



Enhancing the Competitiveness of Long An's Tourism Destination

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Abstract

This study analyzes the competitiveness of Long An as a tourism destination using the SWOT framework, assessing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Long An possesses significant competitive advantages, including a strategic location, abundant natural resources, and rich cultural and historical heritage. Additionally, the province has been making substantial investments in tourism development. However, several challenges remain, such as a shortage of skilled human resources, underdeveloped tourism infrastructure, and ineffective destination marketing strategies. In the face of intense competition from neighboring provinces, Long An must adopt a sustainable tourism development strategy, enhance service quality, and strengthen regional linkages, particularly with Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding areas, to increase its attractiveness as a tourism destination.

Keywords: Tourism competitiveness, Long An tourism, sustainable tourism development, destination connectivity

1. Introduction

Long An is a province in the Mekong Delta region, strategically located adjacent to Ho Chi Minh City and sharing a long border with Cambodia. With its geographical advantages, well-developed transportation system, and rich natural resources, Long An is gradually establishing itself as an emerging tourism destination.

In addition to its diverse natural landscapes, including the Dong Thap Muoi wetland ecosystem, Long An boasts a profound cultural and historical heritage. The province is closely associated with the ancient Oc Eo civilization and is home to numerous historically significant sites. In recent years, Long An has focused on tourism infrastructure development, expanding ecotourism and entertainment zones, and enhancing destination marketing efforts to attract both domestic and international visitors.

However, to strengthen its tourism competitiveness and solidify its position within the regional tourism landscape, Long An must address several critical challenges, including workforce quality, accommodation infrastructure, destination marketing, and brand positioning. This study examines the province's strengths and limitations while proposing strategic measures for sustainable tourism development, ultimately contributing to economic and social growth in the region.

2. Research Content

2.1 Competition and Competitiveness

Competition

The term "competition" (*compete*) originates from the Latin word *competere*, which refers to the rivalry between entities of similar qualities in pursuit of specific benefits or objectives (Vu, V. D., 2020)^[1]. According to Karl Marx, "Competition is the intense struggle among capitalists to secure favorable conditions in production and commodity consumption, aiming for surplus profits" (Karl Marx, 1859)^[2]. This perspective has been widely adopted by businesses to optimize their competitive strategies in various industries.

Competitiveness

Competitiveness is a multifaceted concept that varies depending on market dynamics and economic conditions. Market Share Approach: According to the Economic Terminology Dictionary (2001) ^[6], “Competitiveness is the ability to secure a larger market share than competitors, including the capacity to reclaim market segments”. To enhance destination competitiveness, businesses must analyze market trends, understand consumer preferences, and continuously improve the quality of products and services.

Profitability Approach: The OECD defines competitiveness as “the ability to generate high income by effectively utilizing production factors, thereby enabling enterprises, industries, and nations to achieve sustainable development within a competitive international environment” (OECD, 2013) ^[3]. This indicates that to strengthen tourism competitiveness, destinations must leverage existing resources while strategically investing in new assets, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and market positioning.

2.2 Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the competitiveness of Long An’s tourism sector. Specifically, the research applies the SWOT analysis framework, which evaluates internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) that influence the development of tourism in the province.

Additionally, data collection and analysis are conducted through the following methods:

Secondary Data Analysis: This involves gathering information from reports issued by the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Long An Province, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), as well as academic studies and journal articles related to tourism development in the Mekong Delta region.

Field Surveys: Direct observations and assessments are conducted to evaluate tourism infrastructure, accommodation services, tourist attractions, and visitor engagement at key tourism sites in Long An.

Comparative Analysis: The study contrasts Long An’s tourism potential and challenges with those of neighboring provinces such as Tien Giang, Ben Tre, and Dong Thap to assess Long An’s competitive positioning within the regional tourism market.

Based on these research methods, the study provides an objective assessment of Long An’s tourism development status while proposing strategic solutions to enhance its destination competitiveness in the future.

