



A Retrospective Analysis of the Responses and Adaptations of Tourist Cities during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Hoi An, Quang Nam, Vietnam

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to global economic and social systems, particularly in the tourism sector—both worldwide and in Vietnam. Amid the prolonged crisis marked by multiple waves, tourist cities faced substantial difficulties, including severe psychological, social, and economic disruptions. However, these cities have also demonstrated varying degrees of resilience and adaptability during and after the pandemic. Hoi an (Quang Nam), designated a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site in 1999, has long been a popular destination for domestic and international visitors alike. Drawing on theoretical insights and empirical data, this paper critically examines the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Hoi and evaluates the city's response and adaptation strategies. The study also proposes several solutions for the sustainable recovery and development of tourism in Hoi and other urban tourist destinations amid evolving societal contexts.

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 is a global pandemic caused by a novel coronavirus, first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, at the end of 2019. By early 2020, the virus had spread worldwide. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic ^[1]. Beyond its devastating toll on human health, the pandemic has had profound socio-economic consequences, with the tourism sector among the hardest hit. In Vietnam, tourism was severely affected. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, domestic tourist arrivals were projected to exceed 30.5 million in the first half of 2021. Despite this, tourism revenue declined to VND 134 trillion—24.2% lower than the same period in 2020 (Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper, 2021) ^[2].

Hoi An City, under the administration of Quang Nam Province, covers a total area of 6,068 square kilometres and is situated between latitudes 15°15'26" and 15°55'15" North, and longitudes 108°17'08" and 108°23'10" East. As of April 1, 2019, Hoi An had a population of 98,599 (General Statistics Office, 2020, p. 26) ^[3]. Administratively, the city consists of nine wards—Cam An, Cam Chau, Cam Nam, Cam Pho, Cua Dai, Minh An, Son Phong, Tan An, and Thanh Ha—and four communes: Cam Ha, Cam Kim, Cam Thanh, and Tan Hiep, the latter located on Cham Islet (Quang Nam Statistics Office, 2013, p. 13) ^[4]. The pandemic brought the city's tourism industry to a standstill for more than two years.

¹ World Health Organization. WHO timeline – COVID-19 [Internet]. 2021 Jun 5 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/05/06/2021-who-timeline-covid-19>

² Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper. Tourism overcomes difficulties in the first half of the year [Internet]. 2021 Aug 12 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <https://dangcongsan.vn>

³ General Statistics Office. Complete results of the 2019 population and housing census. Hanoi: Statistical Publishing House; 2020.

⁴ Quang Nam Statistics Office. Statistical yearbook 2012. Hanoi: Statistical Publishing House; 2013. p.13.

Numerous businesses in Hoi An Ancient Town faced critical challenges, including mounting debt and bankruptcy. According to the Hoi An City Tax Department, over 250 enterprises suspended operations, 62 closed permanently, and more than 2,000 individual business households ceased activity due to the pandemic's impact. Consequently, local government revenues dropped sharply, and more than 1,000 business households recorded little to no income. In 2021, the city's total budget revenue was approximately VND 400 billion—drastically lower than the pre-pandemic average of nearly VND 2,000 billion annually (VOV – Central Region, 2021) ^[5].

2. Materials and methods

The major emphasis of this research is on retrospective analysis of the response and adaptation of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site Hoi An in Quang Nam Province, Vietnam during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study utilises historical science's primary methodology, logical analysis, and an interdisciplinary approach that includes public policy, sociology, economics, and cultural studies. To address the difficulties posed, the study uses interdisciplinary methodologies (public policy, conservation, ethnology, cultural studies, sociology, tourism, and so on), comparative research, and an analysis of heritage exploitation models linked to tourism. The comparative research method is also used to analyze and evaluate issues. As a result, it provides a foundation for suggesting conservation strategies and increasing the value of World Cultural Heritage in the current context. We combine this with sources currently stored locally: at the Hoi An Center for Cultural Heritage Management and Preservation; relevant departments in Hoi An; documents stored at the sites and families of the Chinese groups.

