



## ТЕНДЕНЦИИ В РАЗВИТИЕТО НА ВХОДЯЩИЯ ТУРИЗЪМ ВЪВ ВИЕТНАМ

### TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INBOUND TOURISM IN VIETNAM

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**Abstract:** Located in Southeast Asia, Vietnam has great potential for tourism development with its favourable geographical location, climate, and natural conditions, including a coastline of more than 3 260 km along the length of the country. It is in the list of 12 countries with the most beautiful beaches and bays in the world, such as Ha Long Bay and Nha Trang Bay. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam was also considered a safe destination.

In particular, on 7 September 2022, the World Travel Awards (WTA) once again honoured Vietnam as Asia's Leading Destination. This is the 4th time in a row the country has achieved this award (2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022). In addition, its tourism was also voted as Asia's Leading Natural Destination, leading the region in the categories of heritage and culture. This is an opportunity and a motivation for Vietnam to continue to promote the image and affirm the brand and position of its tourism in the region and in the world.

The purpose of the article is to present Vietnam as a tourist destination. The volume of incoming tourists and the structure of inbound tourism are analyzed on the basis of statistical data. Special attention is paid to inbound tourism to Vietnam from Eastern European countries in the period 2018–2023.

**Keywords:** Vietnam; tourism; tourist destination; inbound tourism; development.

**JEL:** 83

### Introduction

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is an S-shaped strip of land, located in the centre of Southeast Asia, in the east of the Indochinese peninsula. It is bordered by China to the north, by Laos to the west, and by Cambodia to the west. To the southeast, it overlooks the East Sea and the Pacific Ocean. The capital city is Hanoi. The country has nearly 100 million people made up of 54 ethnic groups, covering an area of 331 690 km<sup>2</sup>, with lower terrain from the north to the south, gradually leaning from the west to the east.

Vietnam is known as a country with a lot of potential for tourism development with its favourable location in terms of geography, climate, and natural conditions, including a coastline of more than 3 260 km along the length of the country. It is among the 12 countries with the most beautiful beaches (more than 125) and bays in the world, such as Ha Long Bay, Nha Trang Bay, etc. This has been evidenced by a series of prestigious awards in tourism for destinations, heritage sites, golf courses, hotels, airlines, etc. awarded by renowned world organizations.

Vietnam has effective COVID-19 prevention measures. As a result, it is considered a safe destination, a peaceful country with beautiful and humid landscapes, special food, stable politics, no terrorism, and no robbery. Epidemics are controlled safely and strictly in the minds of many major inbound markets to Vietnam, such as the UK, the US, Russia, etc.

These achievements are not great, but they are an opportunity and motivation for Vietnam to continue to promote the image and affirm the brand and position of its tourism in the region and in the world. In this article, the author presents Vietnam as a tourist destination, thereby statisticizing the number and analyzing the structure of international visits to Vietnam in the period 2018–2023, especially from Eastern Europe.

### **Literature Review and Research Methods**

The tourist market can be defined as “a relatively distinct part of the market in general, which includes the set of freely negotiated exchange relations between sellers (tourist enterprises) and buyers (tourists), manifested on the basis of objective mechanisms and subjective interests related to the price, the place, time and scope of the purchase and sale of specific services and goods satisfying the need for tourism, according to the requirement to achieve an economic advantage for market actors” (Rakadzhyska et al. 2020). The tourist destination is a central element of the tourism system and it has complex content. The destination offers a wide range of tourist products to different market segments. It interacts with both the international and the domestic market of the country it refers to (Marinov 2015).

To complete this article, the author has mainly used the documentary research method based on secondary data collected from books, journals, scientific reports, information sources from the internet, as well as judgments and assessments of experts and managers related to the research problem. The author has also used descriptive statistical methods to analyze the number and structure of international tourists to Vietnam in the period 2018–2023, especially tourists from Eastern Europe.

### **Overview of Vietnam as a Tourist Destination**

Vietnam has very rich and diverse tourism resources in terms of nature and culture. This is one of the most important conditions for creating specific, unique, and diverse products with reasonable prices, suitable to the tastes of many international customer markets, and ensuring competitiveness with other products and services of other countries in the same continent.

