



AGRICULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF BEN TRE PROVINCE

Nguyen Thi Thu Hoa^{1*}, Le Thi Tu Mi¹

¹Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, HUTECH University, Vietnam

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>DOI: 10.52932/jfmr.v4i2ene.1179</p> <p><i>Received:</i> December 09, 2025</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> January 09, 2026</p> <p><i>Published:</i> March 25, 2026</p> <p>Keywords: Agricultural tourism, Ben Tre, Competitive advantage, Resource exploitation, Sustainable development</p> <p>JEL codes: Q01, Z32, Z38</p>	<p>Agricultural tourism is a strategic pillar in Vietnam's rural development strategy to 2030, particularly for Ben Tre Province, which possesses a unique ecosystem of over 78,000 hectares of coconut plantations. This study aims to systematically assess development conditions and propose comprehensive sustainable solutions to enhance the province's competitive advantage. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research utilized primary data from 153 tourists surveyed between February and April 2025 alongside secondary data analysis. were applied to evaluate four key factor groups: resources, facilities, human resources, and local policies. The findings reveal that while Ben Tre has strong resource attractiveness (Mean = 3.79), significant bottlenecks exist in infrastructure specifically 61.40% dissatisfaction with accommodation and human resources, where 68.6% of respondents were dissatisfied with foreign language competency. Notably, international tourists demonstrated significantly higher expectation standards regarding facilities compared to domestic groups ($p < 0.001$). The paper's novel contribution lies in addressing the gap between descriptive potential and empirical evaluation a proposed solution framework. This includes synchronized facility upgrades, green management models, and standardized training to advance Ben Tre's tourism toward global professionalism and sustainability.</p>

**Corresponding author:*

Email: ntt.hoa@hutech.edu.vn

1. Introduction

Tourism is recognized as a critical pillar of the global economy, contributing significantly to GDP and employment generation (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2022). In the context of robust post-COVID-19 recovery, Vietnamese tourism has witnessed impressive growth with nearly 10.7 million visitors in the first six months of 2025 (Cuc Du lich Quoc gia Viet Nam, 2025), laying the foundation for the development of specialized tourism models.

Agricultural tourism has been institutionalized as a priority sector in the Rural Industry Development Strategy to 2030 (Decision No. 1058/QD-TTg, 2023). This prioritization not only promotes rural economic development and poverty alleviation (Hall et al., 2003; Lane, 1994) but also directs inter-sectoral cooperation. The 2025 coordination program between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism emphasizes sustainable development following ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) criteria framework (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2024). This approach demonstrates alignment with global trends toward responsible tourism and meets international tourists' expectations regarding sustainability (Boluk et al., 2019; Font & McCabe, 2017).

Ben Tre Province possesses ideal resource advantages for agricultural tourism, including a total area of 78,195 ha of coconut plantations (May 2023), fruit garden ecosystems, traditional craft villages, and distinctive cultural heritage. Product diversification has yielded significant growth: in Q1/2025, total visitors reached 781,085 (up 34.9%) and total revenue was estimated at 1,017 billion VND (up 42.2%) (Bao Dien tu Chinh phu, 2023). The breakthrough growth in international visitors (up 112.8% in Q1/2025) creates an urgent need for comprehensive strategic solutions.

Research Objectives: This study aims to (1) systematize the theoretical foundation of agricultural tourism development conditions; (2) assess the current state of agricultural tourism development in Ben Tre province based on tourist perceptions and evaluations; (3) propose comprehensive and sustainable solutions for agricultural tourism development in Ben Tre Province.

2. Theoretical review

2.1. Concept of agricultural tourism

Agricultural tourism is understood as a form of tourism occurring within agricultural production spaces, including orchards, farms, livestock areas... where tourists directly participate in cultivation activities, agricultural product processing, experience working life, and engage with indigenous agricultural culture (Wicks & Merrett, 2003). According to United States Department of Agriculture, this is a form of rural tourism associated with recreational, educational, and cultural experience purposes through farm-based activities. International research (Sznajder et al., 2009) shows that this form is intrinsically linked to traditional agricultural spaces, offering practical experience and high interactivity for tourists.

In the Vietnamese context, the concept of agricultural tourism has been expanded to encompass not only agricultural experiences but also a service system based on agricultural production aimed at increasing farm household income, developing rural economy, and preserving cultural and ecological values (Ngo Thi Phuong Lan et al., 2021). This is particularly suitable for the green economy and circular economy development orientation in Mekong Delta provinces, including Ben Tre.

2.2. Characteristics of agricultural tourism

Agricultural tourism possesses three core characteristics:

First, Flexibility: Tourism activities depend on seasons, climate conditions, and local production characteristics. Therefore, tourism products have high adaptability according to natural context and cultivation cycles (Mitrică et al., 2025).

Second, Inter-sectoral Integration: This form integrates agricultural production, tourism services (accommodation, cuisine, guidance), and indigenous cultural experiences, creating a value chain connecting farmers - enterprises - destinations (Huong et al., 2025).

Third, Sustainability: The development of agricultural tourism is intrinsically linked to resource conservation, maintenance of traditional culture, and enhancement of community livelihoods. This is the pivotal foundation ensuring long-term development (Nguyen Quoc Cuong & Luu Quang Vinh, 2022).

