

Enhancing the Role of Historical and Cultural Relics in Tourism Development: A Case Study of Can Tho City



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ABSTRACT: This article examines the efforts and challenges associated with promoting the values of historical and cultural relics in Can Tho City, focusing on their integration into tourism development. Can Tho, a centrally administered city in the Mekong Delta, possesses a rich cultural heritage that includes numerous historical relics and sites of revolutionary significance. These tangible cultural assets are pivotal for the city's tourism potential, serving as critical attractions for domestic and international tourists. The article explores the various initiatives local authorities undertake, including policy implementation, investment in infrastructure, and community engagement, to enhance the preservation and promotion of these cultural sites. It also addresses the limitations, such as inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, and the uneven awareness of heritage value among stakeholders. Recommendations are provided for improving the management and promotion of Can Tho's cultural heritage, emphasizing the need for better coordination among local agencies, increased investment, and the development of professional tour guide services. The article concludes that while significant progress has been made, further efforts are needed to realize the potential of Can Tho's cultural heritage in contributing to sustainable tourism and economic development.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Heritage; Tourism Development; Historical Relics; Can Tho City ; Preservation and Promotion

1. INTRODUCTION

Historical and cultural relics are a significant component of the national heritage system. They serve as valuable resources that can promote socio-economic development and enhance the quality of life by integrating with tourism CTCPC. (2019). These sites offer unique tourism products and diverse cultural experiences for visitors, combining elements of sightseeing, research, relaxation, ecology, and cultural beliefs. This integration contributes significantly to socio-economic growth (Bui, 2019).

Can Tho, a city with a rich history, plays a crucial role in Vietnam's economic, social, and defense sectors. It serves as a development hub for the Mekong Delta region. The people of Can Tho are known for their patriotic, solid spirit and revolutionary heritage CTCPC. (2019). The city's strategic importance was evident during the two resistance wars against foreign invaders, where it played a pivotal role in the national liberation and unification efforts.

Preserving and promoting cultural heritage value, mainly historical and cultural relics, is vital for sustainable development. This task contributes to revitalizing culture and fostering prosperity in the country and Can Tho city.

Despite the socio-economic progress and growth in tourism activities, Can Tho's tourism sector has not fully realized its potential. While the city has seen an increase in visitor numbers, the development of tourism infrastructure and services remains inconsistent. The lack of high-quality tourist destinations, unique tourism products, and effective connectivity hinders the city's ability to attract and retain tourists.

This article analyzes and synthesizes secondary data from various sources, including research publications, books, magazines, and reports from relevant city agencies and departments in Can Tho to address these challenges.

2. CURRENT STATUS OF THE WORK OF PROMOTING THE VALUE OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RELICS IN CAN THO CITY

2.1 Overview of Can Tho's Cultural and Cultural Heritage

Can Tho, the central city of the Mekong Delta, is renowned for its serene river landscapes and hospitable people. It is a region steeped in rich spiritual traditions and favorable feng shui, serving as a cultural melting pot with numerous historical sites (CTCPC, 2019). As of 2020, Can Tho boasts approximately 325 historical and cultural relics and scenic spots, with 36 officially

Enhancing the Role of Historical and Cultural Relics in Tourism Development: A Case Study of Can Tho City

recognized—14 at the national level and 22 at the city level. This study focuses exclusively on Can Tho's recognized formal historical and cultural relics (DCST, 2021a).

Among the national-level cultural heritage sites in Can Tho are 14 significant historical relics, including the Special Committee of the Annam Communist Party (1929-1930) in Bui Huu Nghia Ward, Binh Thuy District; Nam et al. in Bui Huu Nghia Ward, Binh Thuy District; the Tomb of poet Phan Van Tri in Nhon Ai Commune, Phong Dien District; Hoi et al. in Bui Huu Nghia Ward, Binh Thuy District; the Grave of Valedictorian Bui Huu Nghia in Bui Huu Nghia Ward, Binh Thuy District; the large clinic of Can Tho in Tan An Ward, Ninh Kieu District; and the historical site marking the establishment of the Annam Communist Party Cell of the Red Flag Party in Co Do Town, Co Do District (Bui, 2019).. Other significant sites include locations related to the resistance war against the United States, such as the troop transfer location, Forward Military Medical Station, and weapons hiding place along Can Tho Arc Road in My Khanh Commune, Phong Dien District.