2.3 Research Area

This study was conducted in Long An Province, a significant tourism destination in the Mekong Delta region. Long An

shares borders with Ho Chi Minh City and the provinces of Dong Thap, Tien Giang, and Tay Ninh, while also featuring a 137-kilometer-long international border with Cambodia. This strategic location facilitates economic activities and international trade. In terms of transportation, Long An has a well-developed road and waterway network, seamlessly connecting the Mekong Delta with Vietnam’s southern economic hub (Phan, X. H., & Truong, T. T. H., 2017) ^[4].

Long an is situated within the Dong Thap Muoi wetland ecosystem, characterized by rich biodiversity and significant potential for ecotourism and river-based tourism. Beyond its natural endowments, the province serves as a cultural and historical hub of Southern Vietnam, closely linked to the ancient Oc Eo civilization and home to numerous historical sites that played a crucial role in Vietnam’s resistance movements (Ha, T. H., 2022) ^[1].

Currently, Long An is focusing on developing key tourism projects, including the Khang Thong Entertainment Complex (Happyland), Chavi Educational Ecotourism Area, My Quynh Zoo, and Hoan Cau Long An Golf Course, aiming to attract both domestic and international visitors. Additionally, the province is investing heavily in destination marketing and promotional activities (Truong, T. K, Ngo, H. A. K., & Nguyen, T. C., 2021) ^[5].

From a socioeconomic perspective, Long an is transitioning from an agriculture-based economy to a service-oriented industrial economy, fueled by rapid urbanization and strong domestic and foreign investment inflows. However, the province still faces a shortage of high-quality human resources, particularly in the tourism sector. To address this, investment attraction policies, workforce training initiatives, and infrastructure development strategies are being prioritized.

With a favorable geographical location, diverse natural resources, a rich cultural heritage, and a structured development strategy, Long an is well-positioned to enhance its tourism competitiveness, not only within the Mekong Delta region but also on a national scale

2.4 Research Findings and Discussion

This study employs the SWOT analysis framework to provide a comprehensive assessment of the current state of tourism in Long An. Through this analysis, the study identifies key factors influencing the destination’s competitiveness, evaluating its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The findings highlight Long An’s comparative advantages, as well as existing limitations, providing insights into how the province can enhance its appeal as a competitive tourism destination within the Mekong Delta region. Based on these insights, the study proposes strategic development solutions aimed at improving destination competitiveness and sustainability in the face of growing regional competition.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of Long An’s Tourism Sector

Category	Factors
Strengths (S)	S1: Abundant and diverse natural resources S2: Numerous historical and revolutionary heritage sites S3: Strategic geographical location with convenient accessibility S4: Strong focus on human resource training and development
Weaknesses (W)	W1: Unprofessional and untrained workforce W2: Tourism infrastructure and technical facilities do not fully meet visitor demands W3: Ineffective marketing and tourism promotion activities

	W4: Limitations in tourism management and planning implementation
Opportunities (O)	O1: Stable political and security environment – A safe travel destination O2: Continuous improvement and increasing investment in tourism infrastructure O3: Enhanced tourism connectivity between Long An and Ho Chi Minh City
Threats (T)	T1: Intensifying competition with other regional destinations T2: Environmental impacts on tourism – Degradation of natural tourism resources T3: Gaps in societal awareness regarding tourism development T4: Fluctuations in the domestic and global economy affecting tourism growth

A. Strengths

Long An possesses significant competitive advantages in tourism development, owing to its strategic location, abundant resources, and strong governmental investment. These key factors contribute to enhancing its competitiveness and positioning Long An as an emerging tourism destination in the Mekong Delta region.

Rich tourism resources

Long An boasts a diverse array of natural and cultural resources, fostering the development of various distinctive tourism products. The province is home to the Dong Thap Muoi wetland ecosystem, an intricate river network, and pristine natural landscapes, offering significant potential for ecotourism, garden tourism, and river-based tourism. Furthermore, Long An is historically linked to the ancient Oc Eo civilization and houses numerous significant historical sites, making it a prime location for cultural and spiritual tourism. By effectively utilizing these resources, Long An can create unique, non-redundant tourism products, distinguishing itself from neighboring provinces and attracting both domestic and international visitors.