In practice, agricultural tourism is implemented through models such as garden tourism, farmstays, craft villages, educational tourism, organic tourism..., allowing tourists to experience from planting and harvesting to agricultural product processing (Nguyen Huu Nhuan et al., 2025). This represents Ben Tre's distinctive advantage, a land with unique coconut ecosystems and garden landscapes.

2.3. Literature review on agricultural tourism development

Previous studies on agricultural tourism have established a solid theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding its role in rural economic development and sustainability. International research highlights agricultural tourism as a multidimensional development model that integrates agriculture, culture, and tourism services, emphasizing the preservation of local identity, diversification of rural livelihoods, and the balance between economic growth, environmental conservation, and cultural sustainability (Boluk et al., 2019;

Font & McCabe, 2017; Tao & Wall, 2009; Hall et al., 2003; Lane, 1994). Key success factors identified include high-quality agricultural products, authentic cultural experiences, adequate infrastructure, and skilled human resources (Sznajder et al., 2009). These perspectives provide an essential framework for assessing sustainability in local agricultural tourism development.

Domestic studies further contextualize these insights within Vietnam, particularly in the Mekong Delta, by emphasizing governance mechanisms, stakeholder coordination, value chain integration, and policy support. Research underscores the importance of collaboration among government, enterprises, and local communities, alongside investment in infrastructure, human resources, and supportive policy frameworks to enhance competitiveness and sustainability (Nguyen Huu Nhuan et al., 2025; Nguyen Thi Tam, 2023; Ngo Thi Phuong Lan et al., 2021). Collectively, these studies provide a comprehensive basis for evaluating and proposing sustainable agricultural tourism development strategies for Ben Tre province.

Research gaps

Despite numerous studies on agricultural tourism, three notable gaps remain: (1) Research on Ben Tre is primarily descriptive of potential, lacking empirical studies from the tourist perspective to evaluate development conditions; (2) No comparative analysis between tourist groups (domestic, international) to identify differences in expectations and behavior. (3) Lack of integrated solution sets, constructed based on primary and secondary data analysis, meeting sustainable development requirements aligned with ESG.

This study aims to address these gaps and provide scientific evidence for proposing agricultural tourism development solutions for Ben Tre province in the context of rapid

tourism growth and sustainable development model transformation requirements.

2.4. Theoretical framework on agricultural tourism development conditions

Synthesized from domestic and international research, the study identifies four core condition groups determining agricultural tourism development in Ben Tre:

Agricultural tourism resources

Resources include natural landscapes, agricultural ecosystems, distinctive agricultural products, cultivation processes, and indigenous culture (Sznajder et al., 2009). This is the foundational factor creating attractiveness, especially for destinations with unique ecosystems like Ben Tre's coconut land. Abundant resources positively impact agricultural tourism product development (Nguyen Huu Nhuan et al., 2025; Nguyen Thi Tam, 2023).

Infrastructure and facilities

Infrastructure (transportation, electricity, water, telecommunications) and tourism facilities (accommodation, dining, experience sites) are crucial conditions increasing accessibility and enhancing tourist experiences. International experience (USA, Canada, Austria) shows that synchronized investment in infrastructure and experience farms is a prerequisite for agricultural tourism development (Nguyen Huu Nhuan et al., 2025). Therefore, Ben Tre needs to focus on upgrading routes to production areas and garden tourism sites.

Tourism human resources

Human resources determine service quality and destination competitiveness (Chinh phu, 2011). For agricultural tourism, human resource requirements include not only service skills but also agricultural knowledge, interpretation, foreign languages, and experience design capabilities. Training for households,

cooperatives, and management personnel is an essential solution (Nguyen Quoc Cuong & Luu Quang Vinh, 2022).

Tourism development policies

State policies play a guiding role in development, especially in the context of tourism as a spearhead economic sector (Resolution 08-NQ/TW, 2017). Policies should focus on resource conservation, sustainable development, community livelihood support, and encouragement of community-based tourism models (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014; Tao & Wall, 2009). For Ben Tre, local policies need to concentrate on investment incentives, support for transitioning production to tourism, regional linkages, and agricultural tourism value chain development.

3. Research methodology

The study applied a mixed-methods approach following Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) explanatory sequential model, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to ensure comprehensiveness and reliability of results. In the quantitative phase, primary data were collected through online surveys using Google Forms questionnaires for tourists who have experienced or are experiencing agricultural tourism in Ben Tre; simultaneously, secondary data were extracted from local tourism management agencies. Surveys were conducted from February to April 2025 at representative agricultural tourism sites such as coconut gardens, fruit orchards, craft villages, homestays and farmstays, combined with online platforms. Based on Comrey and Lee's (1992) recommendation, the minimum sample size for 15 observed variables is 75 observations; the study collected 163 responses and filtered down to 153 valid samples for analysis. Descriptive statistical techniques, Cronbach's Alpha reliability testing, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were performed using

SPSS 26.0 to examine scale structure, assess convergent-discriminant validity, and identify influential factor groups. Subsequently, Independent Sample T-test and ANOVA were used to compare differences in evaluations among tourist groups by nationality, age, and trip purpose. Multiple linear regression analysis was applied to determine the impact level of four factor groups: Resources; Facilities; Human resources; and Local policies. In the qualitative phase, document synthesis methods (Bowen, 2009) and case comparison (Yin, 2018) were used to provide deeper explanations of quantitative results and draw experiential lessons for Ben Tre.

