synchronized manner to preserve local nature and culture, ensuring that tourism enhances rather than erodes the cultural identity of the destination. In addition, investment in infrastructure and strict management is required to maintain the destination's quality, security, and safety.

Third, efforts should be made to diversify tourism products and adopt appropriate promotion and marketing strategies suited to the locality. Avoiding a scattered approach, the focus should be placed on targeted customer segments. Embracing technological advancement and digital transformation is essential to maintaining competitiveness, alongside investing in and developing human resources.

Fourth, Inspection, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation activities must be regularly organized for all tourism operations, ensuring that tourism support policies are implemented correctly, in compliance with regulations and directed at the intended beneficiaries.

Chapter 3 **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

3.1. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

3.1.1. Expert Method

The author employed the expert interview method by consulting five specialists in the field of tourism to refine and finalize the questionnaire prior to conducting the survey. The experts were asked to provide feedback using pre-prepared evaluation forms. After reviewing the draft questionnaire, they offered comments, suggestions, and recommendations for adjusting and improving the questions.

3.1.2. Scale Design Method for Evaluation

Designing a measurement scale is essential to accurately assess the selected variables using an appropriate scope. The specific questions related to each factor in the questionnaire were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. This scale evaluates the respondents' level of agreement regarding the competitiveness of each factor, ranging from 1 (Very Low) to 5 (Very High).

3.1.3. Data Synthesis and Analysis Method

Both secondary and primary data were compiled and processed using Excel software. Data related to the components of provincial tourism destination competitiveness were analyzed using SPSS software.

These methods were applied to interpret statistical data reflecting the current state of the research problem, comparing real-world findings with theoretical foundations to assess the competitiveness level of Ninh Binh's tourism destination. Additionally, they were used to examine and compare models for enhancing destination competitiveness in various domestic and international localities. Based on this, key lessons and insights were synthesized and analyzed to draw implications for Ninh Binh province.

3.1.4. Data Collection

3.1.4.1. Secondary Data Collection

The secondary data collected for this dissertation include: Theoretical foundations related to tourism destination competitiveness, such as key concepts of tourism, tourism destinations, and destination competitiveness, along with the identification of its constituent factors. Statistical data on the number of tourists, tourism revenues, and tourism investment over the years. Information about the context, consumer trends, and global tourism dynamics that influence the competitiveness of Ninh Binh's tourism destination. All these data were collected from reliable and authoritative sources.

3.1.4.2. Primary Data Collection

Step 1: Sampling Method

To collect primary data and apply a multi-dimensional analytical approach, the dissertation conducted a sociological survey using a structured questionnaire designed to assess and evaluate the factors constituting the competitiveness of provincial tourism destinations.

The survey sample was selected randomly, with the minimum sample size determined based on the study by Comrey and Lee (1992), which suggests that the minimum sample size for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) should be five times the total number of observed variables:

$n = 5 \times m$ (In which: n is the minimum sample size, and m is the number of questions in the questionnaire)

The study employed a probability sampling method with a random selection approach. The questionnaire used in this research included 35 questions, so the minimum required sample size was: $35 \times 5 = 175$ respondents.

However, to ensure adequacy after removing incomplete or low-quality responses, the final sample size was set at 300 respondents. A sample size of 300 provides strong representativeness and yields highly accurate estimation results. This sample size also satisfies the requirements for conducting both Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and multiple regression analysis.

Step 2: Developing the Questionnaire and Survey Form

Based on the theoretical framework of tourism destination competitiveness and its constituent factors, the researcher developed a draft version of the questionnaire. Subsequently, expert interviews were conducted to review and refine the content of the questionnaire. The discussions focused on several key points: Which survey questions were unclear or confusing to respondents? How should the wording or structure of questions be modified to improve clarity and comprehension? Should any additional statements or factors be included to better represent the components of tourism destination competitiveness? How should the experts' additional suggestions be articulated and explained within the questionnaire?

Based on expert feedback, two additional factors were incorporated: "The development of information technology (IT)" — included as a sub-factor under the broader factor "Supporting factors and resources.", "The linkage between tourism and other sectors at the destination (Ninh Binh)" — added as a sub-factor under "Policies, planning, and destination development.". These additions were made to ensure the questionnaire provided a more comprehensive assessment of Ninh Binh's

tourism destination competitiveness.