The city-level recognized relics include 22 notable sites, such as the Ong Hao Victory historical-cultural relic in Truong Long Commune, Phong Dien District; Thoi An communal house in Thoi Trinh A Area, Thoi An Ward, O Mon District; the Command Base of the 1968 Spring Offensive and Uprising (Plum Garden Base) in Binh Thuong B Area, Long Tuyen Ward, Binh Thuy District; Pothisomron Pagoda in Area IV, Chau Van Liem Ward, O Mon District; and the Victory site of the National Self-Defense Team in Can Tho Province in 1945 (Le Binh battle) located in Le Binh Ward, Cai Rang District. Other significant sites include Thuan Hung communal house in Tan Phu Area, Thuan Hung Ward, Thot Not District; Linh Son Co Mieu in Thoi Hoa 1 Area, Thoi Long Ward, O Mon District; and Dinh Thuong Thanh in Thanh My Area, Thuong Thanh Ward, Cai Rang District. Additionally, the site of the victory of Ong Dua in 1960 in Dinh Khanh A Hamlet, Dinh Mon Commune, Thoi Lai District, and the historical site Giang Gua Hamlet in Nhon Khanh, Nhon Nghia Commune, Phong Dien District, are noteworthy (DCST, 2021a).

Can Tho offers a variety of tourism types, including river life experiences, MICE tourism (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions), eco-tourism, cultural-historical tourism, community tourism, and urban tourism. Each type of tourism aligns with the specific characteristics of different localities within the city's nine districts. However, the main attractions are concentrated in certain districts, such as Ninh Kieu District, which is ideal for developing MICE and urban tourism due to its central location and historical sites like Lon Temple, Ong Pagoda, and Can Tho Market Hall. Cai Rang District, known for the Cai Rang floating market, is perfect for river life tourism, offering a unique product that distinguishes Can Tho's tourism industry (Bui, 2019). Binh Thuy District, with its system of ancient villages, houses, communal houses, and pagodas like Hoi Linh Pagoda, Nam Nha Pagoda, Long Quang Pagoda, and Binh Thuy Communal House, is suitable for cultural and historical tourism. Phong Dien District, famous for its fruit gardens and various tourist spots, is ideal for eco-tourism. Additionally, Thot Not District is known for its natural ecosystems, such as the Bang Lang stork garden and Tan Loc Island, renowned for its fruit gardens and historic houses (Bui, 2019)..

Can Tho also features a system of natural dunes and islands, which hold the potential for developing high-quality eco-tourism and resort urban projects. These developments contribute to diversifying the city's tourism products, catering to the varied needs of both domestic and international tourists.

2.2 Achievements in promoting the value of historical and cultural relics and causes

2.2.1. These achievements

Firstly, on promulgating planning documents and plans

The city has issued guiding documents, regulations, and specific plans to implement the protection and promotion of cultural heritage values within its jurisdiction. These initiatives have been integrated into meetings and conferences to disseminate and thoroughly communicate the proposed content to all relevant agencies, departments, and organizations in the area for effective implementation. Key documents include (CTCPC, 2019):

- Directive No. 23-CT/TU dated June 5, 2018, from the Can Tho City Party Committee (CTCPC), emphasizing the strengthening of management, conservation, and promotion of historical and cultural relics in the city.
- Official Dispatch No. 1235-CV/TU dated January 9, 2019, from the City Party Committee, directing the enhancement of cultural and artistic activities within the city.
- Decision No. 105/QD-UBND dated January 13, 2016, from the People's Committee of Can Tho City, approving the development planning of the city's cultural industry until 2020, with a vision extending to 2030.
- Decision No. 3307/QD-UBND dated October 28, 2016, which approves the project "Protecting and Promoting the Art of Southern Don Ca Tai Tu in Can Tho City, 2016-2020."
- Decision No. 3616/QD-UBND dated December 29, 2017, approving the project "Preserving and Promoting the Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Can Tho City until 2020."
- Plan No. 117/KH-UBND dated July 16, 2018, detailing the preservation and promotion of historical-cultural relics, intangible cultural heritage, craft villages, and scenic spots associated with tourism development in Can Tho until 2020.

Enhancing the Role of Historical and Cultural Relics in Tourism Development: A Case Study of Can Tho City

- Plan No. 89/KH-UBND dated April 14, 2021, outlining the continued efforts to preserve and promote historical-cultural relics, intangible cultural heritage, craft villages, and scenic spots in conjunction with the city's tourism development for the period 2021-2025.

These documents reflect the city's leadership's commitment to preserving and enhancing cultural heritage sites, providing significant support for the renovation and restoration efforts (Bui, 2019). As a result, many restored relics have become popular tourist destinations, attracting more visitors interested in historical and cultural exploration.