#### ***Monuments and Landmarks***

With thousands of kilometers of coastline, thousands of large and small islands, hundreds of sunny and windy white sand beaches all year round, warm sea water, etc., Vietnam is really a paradise of sea and islands, such as Lang Co, Nha Trang, Cam Ranh, Ninh Chu, Mũi Né, Con Dao, Phú Quốc, etc. Here, it is possible to build and exploit a high-class resort combined with many other activities (resort, swimming, mineral bath, golf, sea sports, boat racing, windsurfing, snorkeling, diving tourism, etc.).



**Figure 1.** *Some Famous Places in Vietnam* (Source: Vietnam Tourism Dept.)

Vietnam has more than 41 000 monuments and landmarks. The density and number of relics are the highest in 11 provinces in the Red River Delta, accounting for about 56% of Vietnam's relics. Currently, after the 13th ranking at the end of 2022, Vietnam has a total of 128 special national monuments. The Red River Delta is the region with the most ranked monuments in the country with 47 relics, 21 of which in the capital of Hanoi.

Vietnam's diverse terrain, especially the high mountainous terrain, has created many landscapes with high peaks, deep abysses, and majestic waterfalls (e.g. the Northwest mountains, the Trường Sơn range, the Central Highlands, etc.). The cave system is very diverse and rich, distributed relatively widely, especially in the northern and northern central regions. There are caves associated with the evolution of the ancient Vietnamese (e.g. Người Xưa, Xóm Trại, Con Moong, Do Mountain, etc.). There are also cave systems associated with majestic landscapes which are part of the world's natural heritage, such as Ha Long Bay and Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng National Park.

Vietnam has an ecosystem with a high biodiversity value, a system of interlaced canals, many mangrove forests, and lush orchards all year round. Also, the country has 33 national parks, more than 400 hot water sources from 40 to 120 degrees, and a cave system with world-famous magical stalactites. Vietnam's caves are mainly located in limestone mountains with a very well-developed karst terrain.

For many consecutive years, a lot of landscapes and other heritages in Vietnam have been voted and ranked highly by prestigious organizations and magazines.

*Holidays with Kids*, Australia's travel magazine about experiences for families with young children, recently announced the top 10 best family resorts in the world, where the Alma and Anam resorts in Vietnam hold the 3rd and 5th positions respectively. The Alma Resort is behind the UAE's Atlantis Dubai and France's Disneyland Hotel in Paris.

In 2016, the Ba Na Hills Golf Club received the award "World's Best New Golf Course" within the framework of the World Golf Awards. In four consecutive years (2017–2020), Vietnam was honoured by the WGA World Golf Awards as Asia's Best Golf Destination.

In 2021, the Golden Bridge at Sun World Ba Na Hills of the Sun Group topped the list of New Wonders of the World voted by the *Daily Mail* (UK).

Ha Long Bay was ranked 5th by CNN in the list of 25 most beautiful destinations in the world announced on 8 March 2023.

Ninh Binh – the destination known as “Ha Long on land”, has just been considered by *Forbes* one of the 23 best tourist destinations in 2023. Previously, Ninh Binh was ranked 7th in the top 10 list of friendliest destinations in the world by the 11th annual Traveller Review Awards.

Thus, Vietnamese tourism has been recognized by the world and has continuously received international awards. Most recently, according to the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) Global Tourism Development Capability Index 2021 Report, released on 24 May 2022, Vietnam’s tourism ranked 52 out of 117 economies, with an increase of eight positions compared to 2019. This is the third highest increase in the world.

### ***Culture***

Vietnam is known and loved for being a country with a very unique culture, many ethnic communities, and a long history. It is a peace-loving but also an indomitable nation that has won victory in defending its independence. Entering the 21st century, Vietnam has gained popularity as a country with many achievements in socio-economic development, becoming a destination for trading partners in the world.

Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups, each of which having its characteristic culture, customs, architecture, cuisine, and lifestyle.