Step 3: Conducting the Survey

To achieve the research objectives of the dissertation, the target respondents were identified as managers, officials, and public employees working in various departments, agencies, and People's Committees of districts and cities within Ninh Binh province.

The actual distribution of questionnaires was as follows: 150 questionnaires were distributed to provincial departments and agencies (such as the Department of Tourism, Department of Culture and Sports, the Office of the Provincial People's Committee, the Office of the National Assembly Delegation and Provincial People's Council, etc.); 150 questionnaires were distributed to People's Committees of the 8 districts and cities in Ninh Binh province.

Survey Method: Since the survey participants were categorized according to specific agencies and organizations, the researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to the selected respondents at their workplaces. Each respondent received detailed instructions to ensure they fully understood the questions and provided complete, accurate answers - minimizing omissions or misunderstandings.

Survey Duration: The survey was conducted over a three-month period, from August 2023 to October 2023. A total of 300 questionnaires were collected; however, 24 questionnaires were excluded due to insufficient information or biased responses. Consequently, 276 valid questionnaires were retained and used for data analysis.

Data Processing: During the quantitative analysis phase, once all responses were collected and the survey period had concluded, each questionnaire was assigned a unique serial number (from 01 to the final valid response). Questionnaires missing substantial information were removed. The remaining data were then entered into Excel for processing and subsequent analysis.

3.2. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

The quantitative research method was employed to test and evaluate the factors constituting the tourism destination competitiveness of Ninh Binh province. The study conducted the evaluation by assessing the reliability of the measurement scales for independent variables and by performing an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using the SPSS software tool.

Chapter 4

CURRENT STATE OF TOURISM DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS IN NINH BINH PROVINCE

4.1. Overview of the Tourism Destination in Ninh Binh Province

4.1.1. Natural and Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Province *4.1.1.1. Natural Characteristics*

Ninh Binh's natural features include: Geographical location, Topography, Climate, Hydrology, Biodiversity, Soil composition, Mineral resources

4.1.1.2. Socio-Economic Characteristics

Key socio-economic indicators of Ninh Binh include: Average population size, Labor force participation rate, Unemployment rate, Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), Total state budget revenue, Total realized investment capital in the province, Import and export turnover.

4.1.2. Components of the Tourism Destination in Ninh Binh Province

4.1.2.1. *Tourism Resources*

Ninh Binh province has many outstanding tourism resources such as Trang An World Heritage Site, Van Long Wetland Nature Reserve, Cuc Phuong National Park, Hoa Lu Cultural, and Historical and Environmental Forest. Ninh Binh province also has a remarkably diverse ecosystem, reflecting the province's geographical and climatic conditions.

4.1.2.2. *Infrastructure*

Regarding transport infrastructure resources, Ninh Binh province has about 3,770 km of roads, including national highways, provincial roads, district roads, urban roads, specialized roads, and rural roads. The transport infrastructure in the province has changed since 2015, showing a diversity of means of transport, including cars, taxis, buses, trucks, specialized vehicles, other types of vehicles, and motorbikes. However, the reduction in the number of taxis and the stagnation in the number of buses has raised many concerns, which may affect the convenience and accessibility of tourists.

4.1.2.3. *Tourism facilities*

By 2022, the province had 800 accommodation establishments, accounting for 14% of the nation's total accommodation capacity, making it one of the top 20 provinces in Vietnam in terms of lodging capacity. A notable aspect of Ninh Binh's accommodation sector is the significant growth in the number of homestays, which increased to 332 establishments with 2,537 rooms in 2022. This growth reflects the diversity and richness of accommodation options available to tourists.

4.1.2.4. *Amenities and ancillaries*

Ninh Binh has over 300 restaurants and cafés across the province, offering a wide range of dining options. The cuisine varies from traditional Vietnamese dishes to international cuisines, catering to the diverse tastes of both domestic and international tourists. Additionally, the province is home to numerous souvenir shops, local markets, and craft villages, where visitors can purchase traditional Vietnamese products such as silk, lacquerware, and hand-embroidered items.