4. Research results

4.1. General introduction to Ben Tre province

Ben Tre is a coastal province in the Mekong Delta, formed through the pioneering efforts of Vietnamese settlers from the early 17th century. From a pristine land with forests and swamps, through generations of land reclamation, by the late 18th – early 19th centuries, the village system was established, creating a prosperous garden agriculture foundation (Uy ban Nhan dan tinh Ben Tre, 2023). The province possesses a distinctive hydrological system with four major rivers: Tien River, Ba Lai River, Ham

Luong River, and Co Chien River, creating three islets: An Hoa, Bao, and Minh with abundant alluvial sources, particularly favorable for fruit tree cultivation and specialized agriculture (Ben Tre Statistical Office, 2023). Regarding transportation, two main national highways (QL57, QL60) along with Rach Mieu Bridge, inaugurated and put into operation in 2008, have enhanced connectivity with Ho Chi Minh City and neighboring provinces, creating strong momentum for socio-economic development. Thanks to advantages in geographical location, natural resources, and increasingly improved infrastructure, Ben Tre has favorable conditions for developing agricultural economy, garden eco-tourism, and marine economy, becoming one of the provinces with great potential in the Mekong Delta regional development strategy (Bo Xay dung, 2025).

4.2. Research findings

Sample results (n = 153) indicate that Ben Tre currently serves primarily domestic tourists (64.1%), with the 18-45 age group (77.8%) predominating and the tourism trend being recreation combined with cultural experiences. These findings provide practical foundations for designing recreational experience products and optimizing digital marketing strategies targeting young customers. (see Appendix 1)

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha test results

Code	Conditions	No. of Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
TN	Agricultural tourism resources	4	0.856
CSVC	Facilities	5	0.829
NNL	Human resources	4	0.812
CS	Local development policies	2	0.785

All factor groups have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients > 0.7, meeting internal consistency reliability standards. All item-total correlations are > 0.3, showing that observed variables have good correlation with group totals.

Current state of agricultural tourism resources

Statistical data show uneven development among agricultural tourism resource types in Ben Tre. Some indicators recorded positive

growth: OCOP agricultural products increased 17.65%, agricultural farms increased 6.16%, and 19.09%, historical-cultural tourist sites increased coconut cultivation area increased 0.95%.

Table 2. Agricultural tourism resource exploitation status in Ben Tre province

Resources	Units	2024 (ha)	Exploitation Rate (%)	Assessment
Coconut gardens	Ha	79.697	70	High
Fruit orchards	Ha	23.045	60	High
Historical-cultural sites	Sites	80	40	Medium
Traditional craft villages	Villages	55	40	Medium
OCOP products	Products	287	40	Medium
Forests	Ha	4.242	25	Low
Agricultural farms	farms	1.603	30	Low
Rice fields	Ha	14.504	20	Low

Alongside positive signals, Ben Tre's agricultural tourism resources face concerning challenges: rice cultivation area decreased sharply by nearly 35%, fruit tree cultivation area decreased 3.95%, forest area decreased 5.10%, and traditional craft villages decreased 3.51%.

Table 3. Survey results on agricultural tourism resources

Code	Content	Mean	SD	Ranking
TN1	Diverse, attractive tourist sites	4.12	0.76	1
TN3	High-quality agricultural products	3.95	0.82	2
TN4	Diverse experience activities	3.68	0.91	3
TN2	Well-preserved craft villages	3.42	0.95	4
Group average		3.79	0.86	

Tourists rated highly the diversity and attractiveness of agricultural tourist sites (Mean=4.12), especially coconut and fruit gardens. However, evaluation of traditional craft villages remains moderate (Mean=3.42), reflecting inadequate preservation and promotion of traditional cultural values.

Table 4. Comparison of resource evaluation between domestic and international tourists

Code	Domestic (n=98)	International (n=55)	t-value	p-value
TN1	4.05	4.25	-1.52	0.131
TN3	3.28	3.67	-2.31	0.022*
TN4	3.89	4.07	-1.23	0.221
TN2	3.55	3.91	-2.15	0.033*

Notes: * $p < 0.05$

International tourists rated traditional craft villages ($p = 0.022$) and experience activities ($p = 0.033$) higher, indicating this group has greater

demand for indigenous cultural experiences and tourism product authenticity.

Current state of facilities and infrastructure

Table 5. Tourism facility statistics for agricultural tourism in Ben Tre province

Category	Unit	Quantity
Total accommodation establishments	Establishments	90
Total rooms	Rooms	1,700
Maximum capacity	Guests	3,200
5-star hotels	Establishments	1
3-4 star hotels	Establishments	8
Tourist guesthouses	Establishments	65
Homestay/Farmstay	Establishments	16
Total dining establishments	Establishments	130
Total capacity	Seats	35,000

The accommodation system in Ben Tre Province has uneven distribution, with tourist guesthouses accounting for the largest proportion (72.2%), primarily serving domestic tourist groups with moderate spending levels. The number of hotels meeting 3-star standards

and above remains limited (10%), reducing the ability to attract high-end and international tourists. Specialized accommodation types serving agricultural tourism such as homestays and farmstays account for only 17.8%, not adequately meeting potential.