### ***Traditional Folklore***

Vietnamese folk music also has a long tradition, starting from châu văn, quan họ, hát ví, dân ca, etc. In addition, it consists of folk music of other ethnic groups, such as the music of the Tày people, the Sli music of the Nùng people, the Khan music of the Êđê people, the music of the Khmer people, etc. The Vietnamese folk theatre is associated with agricultural life. Water puppetry is a folk art of farmers working in water fields in the Red River Delta, often performed during festivals and leisure time. This is considered a synthesis between the arts of sculpture, music, painting, and literature. Along with water puppetry, the arts of chèo, tuồng and cải lương singing contribute to enriching the Vietnamese traditional theatre background. From the early 20th century, influenced by the Western theatre, modern Vietnamese theatre art has been supplemented with the arts of drama, comedy, circus, magic, dance, ballet, opera, etc.

### ***Festivals***

According to statistics by Vietnam’s Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, there are 7 966 festivals in the country, including 7 039 folk festivals (accounting for 88.36%), 332 historical festivals (accounting for 4.16%), 544 religious festivals (accounting for 6.28%), 10 festivals imported from abroad (accounting for 0.12%), and other festivals (accounting for 0.5%). On average, there are about 22 festivals taking place every day, i.e. a festival is held almost every hour in Vietnam.

These are not only historical values, but also colourful cultural values preserved over thousands of years, many of which have been recognized by UNESCO. Hanoi currently holds the most UNESCO titles awarded to the following subjects: the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, the Doctoral Epitaph of the Thang Long Temple of Literature, the Gióng Festival, the ca trù genre, the tug-of-war games, and the Vietnamese Mother Worship cult. As of 26 November 2022, UNESCO has recognized 43 heritage sites in Vietnam, of which 8 World Heritage Sites, 9 World Biosphere Reserves, 14 Intangible Cultural Heritages, 3 World Documentary Heritage Sites, 6 Documentary Heritage Sites of the Asia-Pacific region, and 3 Global Geopark Sites. World heritage sites in Vietnam are classified as special national monuments.

### ***Vietnamese Cuisine***

Food is not only material culture, but also spiritual culture. Vietnamese cuisine has always been an interesting topic. It is not simply the name of a dish or a recipe, but a long-standing traditional culture with characteristics such as sociability, diversity, and low-fat content combined with a variety of different ingredients. They all help to improve the taste and increase the attractiveness of each dish. Vietnamese people use chopsticks and have a habit of serving all dishes at the same time, sharing them on a tray, showing community and deep self-control. They are especially hospitable when entertaining guests who come to visit with delicious dishes and funny stories shared during eating.



In 2022, TasteAtlas, a website dubbed “the world’s culinary map,” announced that Vietnamese coffee ranked second among the top 10 best coffees in the world. Previously, the travel magazine *The Travel* ranked Vietnam among the top 10 countries with the most unique coffee culture in the world.

In 2015, CNN announced the list of 20 countries with the most favourite cuisine by tourists, including Vietnam with fried spring rolls.

In 2014, the Hanoi bun cha was in the top 10 best street foods in the world voted by *National Geographic*, while the hamburger was in the top 20 best street foods in the world voted by *Huffington Post*. The Vietnamese beef pho and pho rolls also entered the list of 50 best street foods in the world announced by CNN.

Vietnamese cuisine is a colourful picture, highlighting the unique identity of each ethnic group and region, but they still carry the same Vietnamese soul.

### ***Traditional Vietnamese Costume Culture and Art Architecture***

Costumes are one of the three elements of material life (eating, living, wearing), the earliest cultural product of human society. They have changed according to the development of history. Through each period, the traditional costumes of the Vietnamese people have acquired their own distinct imprints, especially women’s costumes. Costumes such as the áo dài, áo tứ thân, and áo bà ba shirts with the conical and strapless hats have gradually become an indispensable cultural beauty, the crystallization of a long-standing culture.

The costumes of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam are very rich and diverse, with unique features that are typical of each region and ethnic group. In mountainous areas, ethnic groups living in stilt houses often wear indigo pants, skirts, and shirts with many patterns simulating wild flowers and wild animals. In the highlands, women often wear skirts, men wear loincloths, etc. But in general, ethnic costumes are decorated with colourful patterns, harmonious in colour, diverse in motifs, and soft in style, suitable for labour on the upland, and convenient for travelling on steep passes. Along with the dresses created by skillful hands and aesthetic souls of ethnic girls, jewelry such as earrings, bracelets, copper and silver necklaces, beaded wire, etc., is also indispensable.