Favorable geographical location

Situated at the gateway to the Mekong Delta and bordering Ho Chi Minh City, Long An holds a strategic advantage in drawing visitors from Vietnam's largest economic hub. The well-developed transportation infrastructure, particularly the Ho Chi Minh City – Trung Luong Expressway, enhances accessibility, making Long An an ideal stopover on the journey to explore Southern Vietnam. Additionally, the province's extensive river system presents opportunities for waterway tourism, fostering regional connectivity with neighboring provinces. Long An also benefits from proximity to an international border checkpoint and Tan Son Nhat International Airport, facilitating access to international tourists, expanding market reach, and strengthening its competitive edge in the regional tourism sector.

Commitment to tourism workforce development

Human resources play a crucial role in elevating the quality of tourism services and visitor experiences. Recognizing this, Long An has prioritized investment in workforce training and skill development to enhance service quality and professionalism. Establishing a highly skilled tourism workforce will enable the province to increase its competitiveness, ensuring that its tourism products not only attract visitors but also deliver exceptional experiences that encourage return visits.

Future growth potential

With strong governmental investment in infrastructure, human resource development, and strategic tourism planning, Long An is well-positioned to achieve sustainable tourism

growth. By leveraging its strengths and opportunities, the province has the potential to emerge as one of the most attractive tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta region.

B. Weaknesses

Despite its significant tourism potential, Long An still faces several limitations that must be addressed to enhance its competitiveness. Identifying these weaknesses is essential for the province to develop effective strategic solutions, ensuring the sustainable growth of its tourism sector.

Inadequate tourism workforce quality

Although Long An's tourism industry has shown positive growth in recent years, the quality of its human resources remains insufficient to meet industry demands. The tourism workforce lacks structured professional training programs, resulting in a largely unskilled and unprofessional labor force. Many service staff members lack essential technical skills, impacting service quality and visitor experience. Moreover, even management personnel in accommodation facilities and tourism sites have not received adequate professional training, affecting operational efficiency. If this situation is not addressed promptly, Long An may struggle to attract and retain tourists, ultimately hindering the province's tourism development.

Limited tourism infrastructure and accommodation services

Although considerable efforts have been made to develop tourism infrastructure, existing facilities remain inadequate to meet growing visitor expectations. According to statistics, Long An currently has 330 accommodation establishments with more than 5,000 rooms, yet most of them lack high-quality standards. The province has only a few two-star hotels, and there are no three-star or higher-rated hotels, making it challenging to attract high-end and international tourists. Furthermore, low occupancy rates indicate that accommodation facilities are not being fully optimized. To achieve sustainable tourism growth, Long An must invest in upgrading its hotel network, resorts, and supporting services to enhance visitor experience and satisfaction.

Ineffective tourism marketing and promotion

Despite efforts in destination promotion, Long An's marketing strategies remain ineffective. Promotional campaigns lack creativity and differentiation, primarily relying on natural tourism assets rather than developing engaging, well-branded content. Furthermore, digital marketing remains underutilized, with limited presence on social media, tourism websites, and digital technology platforms, resulting in missed opportunities to engage potential visitors. The lack of a cohesive branding strategy has led to weak market positioning, making it difficult for Long An to compete with neighboring destinations.

Lack of integrated tourism planning and development focus

Tourism planning and management in Long An still face several shortcomings, failing to keep pace with industry trends. Some high-potential destinations, such as Tan Lap Floating Village and river tourism routes, remain underutilized, relying solely on natural appeal without strategic investment to develop attractive tourism products. Similarly, historical sites have not been effectively leveraged, often limited to basic sightseeing experiences without immersive or interactive elements, making it difficult to encourage repeat visits.

C. Opportunities

The tourism industry in Long An is presented with numerous strategic opportunities, driven by both internal and external factors. These advantages not only enable the province to expand its visitor market but also foster long-term sustainable tourism growth.