Second, on implementing propaganda to raise awareness of sectors at all levels and people of all walks of life about the importance of effectively exploiting the value of historical and cultural relics associated with tourism development. locally

The City Party Committee consistently emphasizes the importance of propaganda efforts to raise awareness among all sectors and the general public about the significance of effectively utilizing the value of historical and cultural relics in conjunction with local tourism development. The Party Committee annually issues official dispatches providing specific directives on these matters. They have called for enhanced propaganda efforts, mainly focusing on the purpose and significance of various cultural activities. These activities are often associated with advertising and promoting tourism, with a strong emphasis on showcasing the city's cultural and historical tourist destinations and the image of Can Tho's land and people.

To further this objective, the city organized a "Cultural Heritage Propaganda Contest," which allowed officials, union members, and students to interact and exchange experiences in propaganda work. This initiative aimed to promote the heritage value of local cultural assets while identifying and training potential cultural heritage propagandists. Such efforts are crucial in enhancing the professional quality of the city's cultural heritage propaganda teams.

Moreover, the city has shown a keen interest in producing and distributing various books and publications. Approximately 17,000 copies have been issued to educate and inform visitors interested in the value of the city's recognized relics. These publications are vital in spreading awareness and appreciation for Can Tho's cultural heritage.

Third, on implementing close coordination between relevant departments and branches in preserving and promoting cultural heritage associated with tourism development.

State tourism management in Can Tho has been characterized by effective coordination between various departments and localities, enhancing the efficiency of efforts to protect and promote cultural heritage values. Each year, the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism collaborates closely with the Department of Education and Training to implement educational programs to promote traditional values and cultural heritage, focusing on ethnic minority cultures and school-based tourism development for students. This collaboration includes organizing over 62 programs such as "Searching for Heritage," "Connecting Heritage," "Discovering Heritage," and "Students Preserve and Promote Cultural Heritage." Additionally, coordinated efforts are made to organize activities where students visit and care for historical and cultural relics (Bui, 2019). These initiatives help visitors, particularly students, better understand the historical traditions and cultural values of the locality and the Vietnamese people as a whole. The programs also work to build a model of tourism promotion within schools, fostering a culture where "everyone does tourism."

Furthermore, a coordination plan was established between the City Women's Union and Can Tho City Youth Union to organize activities focused on preserving and promoting the city's historical and cultural relics for 2019-2021. Activities under this plan include organizing tours, cultural exchanges, and traditional activities at heritage sites. There is also an emphasis on adopting, caring, and protecting the environment at these sites, with at least one site designated in each area. The activities include experiencing various forms of intangible cultural heritage, such as the Ky Yen ceremony at communal houses, memorial ceremonies for local historical figures and cultural celebrities, and participating in folk games, culinary events, and traditional music performances during festivals (Bui, 2019). The "Cultural Heritage Propaganda Contest" allows association and union officials to exchange experiences in propaganda work and promote the value of local heritage.

The Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, in partnership with the People's Committee of Binh Thuy District, developed a plan to elevate the Ky Yen Thuong Dien Festival at Binh Thuy Communal House to a city-level event. This annual festival has become a key highlight, facilitating connections between travel businesses and tourists and promoting cultural tourism. Additionally, the Department collaborates with the People's Committee of Thot Not District to organize the Tan Loc Fruit Garden Festival at Tan Loc Dong Communal House, attracting an average of 40,000 visitors each year. This festival serves as a platform to showcase the region's heritage and draw tourists.

Through these coordinated efforts involving the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, the Department of Education and Training, the Can Tho Youth Union, and various district-level Youth Unions, the city has successfully promoted traditional propaganda and education about cultural heritage in schools. The diverse range of activities, including sightseeing, educational programs, and interactive experiences such as "Finding Heritage," "Connecting Heritage," "Discovering Heritage," and "Students

Enhancing the Role of Historical and Cultural Relics in Tourism Development: A Case Study of Can Tho City

Preserve and Promote Cultural Heritage," has attracted significant participation, helping to foster a strong cultural awareness and appreciation among the youth and the wider community.

Fourth, about promoting tourism through the media and organizing cultural events

To date, several tourism routes associated with historical and cultural relics have been established, comprising four main routes that travel agencies promote and organize for tourists. These routes include the Cai Rang Floating Market - Noodle Craft Village - Truc Lam Phuong Nam Zen Monastery - My Khanh Tourist Village route; the Cai Rang Floating Market - Binh Thuy Ancient House - Binh Thuy Communal House - Con Son route; the Cai Rang Floating Market - Noodle Craft Village - Nam Nha Pagoda - Binh Thuy Communal House - Tan Loc Island route; and the route encompassing Ong Pagoda - Vam Xang Fruit Garden - Can Tho Bridge - Pitu Khosacrangey Pagoda - Can Tho Ancient Market - Can Tho Cruise - Ninh Kieu Night Market - Cai Rang Floating Market - My Khanh Tourist Village (Bui, 2019).