Traditional Vietnamese architecture is heavily influenced by the cultural interference between the two great ancient Asian civilizations of India and China. Vietnamese folk art includes decorations on bronze drums, archaeological sites, sculptural motifs in communal houses and pagodas, and folk paintings. The ancient architectural works of Vietnam are generally modest and simple, in harmony with nature by mainly using local materials, with beautiful colours, clearly showing the folklore of the wet rice agricultural civilization. For residential buildings or artistic and religious works, the roof is curved like the bow of a boat, with sculptures of dragons, tigers, cranes, phoenixes, turtles, snakes, etc. – outstanding symbols expressing strength, authority, spirituality, and worship of the gods and human gods of farmers.

### ***Inbound Tourism in Vietnam***

For 60 years of establishment and development, Vietnam’s tourism has affirmed its role as a leading economic sector with great contributions to the country’s economic development. The period 2018–2022 was a period of many breakthroughs in growth, but also a turbulent period with nearly three years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

***2018 is considered a successful year for Vietnamese tourism.*** According to statistics of the General Department of Tourism, Vietnam welcomed 15.5 million international visitors in Vietnam, which is an increase of 2.7 million visitors (19.9%) compared to 2017 and nearly twice as more compared to 2015. The total revenue from tourism was \$27.7 billion, estimated at 8.39% of the country’s GDP, of which the total revenue from inbound tourism was \$16.6 billion (accounting for 60.1%). Tourism makes an important contribution to the development of other related industries and fields, raising Vietnam’s position by having the fastest growth rate of international visitors in the world in 2018 (ranked 6/10 in 2017).

**2019 has continued to be a successful year.** For the first time, Vietnam welcomed 18 million international visitors, which is 16.2% more compared to 2018. The total revenue reached \$32.83 billion, or 18.5% more than in 2018. These results are really impressive. In 2019, the growth of inbound tourism to Vietnam was much higher than the global average (3.8%) and the Asia-Pacific region (4.6%).

In 2019, Vietnam's tourism was nominated in five categories of the World Travel Awards: World's Leading Heritage Destination (first time); World's Best Golf Destination (first time); Asia's Top Destination (2nd consecutive year); Asia's Leading Cultural Destination (2nd consecutive year); and Asia's Premier Culinary Destination (first time). Vietnam is constantly in the group of countries with the fastest tourist growth in the world. The competitiveness of the country's tourism has continuously increased in the rankings of the World Economic Forum (WEF), ranking 63 out of 140 economies, etc., surpassing Indonesia to rank 4th in the region in terms of inbound tourism.

**In mid-February 2020, the outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world disrupted tourism activities.** According to the World Tourism Organization, the damages in 2020 would cause the number of international tourists to return to the level that was 30 years ago, estimated to a decrease by 70–75%, equivalent to a decrease of about one billion visitors and of \$1.1 trillion in total tourism revenue. From March to the end of the year, Vietnam closed to inbound tourism, and its tourism industry faced unprecedented difficulties.

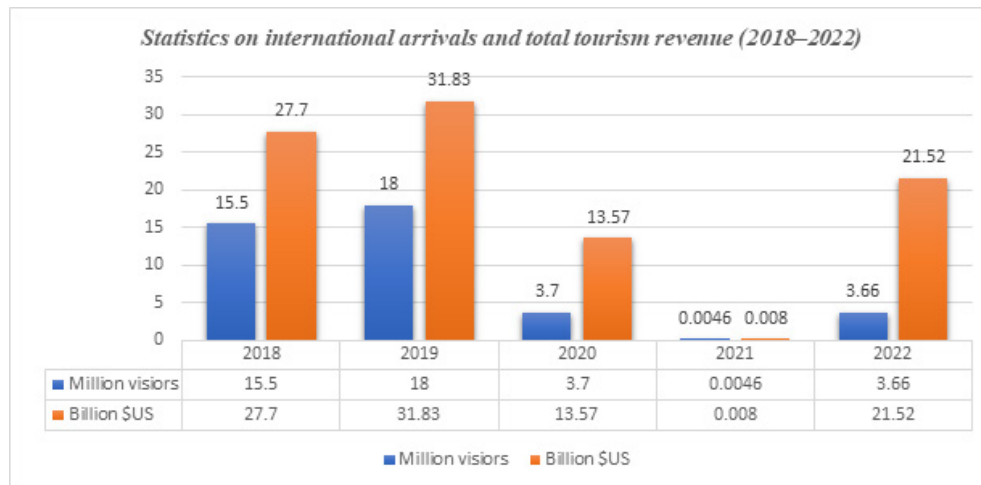
The number of international visitors in 2020 was only 3.7 million, or 79.5% lower than in 2019; domestic tourists reached 56 million, or 34.1% fewer; the total revenue from tourism fell down to \$13.57 billion, or 58.7% (~ \$19 billion) lower. The accumulated difficulties forced the tourism industry to focus on exploiting and developing domestic tourism, thereby becoming a lifeline solution for travel businesses to survive during the epidemic period.