A safe destination, attracting both domestic and international tourists

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist demand has surged, particularly for leisure tourism, ecotourism, and spiritual tourism. Long An, with its stable political and security environment, is increasingly recognized as an ideal destination for both domestic and international travelers. Due to its proximity to Ho Chi Minh City, Long An serves as a convenient getaway for short trips and weekend retreats, particularly for visitors from major urban areas. Additionally, as the gateway to the Mekong Delta, Long An plays a crucial role as a stopover destination, providing significant opportunities to attract and retain tourists along their journey to explore the region.

Continuous investment and upgrades in tourism infrastructure

The development of transportation infrastructure and tourism facilities plays a vital role in enhancing visitor experiences and attracting tourists. Long An is not only rich in cultural and historical values but also benefits from governmental efforts to preserve and promote key heritage sites. Simultaneously, industrialization and urbanization have spurred significant investments in transportation networks, accommodation, and tourism services. The improvement of road connectivity with Ho Chi Minh City and neighboring provinces has made travel to Long An more accessible, contributing to an enhanced tourism experience.

Strengthening tourism linkages with Ho Chi Minh City – A key growth driver

The increasing tourism collaboration between Long An and Ho Chi Minh City has created new opportunities for inter-regional tourism development. Ho Chi Minh City, as Vietnam's economic and tourism hub, attracts millions of domestic and international visitors annually. This presents Long An with the potential to capitalize on spillover tourism demand, offering a complementary experience that blends urban vibrancy with serene natural landscapes.

Furthermore, Long An's connectivity with Tan Son Nhat International Airport allows for seamless access to international tourists. Given its short travel distance, visitors can conveniently transfer from the airport to Long An to engage in ecotourism, agricultural tourism, and cultural

exploration. Effectively leveraging this regional linkage will enable Long An to expand its international visitor market, strengthen its competitive positioning, and foster sustainable tourism development.

D. Threats

Despite numerous growth opportunities, Long An's tourism industry faces significant challenges in enhancing its destination competitiveness. Without appropriate strategic interventions to mitigate these constraints, the province risks falling behind neighboring destinations in the Mekong Delta region.

Intense competition from neighboring provinces

Long An is under considerable competitive pressure from the rapidly developing tourism sectors of nearby provinces such as Tien Giang, Dong Thap, Ben Tre, and Vinh Long. These provinces have established strong tourism brands and offer more diverse and attractive tourism products. In contrast, Long An has yet to create a distinct tourism identity, and its product offerings remain limited, lacking the competitive appeal necessary to attract visitors. Without a significant transformation, Long An's competitiveness will continue to decline, negatively impacting its tourism development strategy and having broader economic and social consequences.

Degradation of tourism resources and environmental impact

The deterioration of natural and cultural tourism resources presents a major challenge for Long An. Conservation efforts for historical sites and natural landscapes have not been effectively coordinated, leading to significant degradation. Additionally, rapid industrialization and urbanization have negatively affected the local ecosystem, resulting in deforestation, reduced biodiversity, and altered landscapes. Without effective policies for resource management and environmental protection, Long An risks losing one of its most valuable competitive advantages in the tourism sector.

Limited public awareness and recognition of tourism's economic role

Although Long An's tourism industry has shown promising growth, public awareness of the sector's economic importance remains limited. Tourism revenue is still relatively low, failing to provide sufficient momentum for sustainable development. Furthermore, the tourism workforce remains largely informal, lacking professional training and essential skills, leading to inconsistent service quality. If the tourism sector fails to establish itself as a key economic driver, it will struggle to attract investment from businesses and stakeholders, limiting its future growth potential.

Impacts of global economic fluctuations

Since 2025, both the global and Vietnamese economies have experienced significant fluctuations, directly affecting the tourism industry. Economic downturns have reduced disposable income, leading to declining travel demand and lower visitor spending. This has been particularly impactful on international tourist arrivals, creating barriers to growth for Long An's tourism sector. If these economic uncertainties persist, Long An's tourism industry may lose momentum,

facing increasing difficulties in attracting visitors in the coming years.