Table 6. Survey results on facilities and infrastructure

Code	Content	Mean	SD	% Dissatisfied	Ranking
CSVC5	Electricity, water, telecommunications	4.35	0.68	7.2	1
CSVC4	Hygienic, diverse dining spots	4.18	0.74	7.8	2
CSVC3	Clear information signs, directions	3.52	0.89	31.4	3
CSVC2	Adequate supporting infrastructure	2.95	1.02	56.3	4
CSVC1	Diverse, quality accommodation	2.78	1.08	61.4	5
	Group average	3.56	0.88	32.8	

Basic elements such as electricity, water, telecommunications, and dining services were well-rated. However, two most serious issues are: *Accommodation services*: 61.4% of tourists were dissatisfied (Mean=2.78) due to lack of

diversity and substandard quality; *Supporting infrastructure*: 56.3% rated negatively (Mean=2.95) regarding public toilets, parking lots, and directional signage systems.

Table 7. Comparison of facility evaluation among tourist groups

Group	CSVC1	CSVC2	CSVC3	CSVC4	CSVC5	Average
Domestic	2.95	3.12	3.68	4.25	4.42	3.68
International	2.45	2.67	3.25	4.05	4.22	3.33
F-value	11.23***	9.87***	6.45**	1.85	1.42	

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

International tourists have stricter requirements regarding accommodation facilities and supporting infrastructure, with significantly lower ratings compared to domestic tourists ($p < 0.001$). This reflects differences in expectation standards and tourism experience between the two groups.

Current state of tourism human resources

Human resources are identified as a pivotal factor in Ben Tre Province’s strategy to position tourism as a spearhead economic sector by 2030. In implementing Action Program No. 22-CTr/TU, the province has proactively advanced training and capacity-building initiatives in a specialized and systematic manner, integrating theoretical instruction with practical application. In 2023, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism organized 12 intensive training courses, focusing on key areas such as agricultural and rural tourism development, tour guiding operations, and grassroots-level public administration. These efforts have significantly enhanced participants’ ability to apply knowledge in developing distinctive tourism products (Thanh Dong, 2023). Concurrently, the province has prioritized the standardization of its workforce in alignment with ASEAN occupational standards, strengthened vocational and language training, and fostered closer linkages between government authorities and enterprises.

A notable highlight in Bến Tre’s human resource development lies in leveraging the role of local communities. Residents are not merely service providers but have become active

agents in creating and conveying indigenous cultural values through rural tourism and homestay models. The collaboration between enterprises and farming households has facilitated the formation of a diversified service network, contributing to income improvement, livelihood enhancement, and greater environmental awareness. This community-based workforce, characterized by deep cultural understanding and genuine hospitality, constitutes a fundamental pillar in shaping the province’s unique tourism identity and ensuring its sustainable development (Thanh Dong, 2022).

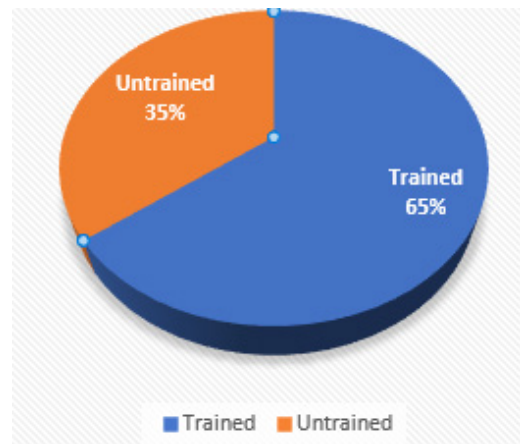


Figure 1. Tourism human resources in Ben Tre province

According to preliminary survey results in 2024, the province currently has over 6,000 tourism workers, of which approximately 60% are trained. However, this workforce remains primarily general and seasonal labor, mostly originating from agricultural households participating in eco-tourism models. State

management human resources number nearly 200 with college-level qualifications or above. Main limitations of this condition (1) Weak professional skills, communication, and situation handling; (2) Limited foreign language competency, especially conversational English.

Low professionalization level due to household-based operation models (1) Some tour guides lack deep knowledge of local culture and history; (2) Limited training network: only two colleges, no undergraduate programs.

Table 8. Survey results on tourism human resources

Code	Content	Mean	SD	%Dissatisfied	Ranking
NNL3	Friendly, helpful local people	4.45	0.62	7.2	1
NNL1	Tour guides knowledgeable about local culture	3.95	0.78	18.3	2
NNL2	Staff with professional skills	3.42	0.91	35.9	3
NNL4	Tour guides with good foreign language competency	2.68	1.12	68.6	4
Group average		3.63	0.86	32.5	

The bright spot is the friendliness and willingness to help of local people (Mean = 4.45), demonstrating traditional hospitality culture. Tour guides have good understanding of local culture (Mean = 3.95). However, two serious issues: Foreign language competency: 68.6% of tourists were dissatisfied (Mean = 2.68), a major barrier in serving international guests; and Professional skills: 35.9% rated below requirements (Mean=3.42).