**In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to disrupt and break the chain of tourism service links,** causing damage not only to the tourism industry, but also to the whole world economy. Particularly in the tourism industry, 95% of the travel companies and 90% of tourist accommodation establishments closed down, millions of employees in the sector lost their jobs, etc.

According to statistics, the number of domestic tourists by 2021 was estimated to reach 40 million arrivals, or 29% and 53% lower compared to 2020 and 2019 respectively. The international market signalled they could start returning with “vaccine passports” as of November 2021, and, by the end of 2021, there were more than 4 600 international visitors to Vietnam.

**The year 2022 was an important milestone for the recovery** of Vietnam's tourism industry after officially reopening from 15 March. By the end of 2022, the country welcomed 101.3 million domestic tourists (exceeding 68.8% of the plan) and 3.66 million international tourists (reaching 73% of the plan). The total revenue from tourism reached \$21.52 billion, exceeding 23% of the plan, thereby increasing 23.3 times than in 2021. However, the number of visitors was still 79.7% lower in comparison with 2019, when there was no COVID-19 epidemic.

On 7 September 2022, at the World Tourism Awards Ceremony, Vietnam's tourism received 16 awards. In particular, Vietnam has once again been honoured as Asia's Leading Destination. This is the 4th time in a row that Vietnam has won this award (2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022). In addition, its tourism was also voted as Asia's leading country in the categories of heritage tourism, cultural tourism, and sustainable tourism. These awards are a premise for Vietnamese tourism to take off and develop more strongly in 2023, as well as an opportunity and motivation to continue promoting its image, brand, and position in the international market.



**Chart 1.** (Source: Vietnam Tourism Dept.)

Looking at the chart, we see that in 2018 and 2019, Vietnam's tourism had a remarkable growth in both the number of international visitors and the total revenue from the tourism industry (incl. revenue from the domestic tourism market).

In the period 2020–2023, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international visitors to Vietnam significantly decreased. The total revenue from the tourism industry during this period was mainly from the domestic market.

**2023 is expected to be the most important year in the recovery strategy of Vietnam's tourism industry**, with the goal of welcoming 110 million tourists (about 8 million international and about 102 million domestic ones), and reaching a total revenue from tourism of about \$28.26 billion. According to the latest data from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the number of international visitors to the country was estimated at 895 425 in March 2023, or 21,5 times more than in March 2022. In the first three months of 2023, it was estimated to reach 2.7 million, or 29.7% more compared to the first three months of 2022, whereas the total revenue was estimated at \$5.77 billion.

However, the tourism industry still has limitations: the number of return visitors is low (10–40%); inbound tourism spending in Vietnam is not high; the airport infrastructure tends to be overloaded, failing to meet the high growth of inbound tourism; the Visa policy on arrival is still limited compared to directly competitive destinations like Thailand, Singapore, etc.

### **Structure of International Tourism to Vietnam**

Vietnam has been a safe and friendly destination for many international markets in recent years, such as Russia, England, France, Korea, China, etc., due to the following factors: history, culture, diplomatic relations, and geographical distance.