4.2. CURRENT STATE OF COMPETITIVENESS OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN NINH BINH PROVINCE

4.2.1. Tourism Performance Results

The number of international tourists has also shown an upward trend, despite some fluctuations, while tourism revenue has experienced stable and robust growth. These statistics highlight the increasing attractiveness of Ninh Binh, supported by effective management and destination development strategies aimed at catering to a diverse range of visitors, particularly international tourists. The impact of global events—especially the Covid-19 pandemic—is clearly reflected in the tourism data. The gradual recovery in visitor numbers after the pandemic signals the beginning of the sector's rebound. Although these figures remain below pre-pandemic levels, they reflect the cautious optimism of international travelers and the continuous efforts of Ninh Binh's tourism sector to rebuild and attract global visitors. Overall, based on the above evaluations, Ninh Binh's destination is currently in the development stage of

the tourism destination life cycle.

4.2.2. Factors constituting tourist destinations in Ninh Binh province

4.2.2.1. Survey sample

4.2.2.2. Scale reliability assessment

4.2.2.3. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

4.2.2.4. Pearson correlation

4.2.2.5. Linear regression results

4.2.2.6. Discussion of quantitative analysis results

The quantitative analysis results clearly demonstrate that each independent variable in the model — Core Resources and Attractions (NLCL), Supporting Factors and Resources (NTNL), Policy, Planning, and Destination Development (CS), Destination Management (QLDD), and Limiting and Enhancing Factors (HDMD) — has a significant impact on the Tourism Destination Competitiveness (NLCT). This finding provides a solid foundation for a deeper understanding of how to improve destination competitiveness.

When examining the degree of influence of each variable, the analysis shows that Core Resources and Attractions exert the strongest impact on NLCT, as indicated by the highest standardized Beta coefficient. Following this, Supporting Factors and Resources and Policy, Planning, and Destination Development also have substantial positive effects, making them important contributors to enhancing the competitiveness of the tourism destination. Meanwhile, Destination Management and Limiting and Enhancing Factors also influence competitiveness but to a relatively lesser degree.

Regarding the direction of impact, all variables show positive coefficients, indicating a direct correlation between independent variables and the tourism destination's competitiveness. This means that improvements in elements such as core attractions, supporting infrastructure, and strategic policy planning can effectively boost destination competitiveness.

Based on descriptive statistical results (as shown in the Appendix), the highest-rated factors include: “Festivals and events in Ninh Binh” and “Climate and natural landscape of Ninh Binh”, “Hospitality and friendliness of local people” with an average score of 4.02, highlighting the welcoming spirit of the community. “Infrastructure of Ninh Binh (roads, public services, etc.)” also received high evaluations, with an average score of 3.97, reflecting strong investment efforts in infrastructure and public tourism services in recent years.

However, some areas were rated lower and require improvement, such as: “Shopping opportunities in Ninh Binh” — indicating the need to enhance shopping facilities to increase the destination's appeal; “Clear vision and planning for future tourism development” (average score 3.76) and “Policies promoting tourism development” (average score 3.83), both suggesting that more focus should be placed on strategic planning and policy implementation to ensure sustainable growth; “Crisis management and effective response measures” scored 3.79, showing the need for stronger crisis preparedness and management plans to ensure visitor safety and destination stability. Overall, the findings emphasize that Ninh Binh's

competitiveness is driven primarily by its natural assets and hospitality, but policy clarity, shopping experiences, and crisis management remain key areas for strategic improvement to achieve sustainable destination competitiveness.

4.2.3. The role of provincial authorities in enhancing the competitiveness of Ninh Binh province's tourism destinations

4.2.3.1. Policy and planning development

First, prioritizing the tourism sector through specific resolutions and development plans:

From 2015 to 2018, shortly after Trang An was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014, Ninh Binh Province identified tourism as one of its key service sectors. In the subsequent phase, the Provincial Party Committee officially positioned tourism as a spearhead economic sector of the province.

Second, developing tourism master plans:

Before the master plan was issued on August 30, 2018, Ninh Binh had formulated various development strategies related to tourism. However, the 2018 Comprehensive Tourism Development Master Plan was the first specialized plan focused solely on the tourism sector. It set forth general objectives and specific, measurable targets aligned with the context of the time.

