

## ABSTRACT

Tourism has always been synonymous with travel and leisure activities; however the tourism industry is responsible for more than these activities alone. In Vietnam and other developing countries, the tourism industry is contributing the main source of income for the economy. Because of the importance of tourism, sustainable tourism development has been created to help preserve and conserve this 'living earner'.

Tour operation business in Ho Chi Minh City is playing an important role in the industry. They handle half of the total number of international tourists coming to Vietnam annually. Since tourism service providers in Vietnam are mostly small in scale with limited budget and power to reach customers in all main markets, tour operators are in the position to deal with. Thus, tour operators are having important impacts on the industry in all aspects of tourism marketing, planning as well as the sustainability of the industry.

The main purpose of this study is to gain a glimpse into the sustainable tourism development in Vietnam as seen through the tour operation business with specific understanding on its profile, role, environmental policies and practices. In addition, the research will test the nature, model and size of the tour operation business as well as the length of tours to evaluate any deviation in attitudes towards sustainable practices.

Descriptive research and questionnaire were used as the research method and research instrument in this study. One hundred set of questionnaires were distributed to one hundred inbound and/or outbound tour operators in selected districts in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The data from the tests was analyzed by an Independent Sample t-test and ANOVA.

The results from hypothesis testing showed that there were few differences between mass and specialist tour operators in their attitudes towards sustainable tourism statements. However, the results also revealed that small and large sized tour operators along with the average length of tours handled by the tour operators do have many significant differences in the context of business attitudes towards sustainable tourism development.

Mass tour operators and specialist tour operators in Ho Chi Minh City have slight attitude differences towards certain issues. Small and large tour operators differ in attitudes towards 13 out of 20 statements on sustainable tourism. The results showed that large tour operators in Ho Chi Minh City have higher levels of support than small tour operators in all statements. The average length of tours group into “1 – 7 days”, “8 – 14 days”, and “15 – 21 days” organized by tour operators in Ho Chi Minh City have also been proven to have effects on the business attitudes of tour operators on the adoption of a sustainable tourism approach. Tour operators who provide longer days of tours are reported to be more supportive to sustainability issues.

From the overall result, tour operators in Ho Chi Minh City mostly showed support for the concepts and practices of sustainable tourism development. An advantage of the industry in Vietnam is the ability to educate and regulate the tourism industry to grow under balanced and controlled developments.