3. Results

3.1 Response and adaptation of Hoi An City to the COVID-19 pandemic

During the extended and repeating waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government and citizens of Hoi An took aggressive steps to respond and adapt. While focusing on strict adherence to pandemic prevention procedures, the People's Committees of Quang Nam Province and Hoi An City implemented specific policies to assist various stakeholders, including companies, communities, individual traders, tourist workers, and visitors.

- **Government initiatives**

At the 16th session of the Quang Nam Provincial People's Council, which took place on July 14-15, 2020, a decision was voted to lower entry costs at many provincial tourism attractions. Specifically, six attractions received a 50% charge decrease. The admission price to Hoi An Ancient Town has been reduced to VND 10,000 per person, per site (Bao Han, 2020) ^[6].

- In addition, from December 1 to 4, 2020, Hoi An provided free access to the Ancient Town to all tourists.

The city has also introduced a 50% discount on admission fees for tourists visiting Ancient Town, Thanh Ha Pottery Village, and Tra Que Vegetable Village. These initiatives were designed to boost tourism demand and aid the sector's revival.

- Resolution No. 18, which was passed by the Quang Nam Provincial People's Council during its 23rd session, gave further assistance. This resolution prolonged the 50% decrease in admission fees for specific sites in Hoi An and provided financial aid to 13 privately held historic sites inside the Ancient Town's ticketed area, totalling VND 5 million per month from July to the end of 2021. Furthermore, the resolution allocates up to VND 500 million for each event for staging promotional events to increase tourism in Quang Nam, with a total support grant of VND 10 billion, favouring projects in Hoi An. MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) organisations visiting Quang Nam received a total aid package of VND 500 million (Baovanhoa.vn, 2020) ^[7]. Hoi An had to temporarily halt visitor activities to comply with pandemic controls several times.
- **Departmental and enterprise-wide efforts**
Hoi An, a city known for its rich cultural legacy, displayed adaptability in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the crisis, the city's cultural and tourist sectors maintained operations aimed at promoting, managing, conserving, and enhancing heritage tourism values. Taking advantage of the lower visitor numbers, different tourist attractions completed necessary repair and preservation activities, established expert artefact conservation processes, and modernised exhibition systems.
- Hoi An introduced many types of historical tourist activities as part of a diversification plan, albeit on a small scale. Funding for these activities came not only from the municipal budget, but also from socialisation and sponsorship campaigns. Specifically, beginning in June 2020, in response to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) theme "Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion", the Museum of Folk Culture (33 Nguyen Thai Hoc Street) will offer experiences such as dó paper printmaking, traditional cake moulding, and herbal lao tea preparation. The Museum of Trade Ceramics (80 Tran Phu Street) provided pottery wheel demonstrations and ceramic painting, while the Museum of Traditional Medicine (46 Nguyen Thai Hoc Street) offered herbal foot soaks and traditional pulse diagnostics. A series of additional events aimed at stimulating tourism included: an online exhibition titled "Traditional Costumes of Hoi An through Photographs" (23 November – 4 December 2020) on hoianheritage.net; an exhibition on "Ancient Trade Signboards in Hoi An" and a "Vintage Goods Exchange Fair" at Hoi An Museum (10B Tran Hung Dao Street) from 25 November to 4 December 2020; and cultural programmes held on 3–4 December 2020 at Hoi An

⁵ VOV – Central Region. Hoi An cautiously reopens to tourists after four COVID-19 waves [Internet]. 2021 Aug 6 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <https://vov.vn>

⁶Bao Han. Agreement reached on reducing entrance fees at selected sites in the province [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <http://dbnd.quangnam.gov.vn>

⁷ Baovanhoa.vn. Quang Nam supports private heritage sites in Hoi An to remain open to visitors [Internet]. 2020 Aug 6 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <https://bvhttdl.gov.vn>

Museum and the Japanese Covered Bridge Courtyard, featuring “Traditional Cuisine”, “Time Masks – Artisan Legacy Showcase”, “Family Music Night”, and “Art Performances”. On 4 December 2020, the “Traditional Long-Distance Race” “For the World Cultural Heritage of Hoi An” took place at Song Hoai Square (Hoi An Centre for Cultural Heritage Management and Preservation, 2020) ^[8].