Current state of tourism development policies

In the context of economic restructuring, Ben Tre Province identifies agricultural tourism as a strategic direction. Important

policies include: Plan 3706/KH-UBND (2021): Tourism development to 2030; Plan 1729/KH-UBND (2023): Community-based tourism development. Additionally, support programs include: Skills training, rural infrastructure upgrades, promotion and regional linkages. These have created notable achievements in Ben Tre: Formation of many agricultural tourism models; establishment of 09 representative MekongDelta tourism sites; 244 OCOP products with 3 stars or above. However, some typical limitations remain: weak access infrastructure, lack of monitoring and effectiveness evaluation mechanisms...

Table 9. Survey results on tourism development policies

Code	Content	Mean	SD	Ranking
CS2	Support programs have positive impact	3.68	0.85	1
CS1	Clear and consistent policies	3.52	0.92	2
Group average		3.60	0.89	

Policy evaluation is at moderate-good level (Mean = 3.60), indicating tourists recognize government efforts in tourism development.

However, transparency and implementation effectiveness still need improvement.

4.3. Discussion of results

Natural resources

Research results show Ben Tre possesses outstanding advantages in agricultural tourism resources, most notably the unique coconut ecosystem at 78,000 ha scale, accounting for approximately 80% of the nation's coconut area. Additionally, river culture and distinctive Mekong Delta ecological environment create an important foundation for developing agricultural tourism products linked with indigenous cultural experiences. High tourist satisfaction ratings regarding local community friendliness (Mean = 4.45) show Ben Tre's socio-cultural environment is a crucial soft asset contributing to tourism experience authenticity, consistent with Sznajder et al. (2009) arguments about experiential value in agricultural tourism. However, resource exploitation remains uneven, reflected in concentration primarily on coconut gardens and fruit orchards (60-70%), while mangrove forests, farms, and rice fields are exploited limitedly (20-30%). The 35% decrease in rice area and 3.51% decline in craft villages signal risks of gradual tourism resource loss, contrary to sustainable development requirements stated in Boluk et al. (2019) and Font and McCabe (2017) research.

Facilities

Technical tourism facilities are identified as the greatest bottleneck hindering agricultural tourism development. Up to 61.4% of tourists were dissatisfied with accommodation facilities and 56.3% rated supporting infrastructure poorly, reflecting lack of synchronization and standardization. Particularly, international tourists showed significantly higher expectation levels compared to domestic tourists ($p < 0.001$), revealing gaps between existing standards and international market requirements. These results align with Nguyen Huu Nhuan et al. (2025) findings, whereby standard facilities play a decisive role in agricultural tourism

destination success in developed countries.

Human resources

Ben Tre's agricultural tourism human resources still have many limitations, especially foreign language competency and communication skills serving international guests. Up to 68.6% of tourists were dissatisfied with staff foreign language abilities (Mean = 2.68), while international visitors increased strongly by 112.8% in Q1/2025. The significant gap between domestic (Mean = 3.15) and international guest (Mean = 1.92) evaluations shows current training programs do not meet tourism activity internationalization requirements. Results align with Le et al. (2021) conclusions about challenges in developing Vietnam's agricultural tourism human resources, especially in the integration context.

Local development policies

Although Ben Tre Province has promulgated many policies promoting agricultural tourism development, tourist evaluation of implementation effectiveness is at moderate-good level (Mean = 3.60). This reflects a certain gap between planning objectives and actual implementation results. Research emphasizes the decisive role of local leadership capacity and external support level two factors that Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) identified as pivotal for community-based tourism model success. Enhancing policy tool effectiveness, strengthening coordination among government-enterprises-community, and ensuring implementation resources are seen as urgent requirements to effectively exploit the province's agricultural tourism potential.

5. Conclusion and solutions

5.1. Conclusion

The study systematically analyzed the comprehensive current state of agricultural tourism development in Ben Tre Province

through four key factor groups: natural resources, facilities-infrastructure, human resources, and development policies. Results show that although Ben Tre possesses distinctive agricultural ecosystems with outstanding competitive advantages of coconut gardens, fruit orchards, and craft villages, exploitation levels are not commensurate, with imbalances between conservation and development remaining. Limitations in facilities, human capacity, and policy implementation effectiveness also negatively affect tourist experience quality.

Based on this, the study proposes four core solution groups: (i) manage and exploit natural resources toward sustainability; (ii) synchronously upgrade facilities, diversify accommodation, and apply green management models; (iii) develop human resources through short-term-long-term training and tour guide professionalization; and (iv) perfect policy mechanisms, strengthen regional linkages, multi-channel marketing, and quality improvement based on tourist feedback. These solutions contribute to directing Ben Tre's agricultural tourism development toward professionalism, sustainability, and enhanced regional competitiveness.