2.5 Development orientation for long an's tourism sector

Table 2: Strategic recommendations for enhancing Long An's tourism competitiveness

No.	Strategic Action	Relevant SWOT Factors
1	Diversifying tourism products	(S1, S2 + O3) - T1
2	Enhancing marketing strategies and destination branding	(S1, S2 + O1, O3) - W3
3	Developing comprehensive tourism policies for Long An	(S1, S2 + O2, O3) - W2, W4; T4
4	Improving the quality of human resources in the tourism sector	(S4 + O3) - W1
5	Enhancing environmental management and destination sustainability	(S4 + O2) - T2
6	Efficient management and sustainable utilization of tourism resources	(S4 + O3) - T1, T3

To enhance destination competitiveness and ensure sustainable tourism growth, Long An must implement comprehensive strategies that address both internal and external factors influencing its tourism industry.

Diversification of Tourism Products: Long An should broaden its tourism portfolio by developing ecotourism, community-based tourism, agritourism, and cultural-historical tourism. By capitalizing on its diverse natural landscapes and rich historical heritage, the province can create unique tourism experiences, differentiating itself from neighboring destinations while reducing competitive pressures.

Strengthening Destination Marketing and Branding: To increase visibility and attract a wider audience, Long An must enhance tourism promotion strategies, particularly through digital marketing and destination branding. Utilizing modern communication platforms, social media, and interactive campaigns will effectively showcase the province's tourism potential, addressing current shortcomings in promotional efforts.

Policy Development for Sustainable Growth: Implementing strategic tourism policies is crucial for strengthening infrastructure, fostering public-private partnerships, and promoting sustainable tourism development. Clear regulatory frameworks should be established to ensure balanced growth, allowing tourism to thrive despite existing infrastructure and economic challenges.

Human Resource Development in the Tourism Sector: A well-trained workforce is essential for delivering high-quality tourism services. Long An must focus on expanding professional training programs, enhancing service skills, and improving management capacity to meet evolving visitor expectations and enhance overall service quality.

Environmental Conservation and Sustainable Tourism Practices: With increasing tourism demand, preserving Long An's natural and cultural assets is vital. The province should adopt eco-friendly tourism initiatives, promote sustainable resource management, and implement measures to mitigate environmental degradation caused by tourism activities.

Efficient Management and Optimal Use of Tourism Resources: Strengthening tourism governance is necessary to ensure the responsible utilization of cultural and natural resources. By implementing effective management strategies, Long An can maximize the economic value of its tourism assets while preserving them for future generations.

Infrastructure Development and Regional Integration: Investment in modern tourism infrastructure is essential for long-term growth. Expanding accommodation options, improving transportation networks, and upgrading key tourist attractions will significantly enhance visitor convenience and satisfaction. Additionally, regional collaboration with Ho Chi

Minh City and other Mekong Delta provinces will help expand Long An's market reach, fostering the development of interconnected tourism products that enhance overall appeal.

By adopting these strategic initiatives, Long An can fully leverage its tourism potential, achieve sustainable growth, and contribute significantly to local economic and social development.

3. Conclusion

This study has conducted a comprehensive assessment of Long An's tourism competitiveness using the SWOT analysis framework, identifying its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the development process. The findings highlight that Long An possesses significant potential to emerge as a prominent tourism destination, owing to its strategic geographic location, diverse natural resources, well-connected transportation infrastructure, and rich cultural-historical heritage. Additionally, ongoing investments in infrastructure and tourism product diversification are positioning the province for enhanced competitiveness.

However, several challenges remain that need to be addressed to fully capitalize on Long An's potential. These include an inadequately skilled workforce, underdeveloped accommodation facilities, inconsistent tourism services, ineffective marketing strategies, and fragmented tourism planning. Furthermore, growing competition from neighboring provinces, risks of tourism resource degradation, and economic fluctuations pose additional threats to the long-term sustainability of the province's tourism industry.

To strengthen its destination competitiveness, Long An must implement strategic interventions that maximize its inherent advantages while systematically addressing existing shortcomings. By adopting a sustainable, well-structured development approach, the province can establish a resilient tourism sector, ensuring long-term growth and contribution to local socio-economic development.

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