- Hoi An also held meetings and dialogues with relevant stakeholders to discuss strategies for increasing the appeal of the Hoi An World Cultural Heritage site, with the goal of overcoming the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, attracting tourists, stimulating post-pandemic tourism, and fostering socioeconomic development. On the morning of October 2, 2020, the Hoi An City People's Committee met with local businesses. Many companies efficiently followed government guidelines and proactively adopted pandemic control measures, such as deferring tourist arrivals from impacted areas and restricting travel to provinces and towns experiencing pandemics. They also instructed visitors and workers on how to follow safety standards. Additionally, companies shared their pandemic prevention experiences with one another. As a result, the business community worked closely with the city to respond effectively during and after the pandemic. This approach was consistent with the recommendation of Mr. Nguyen Thanh Hong, Director of the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, who stated that “Enterprises should treat tourists with civility, seek solutions to retain visitors, and develop recovery strategies for post-pandemic operations” (Quoc Hai, 2020b) ^[9].
- In honour of Vietnam Cultural Heritage Day (23 November 2020) and the 21st anniversary of Hoi An Ancient Town's designation as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site (4 December 1999 - 4 December 2020), the Hoi An City People's Committee, through the Hoi An Centre for Cultural Heritage Management and Preservation, collaborated with the Institute for International Culture - Shokei Gakuin University (Japan) and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam. The inaugural seminar, titled “Preservation and Promotion of Heritage Tourism in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Issues and Solutions”, was held on the morning of December 3, 2020, in the Centre's Hall (10B Tran Hung Dao Street, Hoi An). The second seminar, “The Role of Women in Enhancing the Appeal of Heritage Tourism”, was held in the afternoon of the same day at Maison Vy Hotel (544 Cua Dai Street, Cam Chau Ward, Hoi An). In addition, the Centre hosted a seminar on “Residential and Business Activities within Heritage Sites in Hoi An Ancient Town during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Current Situation and Solutions” on the morning of 4 December 2020 at the Hoi An City Party Committee Hall (11 Tran Hung Dao Street, Hoi An). These discussions focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on heritage sites, including Hoi

An, and proposed solutions for overcoming the challenges.

- **For local residents and other contributing factors**
Prior to the pandemic, the local people faced considerable hardships, mainly economic ones. Household earnings plummeted; stores and restaurants collapsed; employees lost their employment; and small company owners were compelled to vacate rental properties owing to a lack of clients. Nonetheless, the citizens of the Ancient Town exhibited tremendous support for the national pandemic response program, strictly adhering to the government's preventive measures. Residents in tourist regions closed their shops and followed the idea of remaining at home, limited to their own houses and neighbourhoods, which contributed considerably to the outbreak's containment and final control.
- The municipal authorities of Hoi An established a variety of assistance initiatives to aid the populace during and after the pandemic. The Hoi An Buddhist Sangha distributed rice to impacted households via a “rice ATM” scheme. Recognising that 4,960 families (with over 12,000 people) were at danger of food insecurity during the 2022 Lunar New Year (Tet), the Hoi An City People's Committee formally requested rice relief from the Quang Nam Provincial People's Committee on January 8, 2022. Furthermore, during the Year of the Tiger Spring Flower Festival (25-31 January 2022), which was held along Nguyen Hue, Tran Hung Dao, Ngo Gia Tu, Hoang Dieu, Pham Hong Thai, and Thai Phien streets, the city waived participation fees for local residents to assist them in selling flowers and ornamental plants, easing their financial burden during the festive season.

3.2 Adaptation of Hoi An's Tourism Sector in the Post-COVID-19 Period

As early as 2021, Hoi An began preparing a series of initiatives aimed at revitalising tourism in the post-COVID-19 era. These included events in celebration of the International Day of Happiness (20 March); the organisation of “Hoi An Ancient Town Night” (26 March); participation in Earth Hour through a lights-off initiative (27 March); a special live performance titled “Hoi An–Show”, which recreated the historic trading port of Hoi An and featured legends surrounding the Japanese Covered Bridge (28 March); and a commemorative concert dedicated to the late musician Trinh Cong Son (1 April). In parallel, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Cultural Centre worked with Quang Nam Province and Hoi An City to organise “Korean Cultural Days in Quang Nam” (9-11 April) in Hoi An, which featured a variety of cultural exchange activities, performances, and experiential programmes (Hoi An City Centre for Culture–Sports and Broadcasting–Television, 2021) ^[10].