5.2. Solutions

Based on an assessment of the current state of agricultural tourism development in Ben Tre Province, this study proposes a strategic and generalized solution framework to address systemic constraints, particularly shortcomings in accommodation infrastructure and the quality of human resources. By adopting a flexible and scalable approach, the proposed framework is not only suited to the local context but also applicable to agricultural tourism destinations with similar conditions. Drawing on situational analysis and empirical findings, the authors put forward a set of focused, feasible, and practically oriented solutions.

Natural resource solutions

Current situation analysis shows Ben Tre exploits agricultural tourism resources in an imbalanced manner, with coconut gardens and fruit orchards over-exploited while mangrove forests, farms, and rice fields remain underutilized proportionally. Therefore, solution orientation needs to focus on sustainable resource management and exploitation. Core solutions: (1) *Resource portfolio diversification & optimization*: Destinations must move beyond a singular focus on dominant attractions such as Ben Tre's coconut gardens to systematically integrate underutilized assets. This includes the strategic incorporation of mangrove forests, high-tech agricultural zones, and traditional rice landscapes into the tourism value chain. By distributing visitor flows across a broader spectrum of assets, destinations can mitigate the risks of over-exploitation while enhancing the breadth of the tourism product; (2) *Adaptive conservation & financial mechanisms*: Sustainable development requires robust recovery programs for declining cultural and natural capital. This is achieved by establishing dedicated Craft Village Conservation Funds and implementing Green Credit Policies to provide low-interest capital for households. Such mechanisms incentivize the restoration of historical agricultural zones and traditional crafts, ensuring that the "authenticity" of the destination is preserved through economic empowerment rather than just static preservation; (3) *Thematic value-chain integration*: To ensure long-term viability, primary agricultural production must be seamlessly connected with secondary tourism services through integrated circuits. Strategic examples include "River-Agricultural Eco-tours" or "Specialized Coconut Heritage Routes". These thematic circuits enhance the "multiplier effect" by encouraging longer visitor stays and higher expenditure across multiple local sectors, from farming to traditional craftsmanship.

Facility and Infrastructure solutions

Facilities are identified as the greatest weakness according to tourist feedback, especially regarding accommodation and supporting infrastructure. To enhance destination capacity, Ben Tre needs synchronized and focused investment in tourism-serving infrastructure systems. Proposed solutions: (1) *Phased infrastructure development strategy*: Destinations should adopt a “Tiered Priority Matrix” to optimize capital allocation. Phase 1 (fundamental accessibility) focuses on upgrading rural road networks, bilingual directional signage, and basic utilities that remove entry barriers. Phase 2 (experiential infrastructure) targets secondary amenities that directly impact visitor satisfaction, such as standardized public sanitation facilities, lighting, and parking lots. This sequential approach ensures that the destination’s capacity grows in tandem with its market demand. (2) *Accommodation diversification & market segmentation*: To move beyond a reliance on low-value guesthouses, a “Balanced Portfolio Strategy” is required. This involves two parallel orientations: (i) fostering experiential models including homestays, farmstays, and glamping that leverage local agricultural authenticity; and (ii) incentivizing high-tier (3-4 star) hotel investments in key gateway locations through land, tax, and credit concessions. This diversification allows the destination to capture a broader range of market segments, from budget-conscious backpackers to high-spending international travelers. (3) *Standardization via green management models*: Service quality must be formalized through the adoption of international sustainability frameworks, such as the ASEAN Green Hotel Standards. Implementation should focus on four critical domains: firstly, wastewater and waste separation systems; secondly, renewable energy integration; thirdly, significant reduction in single-use plastics; and finally, local material-

based construction. Applying these standards not only enhances operational efficiency but also serves as a vital marketing differentiator in the global eco-tourism market.

Human resource development solutions

Human resources are the decisive factor for service quality, but survey results show significant limitations in foreign languages and professional skills. Therefore, solutions need to target both short-term and long-term training according to international standards. Specifically: (1) *Modular skill standardization and certification*: Destinations should implement a “Modular Competency Framework” for the existing workforce. This involves regular, short-term, certification-based training focusing on high-impact operational domains: professional communication, cross-cultural situation handling, food safety, and standardized accommodation management. By linking these modules to quality assessment mechanisms, the destination ensures a consistent baseline of service quality that meets international market standards; (2) *Strategic educational linkages for long-term professionalization*: To cultivate a future-ready workforce, local authorities must establish formal Academic-Industry Partnerships with specialized regional universities (e.g., UEH, HUTECH, Can Tho University). These links should focus on advanced competencies such as digital tourism marketing, sustainable destination management, and travel operations management. This high-level training ensures a steady pipeline of management-level professionals capable of driving innovation in the agricultural tourism sector; (3) *Linguistic and cultural interpretation excellence*: Given that 68.6% of tourists cited poor foreign language competence as a major drawback, a specialized Language and Interpretation program is essential. This strategy prioritizes two areas: (i) Conversational fluency for frontline staff to enhance immediate guest

interaction; and (ii) Deep-knowledge cultural interpretation for tour guides. By integrating local ecological and historical knowledge with storytelling techniques, guides can transform simple farm visits into immersive, high-value cultural experiences, thereby reducing the high dissatisfaction rates among international guests.