Significant efforts have recently been made to preserve and restore cultural heritages in Can Tho. This has resulted in the enhancement and promotion of several historical and cultural relics, which have played a crucial role in the development of community tourism services within the city. These activities have not only preserved the cultural essence of Can Tho but also provided unique and enriching experiences for tourists, thereby boosting the city's tourism industry and contributing to the local economy.

Fifth, Regarding building an interpretation team and researching effective automatic interpretation applications to enhance the value of heritage in tourist guiding activities and developing intelligent tourism products.

From 2016 to 2020, the city organized six training courses focused on interpretation skills and the management and promotion of monuments, which 324 participants attended. These courses aimed to enhance the professional competencies of those involved in preserving and promoting the city's cultural heritage.

For tour guides specifically, the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism conducted seven training classes to facilitate the renewal of tour guide licenses by regulations. Additionally, two specialized training classes were held for on-site tour guides, attracting a total of 342 participants (Bui, 2019). These educational initiatives aimed to improve the skills and knowledge of tour guides, ensuring high-quality interpretation services at historical and cultural sites.

In addition to traditional training, the city is also exploring the development of practical automatic interpretation applications to enhance the visitor experience. These innovative tourism products aim to provide visitors with easy access to information about heritage sites, thereby enriching their understanding and appreciation of these locations' cultural and historical significance. Such technological innovations are part of a broader strategy to modernize and improve the quality of tourism services in Can Tho, making it a more attractive destination for domestic and international tourists.

2.2.2 Reasons for Achievement

The achievements in promoting the values of historical and cultural heritage in Can Tho city can be attributed to the concerted efforts of various sectors, departments, and the general populace. Several fundamental reasons underpin these successes:

Planning, preserving, renovating, restoring, and promoting the value of relics in the city has received close attention and direction from the City Party Committee, the People's Council, and the City People's Committee. These governing bodies have been instrumental in driving initiatives related to the development, implementation, and financial investment necessary to protect and enhance the value of the city's relics. Their leadership has significantly bolstered the effectiveness of these efforts.

Furthermore, there has been a marked increase in awareness among officials, party members, and the general public regarding the importance of planning, preserving, repairing, and restoring monuments. This heightened awareness has led to the timely and effective preservation, repair, and restoration of numerous historical and cultural relics (Bui, 2019). As a result, these efforts have preserved the national cultural heritage and transformed many restored monuments into attractive cultural tourism products. This transformation has contributed to increasing visitor numbers and generating economic benefits for the locality..

2.3. Limited and causes

2.3.1 Limitations

Promoting heritage value in tourism development in Can Tho has been relatively low. Many historical relics have not been effectively utilized for tourism activities. Although community tourism programs in the city aim to integrate cultural and historical relics to diversify tourism products, in practice, there are few tourism activities centered around these sites (Bui, 2019). Consequently, only a few individual tourists visit the relics rather than organized groups. Additionally, some historical and cultural relics lack organized activities for welcoming and guiding tourists, with the primary reliance being on tour guides.

Investment in cultural heritage remains limited, and social funding is unstable, often facing challenges that hinder sufficient resource allocation to repair and embellish degraded relics. Some sites have not undergone necessary renovations due to the absence of appropriate mechanisms and policies, leading to a lack of cooperation and sponsorship from domestic and

Enhancing the Role of Historical and Cultural Relics in Tourism Development: A Case Study of Can Tho City

international economic organizations. As a result, many valuable cultural heritages remain neglected, with some at risk of further deterioration.

Moreover, the infrastructure and technical facilities supporting tourism are inadequate. Insufficient parking areas, food preparation zones, stream bathing areas, and restrooms contribute to a lackluster visitor experience. Consequently, the inherent value of historical and cultural heritages has not been fully harnessed to create compelling community cultural tourism products.

The community tourism model, linked to preserving and promoting historical and cultural heritage for sustainable development, has shown some initial success. It has facilitated the establishment of tourist routes and attractions, gradually attracting visitors and increasing overall revenue (Bui, 2019). However, the number of visitors remains low, and total revenue remains modest, indicating the limited development of community tourism around historical and cultural heritages in Can Tho. The city's ability to draw tourists back to visit cultural and historical relics is also minimal. The lack of attractive tourism products is a significant limitation at these destinations, further impacting the growth of the tourism sector.