Hoi An has continued to revitalise its image via creative and original tourism goods, thanks to the support and active engagement of local citizens and businesses. These include

⁸ Hoi An Centre for Cultural Heritage Management and Preservation. Programme of activities commemorating Vietnam Cultural Heritage Day [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2022 Aug 10]. Available from: hoianheritage.net/

⁹ Quoc Hai. The tourism sector responds to the pandemic [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <http://www.hoianworldheritage.org.vn>

¹⁰ Hoi An City Centre for Culture–Sports and Broadcasting–Television. Safe and appealing tourism programmes in Hoi An from 20 March to 1 May 2021.

the “Dang Pho” fashion show and the live performance “Hoai Giang Full Moon Night”, all of which promise to provide unforgettable and rewarding experiences for locals and visitors alike. Such initiatives are progressively helping the tourism industry’s revival, reassuring local and worldwide audiences that the city is still dynamic and resolute in prospering in the face of pandemics and natural catastrophes. In general, in the aftermath of COVID-19, both domestic and foreign visitors have expressed a preference for sites that provide fresh, calm surroundings that mix sightseeing with leisure and health recovery. In anticipation of this trend, the authorities of Quang Nam Province and Hoi An City have

devised new tourist development strategies. In 2021, the Quang Nam Provincial People's Committee issued a plan for the development of green tourism in the province through 2025, with the goal of promoting sustainable tourism that protects the environment and natural landscapes while preserving and enhancing the region's cultural and historical values. Quang Nam Province hosted the 2022 National Tourism Year under the theme “Quang Nam – A Green Tourism Destination”. Hoi An was chosen as the province's first municipality to develop a green tourism model based on the “Green Tourism Criteria Framework”, establishing a standard for replication by other communities and businesses.



Fig 1: A visitor's COVID-19 QR code scanning in Hoi An
(Source: <https://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/en/post/16544>)

Local government and enterprises in Hoi An promote post-COVID-19 tourism development

The government and businesses in Hoi An have actively sought new directions for the tourism sector in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, in the first half of 2022, the Hoi An Department of Culture and Information, in collaboration with the Quang Nam Tourism Promotion and Information Centre, conducted surveys and assessments on the feasibility of implementing the “Green Tourism Criteria” in the Ancient Town and Tra Que Vegetable Village. In 2022, the Hoi An City People’s Committee issued the “Green Tourism Development Plan to 2025”, setting the goal that by 2025, destinations including the Hoi An heritage area, the core zone of the Cu Lao Cham – Hoi An World Biosphere Reserve, Tra Que Vegetable Village, Thanh Ha Pottery Village, Kim Bong Carpentry Village, and the Cam Thanh nipa palm forest will be recognised as “green destinations” (Phan Son, 2022) ^[11].

That same year, Hoi An organised numerous activities in response to the National Tourism Year programme. The “Hoi An – Summer Vibes” beach festival (June–July 2022)

featured a wide range of vibrant cultural, sporting, artistic, and culinary events at An Bang, Tan Thanh, Cua Dai beaches, and Cu Lao Cham Island. The Hoi An Weekend Market, held in the An Hoi Sculpture Garden area, adopted a plastic bag-free policy. The programme “Hoi An Residents Touring Hoi An” aimed to enhance local understanding of the city’s cultural and historical values, as well as to raise awareness of green tourism models among its residents. Many tourism sites have since been upgraded and renovated towards sustainable, eco-friendly practices.

Additionally, traditional craft villages and rice fields on the outskirts of Hoi An Ancient Town have gained popularity among international tourists seeking peaceful environments and a deeper understanding of wet rice cultivation. Visitors particularly enjoyed unique tours and tourism products in these rural areas, such as “A Day as a Farmer”, buffalo riding, and cycling through rice paddies. Models of clean and organic agriculture linked to tourism have become attractive options for experiential travellers.