Local development policy solutions

Although Ben Tre has promulgated many policies supporting agricultural tourism development, tourist evaluation remains at moderate-good level, showing need for improved implementation effectiveness and enhanced coordination mechanisms. Key solutions: (1) *Institutional synergy and inter-sectoral coordination*: Destinations must establish formal “Inter-sectoral Steering Committees” to bridge the gap between agricultural production and tourism development. This includes creating integrated land-use planning that protects agricultural integrity while allowing for tourism diversification. A critical component is the Fiscal Incentive Framework, which should provide preferential credit, tax holidays for agricultural tourism startups, and subsidized training costs to lower entry barriers for local communities and enterprises; (2) *Regional clustering and multi-channel integrated marketing*: Moving beyond destination-centric promotion, local authorities should adopt a regional cluster strategy (e.g., the Mekong Delta regional linkage). This involves developing inter-provincial thematic routes and synchronized digital marketing campaigns. By partnering with Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and hosting distinctive cultural events such as the Coconut Festival or River Agriculture Festival destinations can leverage collective branding to compete in the global tourism market; (3) *Evidence-Based policy and quality management systems*: To ensure continuous improvement, destinations must transition to feedback-driven governance. This involves deploying digital tools, such as QR-code-based feedback systems

and provincial tourism applications, to capture real-time visitor sentiment. These data points should be utilized as primary metrics for service inspection and ranking mechanisms, allowing for agile policy adjustments and ensuring that local service standards align with international guest expectations.

Research limitations

Despite achieving many encouraging results, the study still has certain limitations: *Survey scope remains limited in space and sample*: surveys primarily concentrated on several representative tourism sites, not yet covering the entire provincial area; survey sample size, while meeting analytical requirements, is not large enough to be absolutely representative of the entire sector. *Insufficient in-depth analysis of market and technology factors*: the study focused extensively on destination intrinsic factors, while exogenous factors such as green tourism trends, digital transformation, and post-COVID-19 tourist behavior have not been fully integrated. *Lack of inter-regional or international comparisons*: to assess Ben Tre’s position in the agricultural tourism destination competitive landscape.

To develop comprehensively and enhance application value, subsequent studies may focus on the following directions: *Expand survey scope and increase sample size*: particularly for each tourist group and each agricultural tourism type, to enhance reliability and result generalizability. *Integrate advanced quantitative methods*: such as SEM models, multi-group structural analysis, or satisfaction assessment models combining big data from OTA platforms and social networks, to accurately measure tourist experience and behavior. *In-depth research on digital transformation and green economy impacts*: including technology application in destination management, real-time feedback systems, and circular agriculture-tourism business models. *Conduct inter-provincial or*

international comparative research: particularly with successful agricultural tourism cases in the Mekong Delta region or ASEAN countries, to draw lessons and determine Ben Tre's competitive position. *Develop agricultural tourism development forecasting models*: integrating economic-social-environmental factors to support long-term policy planning.

Sponsorship

This research was fully funded by the HUTECH University under grant number 2025.15.QTDL-NH-KS

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.2, accessed in 2026) to improve readability, grammar, and language quality, as well as to assist with translation. The authors reviewed, edited, and took full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

References

- Bao Dien tu Chinh phu (2023). *Bến Tre: Diện tích trồng dừa tăng lên hơn 78.000 ha* [Ben Tre: Coconut cultivation area expands to over 78,000 hectares]. <https://baochinhphu.vn/ben-tre-dien-tich-trong-dua-tang-len-hon-78000-ha-102230531103752484.htm>
- Bo Nong nghiep va Phat trien nong thon (2024). *Chương trình phối hợp trong phát triển du lịch nông nghiệp, nông thôn hiệu quả và bền vững giai đoạn 2024–2030 (Chương trình số 04/CTPH-BNN&PTNT-BVHTTDL)* [Joint coordination program for effective and sustainable development of agricultural and rural tourism for the 2024–2030 period].
- Bo Xay dung (2025). *Trả lời kiến nghị cử tri tỉnh Bến Tre về một số dự án giao thông trên địa bàn* [Responding to the petitions of Ben Tre province's voters regarding several local transport infrastructure projects]. <https://moc.gov.vn/vn/tin-tuc/1179/84253/tra-loi-kien-nghi-cu-tri-tinh-ben-tre-ve-mot-so-du-an-giao-thong-tren-dia-ban.aspx>
- Boluk, K. A., Cavaliere, C. T., & Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2019). A critical framework for interrogating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda in tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 27(7), 847–864. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2019.1619748>
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Chinh phu. (2011). *Quyết định phê duyệt Chiến lược phát triển du lịch Việt Nam đến năm 2020, tầm nhìn đến năm 2030 (Số 2473/QĐ-TTg)* [Decision on the approval of Vietnam's tourism development strategy to 2020, with a vision toward 2030]. <https://chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=153358&tagid=6&type=1>
- Comrey, A. L., & Lee, H. B. (1992). *A first course in factor analysis* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cuc Du lịch Quốc gia Việt Nam. (2025). *Du lịch Việt Nam vượt khó, vững bước tiến vào kỷ nguyên mới* [Vietnam tourism overcomes challenges, advancing steadily into a new era]. <https://thongke.tourism.vn/index.php/news/items/298>
- Cuc Thong ke tinh Ben Tre (2023). *Niên giám thống kê tỉnh Bến Tre các năm 2022, 2023, 2024* [Statistical yearbook of Ben Tre province for 2022, 2023, and 2024].
- Font, X., & McCabe, S. (2017). Sustainability and marketing in tourism: Its contexts, paradoxes, approaches, challenges and potential. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 25(7), 869–883. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2017.1301721>
- Hall, D., Roberts, L., & Mitchell, M. (2003). *New directions in rural tourism*. Ashgate Publishing
- Huong, L. T., Phuong, C. L., & Vu, M. A. (2025). Criteria for agricultural tourism development for farms in Thanh Hoa, Vietnam. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Studies*, 8(10), 6827–6831. <https://doi.org/10.47191/jefms/v8-i10-26>