However, the unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the tourism industry nationwide, including in Ninh Binh. As a result, some of the goals and solutions outlined in the 2018 plan could not be achieved. This led the provincial authorities to propose amendments and updates to the master plan for the period 2021–2030, with a vision to 2050, submitted to the Prime Minister for approval.

Third, implementing tourism support policies:

Between 2015 and 2023, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ninh Binh Province introduced multiple support policies to mitigate the pandemic's negative impact on tourism and facilitate post-pandemic recovery. These policies included: Electricity discounts for tourist accommodation establishments, Land rent reductions, Fee reductions for tour operator licenses and tour guide cards, Financial support for tour guides.

4.2.3.2. Destination Management

**** Destination Management***

From 2015 to 2018, Ninh Binh Province issued several important policies to protect its natural resources, particularly about the conservation and promotion of the Trang An Landscape Complex, a UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage Site. Establishing management boards gradually yielded positive results, ensuring the preservation of the site's outstanding universal values. Management and monitoring activities were strictly enforced to minimize negative impacts on the natural environment. Scientific studies on ecology and the environment were regularly conducted to monitor ecosystem health and assess the impact of tourism. From 2019 to 2023, conservation efforts continued to be a priority. A significant milestone was the recognition of Van Long Wetland Nature Reserve as a Ramsar site in 2019, marking significant progress in ecological conservation. Wildlife conservation and rescue centers for endangered species were also established. Notably, 2022 marked

the fourth consecutive year that Cuc Phuong National Park was voted Asia's Leading National Park by the World Travel Awards.

*** Conservation of Cultural Heritage**

In 2015-2018, the management, protection, and promotion of cultural heritage values in Ninh Binh province were clearly defined between different levels of government, from the provincial to the communal level. During this period, many works were restored and embellished. However, the conservation work still encountered many difficulties. Since 2019, the conservation work has received attention through specific tasks. First, it is the province's assessment and inventory of historical and cultural relics. In addition, the establishment of art clubs and the promotion of traditional art forms in daily life contribute to the preservation and promotion of local cultural heritage. In addition to performing arts, the province also focuses on transmitting handicrafts in traditional craft villages.

*** Infrastructure management and investment**

From 2019 to the present, public investment in tourism infrastructure has reached VND 869.329 billion, of which VND 839.329 billion was allocated to tourism infrastructure development and VND 30 billion to restore historical and cultural relics. During this period, more than 13 investment projects from non-budget capital sources were approved, with a total registered capital of approximately VND 1,755 billion, demonstrating growing investor confidence in the tourism potential of Ninh Binh. However, recreational and sports facilities remain limited, which reduces tourist spending and shortens visitor stay duration. This is one of the reasons why tourists tend to stay only briefly in Ninh Binh, thereby limiting their overall spending in the province.

*** Improvement of the Business Environment**

Between 2018 and 2022, Ninh Binh's Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI) score slightly increased from 63.55 to 64.22, but its ranking dropped from 29th to 44th. This decline suggests that although the business environment has improved, Ninh Binh's pace of reform has lagged behind other provinces, weakening its investment appeal and competitiveness. Additionally, the provincial government actively directed efforts to set reasonable service prices and entrance fees, ensuring they aligned with market realities and created favorable conditions to attract tourists.

*** Ensuring Security and Safety**

Since 2015, the province has identified major tourism hotspots such as Trang An, Bai Dinh Pagoda, and Tam Coc-Bich Dong. The provincial police have collaborated with site operators to implement security monitoring systems, ensuring swift responses to complex situations and maintaining effective communication networks. From 2019 to the present, as the province regularly hosts large-scale events and activities, security and safety at tourism sites have been actively managed. This has involved close cooperation between the tourism sector, police, relevant departments, local authorities, and tourism site managers. Additionally, health and medical services are consistently ensured.