Over the years, the Quang Nam Tourism Association, along with the tourism communities of Quang Nam and Hoi An,

¹¹ Phan Son. Quang Nam: Hoi An deploys green tourism development [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <https://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/printer/42212?type=1>

has worked tirelessly to develop innovative tourism products aligned with the post-COVID context. Hoi An has emerged as a pioneer in establishing and promoting green tourism models that draw upon its rich cultural heritage and human values, while responsibly utilising ecological resources. These efforts not only generate livelihoods and income for local communities but also contribute significantly to the conservation and promotion of cultural and ecological values, as well as raising public awareness about environmental and heritage protection.

In 2023, Hoi An will continue to implement comprehensive measures to boost socio-economic development and advance projects under the national economic recovery and development programme. The focus will be on supporting businesses and citizens in overcoming challenges to production and trade, revitalising the tourism and service sectors, and maintaining a safe, civilised, and hospitable tourism environment.

4. Discussion

4.1. Tourist growth figures

Tourism in Hoi An has been one of the most seriously impacted sectors by the pandemic. Following four rounds of COVID-19 outbreaks, most tourist sites in Hoi An City witnessed a considerable decrease in visitor numbers, with arrivals falling drastically compared to prior years. Prior to the pandemic, Hoi An attracted a large number of tourists: in 2018, the city got 4.992 million visits (3.755 million foreign visitors), and in 2019, 5.35 million arrivals (4 million international visitors). However, as the pandemic progressed, these figures fell sharply. In the first quarter of 2021, Hoi An City attracted little more than 146,375 visitors, with just 8,420 purchasing admission tickets (Hoi An City Centre for Culture – Sports and Broadcasting – Television, 2021) ^[12].



Fig 2: Total number of tourists visiting Hoi An in 2018 and 2019

The response of the local government, businesses, and residents of Hoi An—a city renowned for its tourism—to the COVID-19 pandemic yielded notable achievements.

The foremost success was the effective containment of the COVID-19 outbreak, which ensured the safety of the heritage

city and allowed for the continued operation of economic, cultural, and tourism activities. This laid the foundation for Hoi An's tourism sector to promptly recover and resume development once the pandemic was brought under control. According to Mr Nguyen The Hung, Vice Chairman of the Hoi An City People's Committee: "In 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism and service activities were severely affected, with most tourism indicators declining significantly. However, on average for the 2016–2020 period, tourism and service sectors still met the set targets" (Quoc Hai, 2021a) ^[13].

Due to the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, the number of visitors to Hoi An dropped sharply. In the first quarter of 2021, Hoi An City received over 146,375 visitors. Specifically, museums and heritage sites in Hoi An welcomed 14,025 visitors during this period, including 471 international tourists and 13,554 domestic tourists.

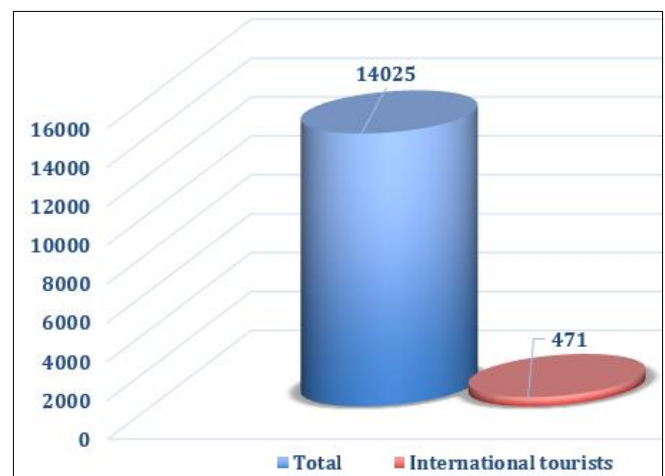


Fig 3: Number of visitors to museums and heritage sites in Hoi An in the first quarter of 2021

Following a period of significant disruption, Hoi An reopened to visitors on the morning of 15 November 2021. From early 2022, the city actively resumed tourism operations under the "new normal" conditions. As a result, after more than two years of pandemic-related challenges, Hoi An's tourism sector began its recovery and experienced robust growth in 2022, acting as a driving force for the development of other economic sectors.