2.3.2 Reasons for limitations

The limitations in promoting and developing tourism around historical and cultural relics in Can Tho can be attributed to several key factors:

Firstly, the propaganda, promotion, and the creation of tourism products tied explicitly to each monument have not been effective. While there has been some progress, certain relics have not reached their full potential in expressing and promoting the unique local characteristics of the area.

Secondly, during the upgrading and repair of some monuments, there has been a tendency to alter architectural elements or even replace worship objects, leading to theatricalization and commercialization (Bui, 2019). Additionally, some relics, such as the Ong Hao Victory site in Phong Dien district and the Tay Do Battalion Victory site in Cai Rang district, suffer from inadequate infrastructure and are located far from the city center, hindering effective tour connections.

Thirdly, protecting and promoting the value of historical relics requires a long-term commitment. However, local government officials' awareness of the importance of preserving and promoting these relics is inconsistent (DCST, 2021b). There is a noticeable lag in innovation among some cultural heritage management officials, who often rely on outdated thinking and are not proactive or decisive in advising competent authorities on establishing suitable policy mechanisms. This lack of initiative hampers the creation of optimal conditions for protecting and promoting historical and cultural relics in the city.

Fourthly, the staff responsible for narrating and interpreting these sites frequently changes, leading to inconsistencies in professionalism and expertise. This instability negatively impacts the quality of propaganda and promotional activities and the overall visitor experience. Additionally, the managers of these monuments, who are often part-time employees in districts, communes, wards, and towns, generally lack sufficient experience and professional knowledge, further affecting the effectiveness of heritage management and tourism development efforts.

3. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Recommendations

Several recommendations are proposed for different stakeholders to enhance the preservation and promotion of historical and cultural relics in Can Tho. The City Party Committee and People's Committee should strengthen the leadership and direction of party committees at all levels, ensuring the effective implementation of the Party's guidelines and the State's legal policies on heritage conservation (Nam & Thanh, 2024). It is crucial to continue planning and executing investment projects for building, renovating, and embellishing approved historical and cultural relics while considering digital transformation and climate change impacts (Bui, 2019). The efficient use of investment capital is essential for repairing and maintaining ranked relics and those at risk of degradation (Thang & Thanh, 2023a). Additionally, there should be a focus on infrastructure improvement, attracting investment in crucial tourism projects, promoting and utilizing historical and cultural relics for tourism development, and establishing a distinct Can Tho tourism brand linked with unique local products.

Training and fostering professional staff and interpretation teams at these relics are vital, with particular attention given to sites with significant tourism potential. Furthermore, festival management should be strengthened to ensure security, order, fire prevention, and environmental sanitation at heritage sites. Prompt detection and strict handling of violations are necessary to maintain order and create a safe and friendly tourism environment. Mobilizing societal contributions is also essential for investing in the restoration, embellishment, management, and promotion of historical and cultural values, intangible cultural heritage, craft villages, and scenic spots.

The Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (DCST) should actively advise the Party Committee and city government, ensuring timely promulgation of relevant plans and projects contributing to tourism development. Travel agencies are encouraged to develop comprehensive tours and routes, including historical and cultural relic sites, moving beyond craft villages and eco-

Enhancing the Role of Historical and Cultural Relics in Tourism Development: A Case Study of Can Tho City

tourism areas (Bui, 2019). Maintaining high professional standards is essential for tour guides and interpreters at these sites (DCST, 2021b). They should continually seek to improve their expertise and recognize the importance of promoting the values of Can Tho's historical and cultural heritage to domestic and international tourists. Alongside benefiting from city-led training initiatives, tour guides should independently pursue new knowledge and creative approaches to meet the evolving demands of the tourism industry (Thang & Thanh, 2023b).

3.2 Conclusion

Can Tho is one of five centrally administered cities in Vietnam, situated in the heart of the Mekong Delta and recognized as a riverside urban area. This strategic location and its natural conditions provide Can Tho with significant advantages for tourism development, mainly through its rich array of tourism resources (Bui, 2019). Among these resources is a comprehensive system of cultural and historical relics, including various tangible cultural heritages. These heritages, which are integral to the history and development of Can Tho—often referred to as Tay Do—encompass relics associated with historical and revolutionary events.

The cultural and ethnic values inherent in Can Tho's heritage play a pivotal role in promoting tourism, often called the "smokeless industry," across various localities in the country (Nguyen et al., 2024). Given this potential, it is crucial to prioritize the construction, preservation, and promotion of cultural values in conjunction with tourism development to attract a growing number of both international and domestic tourists. However, achieving this effectively requires a thorough understanding of the fundamental principles of leveraging cultural heritage for tourism. This understanding ensures that these resources are promoted and developed to respect and enhance the city's artistic legacy while contributing to its economic growth and appeal as a tourist destination.

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