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Ha Long Bay

Ha Long Bay is one of the most popular tourist sites to visit in Vietnam, located in Quảng Ninh Province east of Hanoi in the north east region of the country. The Bay is known for its outstanding features made almost entirely of limestone. These major features contribute largely to displaying the history of the changing geology. The Bay and its surrounding landscape also consist of a group of roughly 1600 islands that rise from the ocean like a mythological creature. Many of the islands are not solid but give way to caves. Many Birds and animals including antelopes, monkeys, and lizard also live on some of the islands. (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/672). Listed as a World Heritage site, this has attributed the Bay with an elite status, and coupled with its tropical climate, it has made it a very intriguing area to explore. The climate allows for many diverse species of plants to grow and has lush forestry. A population of approximately 1,600 people live on Hạ Long Bay in fishing villages that surround the area (http://www.tomyhalong.com/). Most of them live on floating houses and make a living through fishing, searching through the waters for many different species of fish and different kinds of mollusks. The area is cited as being an especially sedimentary environment (Encyclopedia Britannica).

The area is experiencing intense development pressure as one corner of Vietnam’s northern economic contributors. This landscape is experiencing a large influx of both domestic and international tourists, which has aided in increasing their economic status but also raised issues with development companies. With the impact of well-established industries of coal mining and shipping, the recent inflation is placing pressure on the area as a World Heritage conservation area (Lloyd, K., & Morgan, C. 2008). While the geographical landscape makes this environment a very desirable destination for many, the area surrounding the bay has been in conflict with many development companies as well as the tourism industry. The environment is seemingly ideal to for developers who wish to increase tourism and inflate the economy in this developing country (Jansen-Verbeke, M., & Go, F.1995). There is much conflict that surrounds tourism and urban development in areas of unique natural and cultural heritage can be significant and often involve multiple investors (Lloyd, K., & Morgan, C. 2008). Quang- Ninh Province (QNP) is also one of many stakeholders invested in increasing urban development and industrializing. One of the many tourist attractions that draws people to this area is the cruise around the Bay, which also facilitates as a small port. Industrialization due to increasing tourism puts the Bay at risk of increasing pollution due to spills or collisions. (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/672). The processing of waste and pollution in the city around the Bay is only equipped to handle a small portion of the waste that is generated each year, a very common occurrence. (Pham, L. H. (2012). Many ecosystems have been cleared to make way for fish farms and develop areas that are equipped to handle the needs for modern development, all contributing to the pollution into the Bay. Many industrial and environmental pressures congregates in and around Ha Long Bay (Hitchcock, M., T King, V., & Parnwell, M. (2010).

By having the Bay as a participant in the World Heritage system, it forces the territories surrounding it to discuss and negotiate management issues with a range of institutions. Many stakeholders all interact, value and make use of resources located in World Heritage sites in different ways including environmentally, economically and personal use. In the Ha Long Bay, many well established industries such as coal, shipping and tourism tend to work in private, which makes the management of this site very difficult to maintain. Much of the conflict that the Heritage site is experiencing is a lack of cooperation with stakeholders.

Ha Long Bay adjoins one of Vietnam’s principal coalmining areas, which provides employment to some 71,000 people (Lloyd, K., & Morgan, C. 2008). The coal-mining regulations tend to lie beyond the control of the state’s jurisdiction, which now has a poor reputation for being an environmentally pollutant due to the waste from coal extraction infiltrating the Bay. This devastating infiltration kills much of the residential population’s sustainability as they fish, and in turn hurts the local economy. The pollution that runs into the Bay makes this tourist sight very difficult to maintain for visitors as well, if the water is not safe or tangible to be seen and accessed for visitors.

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Tourism development has been identified as a very adequate way to restore the economy of any foreign and exotic destination. Tourism is largely impacting the Bay, as it is a large source of conflict as well as economic inflation. Tourism is generally only successful in an area when its residents are impacted in a positive way with their support and participation (Pham, L. H., 2012). The Bay has been infiltrated with a slew of tourists in the most recent years, which has put tremendous strain on the environment as developers have been attempting to urbanize this destination to capitalize on the travelers.

Having a high number of tourists in only a few coastal towns puts extreme stress on the natural environment in these locations due to sudden increase in carbon emissions as well as use of resources. (Hitchcock, M., T King, V., & Parnwell, M. (2010). Ha Long Bay typically has regulatory rules, however, they have been weakened by the Policy of Renovations (doi moi) reforms relative to the influence and logic of the market, which have put stress on the agricultural industry as well as the economy. (Witter, S. 1996).While seemingly rapid economic development has yielded a quickly increasing environmental crisis, Vietnam has remained very open to the outside world, which as a result has increased its exposure to and acceptance of international values, standards, and laws. (Hitchcock, M., T King, V., & Parnwell, M. (2010).

The touristic value of Ha Long Bay has increasingly been recognized and sought after during the push for development. Due to lack of recognition until 1995, the number of tourists were quite minimal. After the Bay was added onto the list of World Heritage sites, the tourism did not increase for quite some time. It was not until 2003 that the number of tourists had increase from a few hundred thousand to roughly 1.3 million. (http://www.vietnamtourism.com/) Having such a quickly escalating increase in number of tourists has placed increasing encouragement upon Ha Long Bay as a desirable tourist attraction, and placed greater pressure and need for development in order to accommodate the growing tourist numbers, therefore expanding the industry’s ecological footprint. (Hitchcock, M., T King, V., & Parnwell, M. (2010). Ha Long Bay serves as an ideal tourist destination due to its aesthetic quality as well as the various activities available such as kayaking and swimming. This destination has undergone intense new development to accommodate the incoming tourists, which has an almost opposite effect of highlighting the Bay as an important environmental, efficient site.

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