In 2022, Hoi An's Gross Output (GO), calculated at 2010 constant prices, was estimated at VND 4,661 billion, exceeding the annual plan by 10.7%. The average per capita income reached VND 46.2 million, an increase of VND 10 million compared to 2021. The group of sectors comprising tourism, services, and commerce recorded significant growth, particularly tourism.

Total visitor arrivals to Hoi An in 2022 were estimated at 1.536 million, including approximately 614,000 international visitors and 922,000 domestic tourists. Visitors to the Ancient Town were estimated at 548,000, achieving over 425% of the initial annual target. The total number of tickets sold to visitors was approximately 1.207 million. Around 710,000 tourists stayed overnight, with an average stay of 1.29 days per visitor. Total revenue from the tourism sector surpassed

¹² Quoc Hai. Hoi An: Restructuring the tourism industry [Internet]. 2021 Aug 13 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <http://hoian.gov.vn>

¹³ Quang Nam Newspaper. Hoi An tourism makes a remarkable recovery [Internet]. 2023 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <https://quangnam.gov.vn>

VND 712 billion. By the end of 2022, the tourism sector's total GO exceeded VND 2,157 billion, surpassing the annual plan by 30.4% (Quang Nam Newspaper, 2023) ^[14].

Hoi An also successfully hosted several major political, cultural, and social events at both national and regional levels. A prominent example was its successful organisation of the Opening Ceremony and associated activities for the National Tourism Year – Quang Nam 2022.

Each year, Hoi An receives numerous prestigious titles and awards from international tourism organisations. In Tripadvisor's *Top 25 Trending Destinations in 2023*—as voted by travellers—Vietnam was represented by two locations: Hoi An Ancient Town and Ho Chi Minh City. Notably, Hoi An ranked second out of the 25 destinations.

4.2. Observations

The safe and flexible adaptation of the local government, businesses, residents, and visitors in Hoi An reflects the confidence and determination of this exceptional tourist city. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hoi An simultaneously pursued two strategic approaches: implementing a wide range of measures and mechanisms to ensure health and safety in preventing and controlling the spread of the virus, while also introducing policies aimed at supporting tourism recovery and promoting socio-economic development. Although tourist arrivals to Hoi An declined significantly during the pandemic, the city proactively worked to rebuild its tourism image. During periods when the outbreak subsided, Hoi An introduced various tourism stimulus policies, particularly targeting domestic tourism. As a result, after two years of severe disruption, the tourism sector in Hoi An has shown significant signs of recovery.

With its inherent potential and advantages as a heritage city, combined with over 20 years of tourism development experience since being recognised as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site, and its flexible policy responses to societal changes, Hoi An has demonstrated a strong capacity for economic recovery and growth, especially in the tourism sector.

4.3. Recommendations

In the course of tourism development, Hoi An should continue to capitalise on its strengths in cultural heritage. To this day, the city has preserved almost intact its precious ensemble of ancient urban architecture, encompassing nearly all traditional Vietnamese architectural forms. According to statistics as of 31 December 2014, Hoi An had 1,429 heritage sites, of which 1,328 were classified as architectural and artistic monuments. These include civil structures (such as houses, bridges, wells, and markets); religious buildings (communal houses, pagodas, temples, ancestral halls, and clan houses); and unique structures (such as tombs) (Hoi An City People's Committee, 2015, p.173) ^[15].

In addition, Hoi An retains an exceptionally rich and diverse intangible cultural heritage, shaped through centuries of interaction, adaptation, and refinement—true to the words of historian Tran Quoc Vuong: “Hoi An is a convergence of

rivers, people, and cultures in extraordinary diversity” (Tran Quoc Vuong, 1991: 52) ^[16]. This gives rise to a unique reservoir of tangible and intangible cultural tourism resources.

