



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

VIETNAM

CASE STUDY

Eco-Tourism Reaps Benefits

Resorts and residents benefit from sustainable tourism practices



Photo: Flora and Fauna International

Cat Ba Island, once a sleepy fishing village, is now a resort town.

“I learned a lot about community-based tourism and especially about how to do cultural performances and home stays. [The project] also helped me make contacts with tour operators,” said Nguyen Thi Thuy Lanh, chair of the Viet Hai tourism association.

Challenge

Vietnam is in the midst of a tourism boom that is bringing much needed economic growth to coastal communities, but creating challenges in ecologically sensitive areas of the country. On Cat Ba Island, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in picturesque Ha Long Bay, tourism development has depleted fresh water supplies while wastewater pollution in the harbor has noticeably increased. Cat Ba town, once a sleepy fishing village, is now a major resort town sporting more than 100 multi-story hotels, with many more under construction. As a result, local inhabitants have begun to suffer from many of the negative social and environmental impacts of tourism growth, such as increasing prostitution, drug addiction and pollution.

Initiative

USAID is supporting efforts to introduce environmentally friendly tourism practices on Cat Ba Island that provide economic benefits to the local population, not just city-based tourism companies. A pilot project is raising awareness of eco-tourism opportunities to demonstrate that sustainable tourism practices can provide higher-yield, lower-impact benefits. Activities have included training hotels in eco-certification standards for energy and water use, building the capacity of a local hotel association, promoting traditional architecture and performances to attract eco-tourists, and developing a community-based cooperative in Viet Hai, a village in Cat Ba National Park. Residents involved in tourism development have visited other areas of Vietnam and Thailand to learn best practices in developing tourism that helps the poor.

Impact

Hotel owners in Cat Ba have begun to realize the benefits of eco-certification standards, from reduced water and electricity use to new marketing opportunities. In addition, the Vietnam National Tourism Administration recently revised the draft Law on Tourism to include sections that specifically promote eco-certification. In Viet Hai, villagers and leaders have come to understand that lower-impact, community-based tourism is more beneficial when the revenue generated goes to residents. The success of the program is serving as a model for alternative, more sustainable development in Cat Ba Island.

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>