4.2.3.3. Destination development strategies

*** Tourism product development strategy**

From 2018 onwards, based on taking advantage of unique, rich, and diverse tourism, cultural, and historical resources, Ninh Binh has gradually invested in exploiting and forming tourism products, including cultural-historical - spiritual tourism, natural landscape tourism, eco-tourism, and resorts. Since 2019, to maintain and enhance competitiveness, the tourism industry has focused on diversifying products such as MICE, sports, community, and rural tourism (associated with high-tech agriculture). It plans to develop a night-time tourism economy in 04 service areas: culture, entertainment, dining, shopping, and sightseeing. * Tourism promotion strategy

* Tourism promotion strategy

From 2015 to 2018, the province implemented a strategy to promote and advertise tourism mainly domestically and based on traditional platforms. Since 2019, authorities at all levels have promoted propaganda and promotion to many domestic and foreign tourists, attracting and calling on potential investors to research and survey investment in tourism development projects in the province. Tourism promotion activities are focused on in-depth and focused investment, implemented diversely and richly in many forms.

* Digital transformation strategy

Most administrative agencies and enterprises are equipped with computers and internet connections, ensuring a digital working environment that can handle tourism-related tasks. Telecommunications infrastructure has been significantly expanded, providing broadband and mobile Internet coverage throughout the province. Many new solutions have been deployed, such as developing innovative tourism applications, digitizing tourism data and kiosk systems, strategically locating and deploying smart tourism Wi-Fi networks at tourist destinations, and providing free high-speed Internet access. Ninh Binh Tourism Portal acts as a comprehensive digital platform providing necessary tourism information.

* Human resource development strategy

During this period, Ninh Binh witnessed an increase in the labor force in the tourism industry. Along with direct labor, indirect labor in Ninh Binh's tourism industry has a growth trajectory and changes. The provincial government has coordinated with various educational and training institutions to implement programs targeting different areas in the tourism industry.

* Strategy for linkage and cooperation in tourism development

From 2015 to 2018, Ninh Binh's strategy for linkage and cooperation in tourism development mainly focused on domestic activities, with regional promotion and cooperation activities still limited in scale and scope. By the period of 2019 - 2023, the province will move to a more comprehensive cooperation phase, expanding domestic and international linkages and, at the same time, building long-term strategies to develop tourism and attract significant investments.

4.2.3.4. Inspection, Supervision, Monitoring, and Evaluation

The Ninh Binh provincial government has implemented numerous initiatives to inspect and supervise tourism business activities, including monitoring the licensing of tourism operations across sectors such as travel agencies, accommodation services, food and beverage establishments, and tourist transportation. Through these

inspection and monitoring efforts, several limitations and shortcomings in implementation have been identified.

Based on the evaluation criteria established in Chapter 2 and the current role of the provincial government in enhancing the tourism destination competitiveness of Ninh Binh, the dissertation draws several key assessments: The Ninh Binh provincial government has recognized tourism as a key economic sector, setting specific goals in its resolutions and development plans toward 2030–2045, reaffirming a strong and long-term commitment. The province has focused on investing in transportation infrastructure, cultural facilities, and integrating tourism development with socio-economic growth, aiming toward a “heritage urban model.” Heritage conservation has been given significant attention through the establishment of specialized management boards, the issuance of heritage preservation resolutions, and international cooperation initiatives, ensuring the sustainable utilization of cultural and natural assets. The government has issued numerous policies to support businesses and post-COVID-19 recovery, notably through Resolution 105, which focuses on human resources, promotion, and infrastructure development.

The tourism brand identity has been clearly defined with the slogan “Ninh Binh – The Magnificent Ancient Capital”, and widely promoted through international media channels and digital platforms, significantly enhancing the province’s image. Finally, the inspection, supervision, and assurance of the tourism business environment, safety, and security have been strengthened, fostering trust and confidence among both domestic and international visitors.

4.3. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF COMPETITIVENESS OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN NINH BINH PROVINCE

4.3.1. Achievements

Firstly, the number of tourists visiting Ninh Binh has increased significantly. In particular, in 2019, the province welcomed over 915,000 international visitors, and the number of overnight stays nearly doubled, demonstrating the strong attractiveness of the destination.

Secondly, the province has effectively leveraged its natural and cultural resources, developing key tourist attractions such as Trang An, Van Long, and Cuc Phuong, all of which are highly valued for their heritage and festivals.

Thirdly, the provincial government has issued numerous resolutions, projects, and specific policies, identifying tourism as a key economic sector, while prioritizing the development of infrastructure, services, and a favorable business environment.