According to Chapter 1, Article 3 of the 2017 Law on Tourism: “Cultural tourism is a form of tourism developed on the basis of cultural values, contributing to the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural values and the honouring of new cultural values of humanity” (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2017: 2) ^[17]. Internationally, several countries have successfully harnessed cultural heritage as a foundation for tourism development. Notable examples include South Korea and Thailand. In 2019, South Korea welcomed approximately 17 million international visitors (Khanh Van, 2022) ^[18]. In the same year, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Thailand's tourism sector contributed THB 3 trillion to its economy, accounting for 18% of national GDP—of which THB 2 trillion came from international tourists (12% of GDP) and THB 1 trillion from domestic tourism (6% of GDP) (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative that Hoi An continues to preserve and promote its distinctive cultural tourism resources as a sustainable development strategy.

To enable Hoi An's tourism sector to adapt to the new context, particularly in the post-COVID era, the city must conduct in-depth research and further diversify its tourism products and services. These may include cultural tourism, festival tourism, ecotourism, green tourism (such as “green tours”, “green hotels”, “green resorts”, and “green restaurants”), and craft village tourism linked with leisure, recreation, and conference activities. Businesses should invest in and improve the quality of emerging tourism products, such as community-based tourism, green tourism, and wellness tourism.

Beyond the historical and cultural heritage sites within the ancient town, Hoi An should also focus on developing peripheral areas and alternative destinations, such as beach tourism and contemplative retreats. Key sites include An Bang Beach, the Bay Mau Coconut Forest, the Cu Lao Cham Ecotourism Area, Thanh Ha Pottery Village, Kim Bong Carpentry Village, and Tra Que Vegetable Village. The city should also organise a range of distinctive cultural, artistic, and festive events that actively engage both residents and tourists.

Furthermore, in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0), Hoi An must adopt a strategic approach to investing in science and technology, thereby aligning tourism development with digital transformation. Several tourism products and services may be locally adapted, including the implementation of “smart tourism”. Information technology should be employed to enhance promotional activities and tourism operations through digital platforms such as websites, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, enabling timely dissemination of tourism information to both the public and visitors.

Mobile applications and digital tools such as tour guide

¹⁴ Hoi An City People's Committee. Hoi An monuments and scenic spots. Da Nang: Da Nang Publishing House; 2015.

¹⁵ Tran QV. Geohistorical position and cultural identity of Hoi An. In: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Ancient Town of Hoi An. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House; 1991. p.51-62.

¹⁶ National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Law on Tourism, Law No. 09/2017/QH14. Hanoi; 2017 Jun 19.

¹⁷ Khanh V. South Korea: The tourism sector expected to recover soon after COVID-19 [Internet]. 2022 Apr 10 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <https://ncov.vn.net.vn>

¹⁸ Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Thailand announces a sustainable tourism development strategy [Internet]. 2022 Apr 12 [cited 2025 Mar 3]. Available from: <https://bvhttdl.gov.vn>

management software, automated audio guides, and apps that facilitate connections between tourists, tour guides, tourism enterprises, and state tourism management agencies should also be considered.

In conclusion, the development of Hoi An, particularly its tourism sector amid evolving societal challenges—such as natural disasters, pandemics, and Industry 4.0—requires close coordination among policymakers (local authorities), academics (specialised institutions and researchers, both domestic and international), and the local community (heritage custodians, business owners, tour guides, and tourists). The city's administration must prioritise the interests of its residents while ensuring the robust conservation and effective promotion of heritage. Special attention should be paid to the human element, as the people—the “soul” of Hoi An Ancient Town—are the true creators of the emotional experience that defines its tourism appeal.

5. Conclusion

The shifting dynamics of society, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, have had a considerable impact on the tourism industry across Vietnam, affecting both the national landscape and local destinations. In the face of this unprecedented health crisis, Hoi An (Quang Nam Province) encountered significant difficulties and major challenges. However, throughout and following the pandemic, the government and the people of Hoi An implemented a wide range of timely and adaptive measures.

The tireless efforts of the local authorities, businesses, and residents have yielded tangible results for the economic, cultural, and social development of Hoi An City. Based on the analyses, observations, and recommendations presented in this paper, it is hoped that Hoi An will soon achieve stability and robust growth—continuing to affirm its status as an impressive, friendly, and safe destination for both domestic and international visitors. Moreover, the city will play an active role in the preservation and promotion of the values of Vietnam's World Cultural Heritage. The experience of Hoi An also offers valuable insights for other tourist cities across the country in responding to and adapting within the broader context of societal transformation.

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