- Kontogeorgopoulos, N., Churyen, A., & Duangsaeng, V. (2014). Success factors in community-based tourism in Thailand: The role of luck, external support, and local leadership. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 11(1), 106–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2013.852991>
- Lane, B. (1994). What is rural tourism? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 2(1–2), 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669589409510680>
- Mitrică, B., Şerban, P.-R., Roznovieţchi, I., Micu, D., Persu, M., Grigorescu, I., Amihăesei, V., Dumitraşcu, M., & Damian, N. (2025). The tourism sector's vulnerability to climate change-related phenomena. Case study: Romania. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2025.105248>
- Nguyen Quoc Cuong, Luu Quang Vinh (2022). Du lịch nông nghiệp-nông thôn và định hướng phát triển du lịch cho tỉnh Vĩnh Long [Agricultural-rural tourism and orientation for tourism development in Vĩnh Long province]. *In Kỷ yếu Hội thảo khoa học: Giải pháp phát triển du lịch Vĩnh Long trở thành ngành kinh tế quan trọng đến năm 2025, định hướng đến năm 2030* (pp. 1–5). Nhà xuất bản Tài chính.
- Ngo Thi Phuong Lan, Nguyen Thi Van Hanh, & Tran Tuyen (2021). Phát triển du lịch nông nghiệp tại Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long – Góc nhìn từ doanh nghiệp và cộng đồng địa phương [Developing agricultural tourism in the Mekong Delta: Perspectives from enterprises and local communities]. *Tạp chí Khoa học Xã hội*, 9(277), 30–44. <http://tapchikhxhcm.org.vn/index.php/tapchikhxh/article/view/279>
- Nguyen Huu Nhuan, Nguyen Thi Ly, Nguyen Tho Quang Anh, Tran Huong Giang, & Nguyen Thi Thu Huyen (2025). *Kinh nghiệm phát triển du lịch nông nghiệp của một số nước trên thế giới và hàm ý cho Việt Nam* [International experiences in agricultural tourism development and implications for Vietnam]. *Tạp chí Kinh tế và Dự báo*. <https://kinhtevadubao.vn/kinh-nghiem-phat-trien-du-lich-nong-nghiep-cua-mot-so-nuoc-tren-the-gioi-va-ham-y-cho-viet-nam-31097.html>
- Nguyen Thi Tam (2023). Chính sách của Thái Lan về bảo tồn và phát triển nghề thủ công truyền thống gắn với du lịch: Một số bài học kinh nghiệm cho tỉnh Cao Bằng [Thailand's policies on the preservation and development of traditional crafts in association with tourism: Lessons for Cao Bang province]. *Tạp chí Khoa học Xã hội Việt Nam*, (4). http://admin.tapchikhxh.vass.gov.vn/upload/pdf/2023/07/08/15.nguyen-thi-tam_08072023132616.pdf
- Sznajder, M., Prezezbórska, L., & Scrimgeour, F. (2009). *Agritourism*. CABI Publishing.
- Tao, T. C. H., & Wall, G. (2009). Tourism as a sustainable livelihood strategy. *Tourism Management*, 30(1), 90–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.03.009>
- Thanh Dong (2023). *Ngành du lịch Bến Tre chú trọng đào tạo, bồi dưỡng nguồn nhân lực* [The tourism sector of Ben Tre places strong emphasis on training and developing its human resources]. Cục Du lịch quốc gia Việt Nam. <https://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/post/53610>
- Thanh Dong (2022). *Bến Tre: Cộng đồng dân cư cùng làm du lịch* [Ben Tre: Local communities actively engage in tourism development]. Cục Du lịch quốc gia Việt Nam. <https://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/post/44363>
- Uy ban Nhân dân tỉnh Bến Tre (2023). *Kế hoạch phát triển du lịch cộng đồng trên địa bàn tỉnh Bến Tre đến năm 2030* [Plan for community-based tourism development in Ben Tre province until 2030].
- World Travel & Tourism Council. (WTTC, 2022). *Economic impact report 2022*. <https://wttc.org>
- Wicks, B. E., & Merrett, C. D. (2003). *Agritourism: An economic opportunity for Illinois* (Rural Research Report Vol. 14, Issue 9). Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.