Fourthly, Ninh Binh’s government has successfully carried out destination management and development, while simultaneously promoting the province’s natural and cultural resources.

Fifthly, the province has strengthened inspection and supervision of tourism activities, handled violations, and ensured service quality, safety, and security for visitors.

As a result, tourist arrivals and tourism revenue have grown impressively, confirming that Ninh Binh is in a strong development phase with a strategic and effective approach.

4.3.2. Limitations and Root Causes

4.3.2.1. Key Limitations

* Limitations in Policy and Planning

Currently, Ninh Binh's investment attraction policies still lack special incentive mechanisms tailored for major investors and international corporations with strong financial capacity and tourism development experience. Some policy implementations also lack close coordination between different levels of government, from provincial to district and commune levels. Although tourism development plans have been approved and disseminated to localities, in practice, many areas remain passive in executing these plans.

** Limitations in destination management:*

The integration of cultural and historical values into tourism products remains limited, failing to create distinctive and appealing experiences for visitors. Many heritage sites across the province are in a state of serious deterioration. Furthermore, there are still shortcomings in tourism infrastructure and facilities, particularly in high-end services and entertainment complexes. Crisis management and emergency response mechanisms also show several weaknesses that need improvement to ensure greater effectiveness in the future.

** Limitations in destination development:*

Communication and tourism promotion efforts remain limited in scale, funding, content, and methods. The budget for international marketing is still modest, and technological infrastructure investment to support tourism activities has not been sufficient. Ninh Binh also faces a shortage of qualified human resources with appropriate professional skills for the tourism sector.

** Limitations in Inspection, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation:*

Some organizations and individuals still fail to fully comply with legal regulations in tourism operations, creating difficulties for state management agencies in enforcing oversight and maintaining order in the tourism sector.

4.3.2.2. Causes

** Objective causes*

Ninh Binh tourism faces intense competition from domestic and international destinations with modern infrastructure and diverse products. Climate change and extreme natural disasters pose risks to tourism landscapes and the environment. Rapid industrialization and urbanization put pressure on infrastructure and threaten heritage sites. Additionally, tourist demand is increasingly diverse, yet Ninh Binh has not fully met it, and some legal inadequacies hinder development. The COVID-19 pandemic also severely affected the global tourism industry, including Ninh Binh.

** Subjective causes*

Tourism communication and promotion lack connectivity and the use of modern technology. The administrative management system is still cumbersome, with unclear decentralization, slowing project implementation. Budget and enterprise capacity are limited, and human resources at district and commune levels are thin and lack expertise. Tourism products primarily exploit existing strengths, lacking innovation and creativity. Community participation is not fully effective, and digital technology applications remain at experimental levels. Moreover, supporting infrastructure is inconsistent, with a shortage of airports and high-end services, making Ninh Binh less attractive compared to competing destinations.

Chapter 5

ORIENTATIONS AND SOLUTIONS TO ENHANCE THE COMPETITIVENESS OF NINH BINH'S TOURISM DESTINATION

5.1. New Context

5.1.1. Tourism Context in the Coming Period

- Global context.
- Vietnam context.

5.1.2. Socio-Economic and Tourism Situation of Ninh Binh Province

- Socio-economic context of Ninh Binh Province.
- Some orientations.

5.2. Solutions to Enhance the Competitiveness of Ninh Binh's Tourism Destination

5.2.1. Enhancing Quality in Policy Making and Planning

Ninh Binh Province needs to promptly develop a Resolution or a specialized Project on tourism and cultural industry development.

The provincial government should establish a tighter coordination mechanism among state management agencies to ensure consistency in policy guidance and implementation.

Ensure a clear budget allocation mechanism for implementing tourism planning.

Build incentive mechanisms to encourage enterprises and the community to participate in the planning process, fostering consensus and maximizing social resources for tourism development.

5.2.2. Destination Management

Strengthen the authority of newly merged commune-level People's Committees to enhance autonomy, flexibility, and timeliness in tourism management at the local level.

Implement measures for managing natural and cultural-historical resources.

Improve the business environment through administrative reforms, creating a more transparent and favorable investment climate.

