



Vietnamese court music Nha Nhac, broad range of musical and dance styles were performed at the Vietnamese royal court from the 15th to the mid-20th century

HERITAGE MATTERS

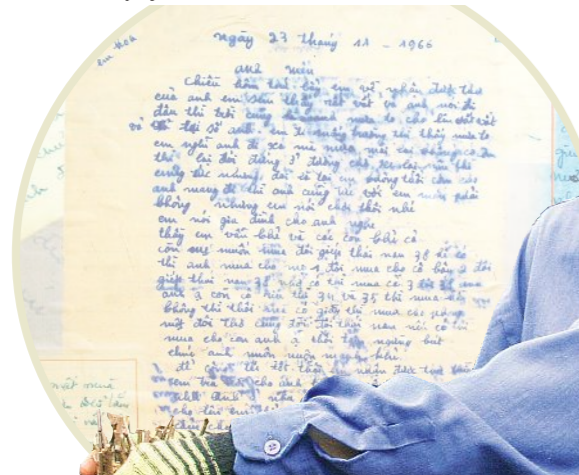


PROF. DR. AMARESWAR GALLA

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Professor Dr. Amareswar Galla, an Indo Australian, helped to establish the UNESCO Hanoi Office and directed its first UNDP project- Ha Long Ecomuseum and many other projects since 1999.

During the American war, more than three million people died. Several left for the front soon after marriage and perished. The correspondence between the couples is projected in the National Museum of Women



Street Vendor, quintessential presence in visitor experiences in Hanoi and throughout Vietnam

IMAGES: International Institute for the Inclusive Museum

What Drives Vietnamese Tourism to be Exemplar in the World?

UNESCO consistently advocates that culture is the driver of sustainable development, however defined and understood. If the rapid growth of tourism is a major driver of development then arts, culture, environment and heritage informing genuine experiential tourism, rather than Disneyland, is critical. UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially targets 8.9 and 12.b refer to the need to devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism, including through local culture and products, and the need to develop suitable monitoring tools in this area. Ethical tourism is a major concern in many parts of the world including India where the Intellectual Property Rights of creator communities are often violated. The Global Code of Ethics by the peak world body UNWTO needs to be translated into local languages and embedded in policy making.

In November 1999, Vietnamese Academies and all government agencies reached a consensus that the country needs to build capacity to participate in the global trends and processes of growth. Soon after it joined the World Trade Organisation. Vulnerable to international tariffs and trade politics, a range of initiatives were undertaken to diversify the economy. Tourism was a major area of growth. Access to Vietnam was made easier for international visitors. Typical Vietnamese experiences based on their history and heritage were promoted. Then 11 September 2001 happened. It was not frontpage news as more Vietnamese perished at the same time in severe flooding. Europeans became apprehensive to travel via the US to the Caribbean for their winter holidays. Vietnam seized the opportunity and promoted tourism as safe in its territories. The annual visitation jumped by 9% immediately and continues to climb.

The turn of the 3rd Millennium presented uncertain times in World Trade. Agricultural prices fell through the roof for Vietnam, a major exporter of primary produce especially rice. Tourism became critical to sustain the economy. A Ten-Year Masterplan for tourism was drafted through



Conserved well and surrounding built environment in the heart of Hanoi -Thang Lang World Heritage sites

UNDP and the National Department of Tourism and Ministries of Finance and Planning. The level of ownership of the importance of hospitality and visitor services at the local level was impressive. There was not much cash to resource initiatives. But the local opportunities had to be grabbed.

Grab they did. From street vendors to boutique hotels put their heart and soul into taking advantage of new opportunities offered through the demands of increasing domestic and international visitation. Five-star chains of multinational hotels came later on. The building blocks for resilient tourism were built by the sea of smaller and local players. This trend helped Vietnam to retain cultural neighbourhoods, busy old streets and most importantly the sense of what it means to be Vietnamese.

The sense of place for Vietnamese is based on both tangible and intangible heritage resources. A new National Heritage Law was adopted in 2002. Dr Dang Van Bai, a scholar and skilled heritage professional was asked to lead. It remains the only country in the world with a regulation requiring community engagement as part of the annual reporting from World Heritage sites.

Mr. Nguyen Van Tuan, the experienced Director of the Ha Long Bay World Heritage site was appointed as the Director General of Vietnam Tourism. He grew up in an impoverished village and worked in the rice fields and also collected wood after school during the devastating American War. The secret to Vietnam's success in tourism is that they appointed two DG's with experience in the culture and heritage fields who mustered their knowledge and competencies to promote tourism based on those things that are unique to Vietnam. All exit polls show that substantial international visitation is due to providing tourism based on quintessentially Vietnamese experiences.

Cultural leadership helped develop unique and regional experiences drawing on the 54 ethnic minorities that constitute the fabric of Vietnamese society. From the upland Mai Chou and Sapa to the plains of the Red River Delta and all the way to the Mekong in the deep South the choice of tourism products and experiences are diversified, a resource that draw the visitors to stay longer and in typical tourism jargon contributing to tens of thousands of bed nights and distributing the growth in GDP across the provinces. Tourism plays a notable role in Vietnam, a world leader in poverty alleviation, addressing the Millennium Development Goals in the past and now the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Vietnamese love statistics. Central, provincial and metropolitan agencies all keep their own profiles. The rigour to ascertain the ground realities of numbers has become a critical tool for tourism planning with integrity something Indian agencies can emulate. In the past two decades Vietnam strategically started benchmarking its cultural and heritage tourism through a commitment to iconic assets.

Ha Long, the most beautiful Bay in the world is inscribed on the World Heritage list for its aesthetic and landscape and subsequently for its scientific and geological values. Hoi An Ancient Town, the most extant trading port in Southeast Asia from about four hundred years ago attracted over 2 billion dollars in FDI. Complex of Hue Monuments, former capital from 1802 to

1945, superbly conserved, protected and promotes responsible tourism. Hue's court music Nha Nhac was inscribed on the UNESCO World Intangible Heritage List. My Son archaeological sanctuary, heart of the Cham Civilisation from 4th to 13th Century, has a major cluster of temples dedicated to Hindu divinities such as Krishna and Vishnu and especially Shiva. When Vietnam decided to build a new National Assembly, construction revealed one thousand years of evidence of its former capital. The Hoang Dieu Archaeological Site in the Thang Lang Citadel has been inscribed on the World Heritage list. The inventory of outstanding heritage tourism sites and experiences developed since 1999 continues.

It is humbling the way the Vietnamese listen to others and demonstrate a scholarly keenness and a professional inquisitiveness to learn. This national trait has won them the love of the world, a major tourism asset in itself. Vietnamese want the best in the world and buy in international expertise. But unlike many countries they use the opportunity to build substantive domestic skill and competencies with designated employment and compatible remuneration.

What are the success factors for Vietnam in tourism in delivering demonstrated economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits? Deployment of competent and experienced leaders at the top in both culture and tourism. Meticulous and often competitive use of statistics in planning. Investing in assets of significance as inheritances to promote heritage values in tourism. Master planning at the national and provincial level. While listening to international experts, ensuring that the Vietnamese voice, knowledge and abilities are fostered. There is a lot more to learn from Vietnamese in India or anywhere in the world. BTW, similar to China, Japan and Korea, Vietnamese are proud to promote their language and culture in all forms of sustainable development for ensuring growth.

NEXT WEEK

Heritage Matters will focus on the Asuka Village where Buddhism was first introduced in Japan.