Invest in and develop infrastructure.

Invest in and improve technical facilities serving tourism.

5.2.3. Destination Development Strategies

Develop new tourism products, promote entertainment tourism and cultural industries with integrated complexes, performance centers, live shows, and regional and international events and festivals.

Innovate tourism communication and promotion strategies.

Apply science and technology, digital transformation.

Develop and enhance the quality of tourism human resources.

5.2.4. Strengthening Inspection, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation

Strengthen the Inspection, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of the implementation results of tourism development programs and plans, associated with timely interim reviews, final assessments, and drawing lessons learned in the organization and execution of these programs and plans.

5.3. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

The dissertation provides specific recommendations to the Government and central ministries, including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism; Ministry of Agriculture and Environment; and Ministry of Finance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research, investigation, and refinement of the theoretical foundation on the tourism destination competitiveness, the dissertation evaluated the tourism destination competitiveness of Ninh Binh province, assessed the role of the provincial government in enhancing the tourism destination competitiveness of the province, identified challenges and opportunities, and proposed several recommendations. The dissertation achieved the following specific results:

First, the dissertation reviewed both domestic and international studies on provincial-level tourism destinations and their competitiveness. Based on this, the research identified existing research gaps.

Second, the dissertation systematized and clarified the concept of provincial-level tourism destination competitiveness from an economic management perspective, identifying its constituent factors and the role of local authorities in policy-making, planning, management, and development. Notably, the dissertation developed a set of tourism destination competitiveness evaluation criteria suitable for provincial conditions—a novel contribution compared to previous studies.

Third, the dissertation conducted a comprehensive analysis of the period 2015–2023, showing that tourism in Ninh Binh has affirmed its position as a key economic sector with many outstanding achievements. At the same time, the dissertation pointed out several limitations: existing policies are not sufficiently attractive to large investors; planning focuses mainly on “core areas” while potential areas remain underutilized; high-end tourism facilities are lacking; the tourism workforce is limited; international promotion is not effective; and the application of smart tourism technology is not comprehensive. Moreover, inspection and supervision activities remain insufficient, with non-standardized data affecting management and policy adjustments. The dissertation also analyzed the competitiveness of individual factors, highlighting that core resources and attractions have the strongest impact on Ninh Binh’s tourism destination competitiveness.

Fourth, the dissertation proposed four groups of synchronized solutions to enhance destination competitiveness, emphasizing the central role of the provincial government in guiding development.

The research results have both scientific and practical significance, serving as a reference for local authorities, policymakers, and the business community. However, the study has limitations as it focuses on the 2015–2023 period, while the socio-economic context may change significantly following administrative unit mergers. These fluctuations directly affect the economic structure, management organization, resource allocation, and tourism brand positioning.

Therefore, further research in the new context is necessary to provide appropriate solutions to help Ninh Binh maintain and sustainably enhance its tourism destination competitiveness in the long term.

LIST OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH WORKS BY THE AUTHOR RELATED TO THE THESIS TOPIC

1. Bui Xuan Tung (2023), “Enhancing the tourism destination competitiveness of Ninh Binh in a sustainable way”, *Proceedings the sixth international conference on Sustainable economic development and business management in the context of globalisation* (SEDBM-6), Finance Publishing House, Hanoi.
2. Bui Xuan Tung (2024), “Improving the competitiveness of Ninh Binh province’s tourist destinations in the new conditions”, *Journal of State Management*, at <https://www.quanlynhanuoc.vn/2024/06/27/nang-cao-nang-luc-canh-tranh-diem-den-du-lich-tinh-ninh-binh-trong-dieu-kien-moi/>
3. Bui Xuan Tung (2024), “Competitiveness of Ninh Binh province’s tourist destinations: Current situation and solutions”, *Journal of Economics and Forecast*, (14), pp.210-213.
4. Bui Xuan Tung (2024), “Factors affecting the competitiveness of tourist destinations in Ninh Binh province”, *Journal of Economics and Forecasting*, (16), pp.200-203
5. Bui Xuan Tung (2024), “Experience from some models to improve the competitiveness of tourist destinations and lessons for Ninh Binh”, *Journal of Economics and Forecasting*, (18), pp.237-240.