**In 2018**, the number of international visitors to Vietnam from Asia accounted for 77.9% of the total number. The European region accounted for 13.1%, of which five Western European countries (the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain) accounted for 6%, and only the Russian market for 3.9%. Visitors from the Americas accounted for 5.8%, of which the US and Canada added up to 5.4%. Visitors from Australia accounted for 2.9%, while those from Africa only for 0.3%. Northeast Asian markets continue to play a key role in the growth of international arrivals to Vietnam.

In 2018, international arrivals by air reached 12.5 million (an increase of 14.4% compared to 2017), and accounted for 80.5% of the total number of international visitors. Arrivals by road had a remarkable growth compared to 2017 (+59.6%) with 2.8 million tourists (accounting for 18.1% of the total number of international arrivals). Visitors by sea accounted for a small proportion (1.4%), corresponding to 215 306, or 16.8% fewer compared to 2017.

**According to the General Statistics Office, there was a total of 18 million inbound tourists to Vietnam in 2019.** The Asian market reached 14.38 million, accounting for 79.9%, or 19.1% more compared to the previous year. Visitors from Europe reached 2.1 million (+6.4% compared to 2018). Those from

the Americas, Australia, and Africa reached 973 800 (+7.7%), 432 400 (-1.2%), and 48 000 (+12.2%) respectively. The number of visitors by air reached more than 14.3 million, accounting for 80.2%. The ones by road reached 3.36 million, accounting for 18.7% and increasing by 20.4% compared to 2018, while those by sea reached 306 000, accounting for 1.5% and increasing by 22.7%.

*In 2020*, visitors from Asia reached 281 360, accounting for 73.3% of the total number of international visitors to our country (-80.4% compared to the previous year). Tourists from all major markets decreased sharply: China – 959 200 (-83.5%), South Korea – 840 000 (-80.4%), Japan – 205 300 (-78.4%), etc. Visitors from Europe were estimated at 671 900 (-69% compared to 2019), of whom 246 300 (-61.9%) from Russia, 82 400 (-73.9%) from the UK, etc.

*In 2021*, there was a total of 4 600 international visitors to Vietnam, with most of them being from the UK and from some Southeast Asian countries. In the last two months of 2021, after nearly two years of stagnation, more than 4 000 international tourists came to Vietnam with “vaccine passports” (most of whom British), as a result of a pilot programme.

*Since the complete opening of tourism from 15 March 2022* until now, the number of domestic and international tourists has increased sharply. According to statistics of the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, in 2022, there were 3.7 million international tourists to Vietnam, and domestic tourism reached over 101.3 million. The total tourism revenue reached \$21.52 billion. Korea was the market with the largest number of visitors (nearly 970 000 arrivals).

Passengers arriving by air reached about 3.3 million, accounting for 89.5% of the international arrivals to Vietnam, which is 29.5 times higher than in 2021. International arrivals by road reached 380 900, accounting for 10.4% (8.4 times higher), while those by sea reached 3 100, accounting for 0.1% (5.1 times higher).

**Table No. 1:** *Changes in the visitor structure to Vietnam by continent, period 2018–2022*

No	Year  Continent	2018		2019		2020		2022	
		Thousand visitor	+/_ (%) compared to 2017	Thousand visitor	+/_ (%) compared to 2018	Thousand visitor	+/_ (%) compared to 2019	Thousand visitor	+/_ (%) compared to 2020
1	Asia	12075	+23.7	14386.3	+19.1	2.813.6	-80.4	2397.5	-15.8
2	Europe	2038	+8.1	2168.1	+6.4	671.9	-69.1	565.5	-16.6
3	Americas	904	+10.6	973.8	+7.7	95.5	-91.9	429.8	+45
4	Australia	438.3	+4	432.4	-1.2	97.5	-77.2	257.2	+28.4
5	Africa	42.7	+19.2	48	+12.2	13.5	-74.5	10	-26
<b>Total</b>		<b>15.500</b>		<b>18.008</b>		<b>3.698</b>		<b>3.660</b>	

(Source: Vietnam Tourism Dept.)

With its geographical proximity and similarities in culture and history, Asia has always been the leading market, bringing the most tourists to Vietnam. With the world’s most developed economy, Europe ranks 2nd among the continents sending tourists to Vietnam.

**Table No. 2:** *Changes in visitor structure to Vietnam by country, period 2018 – 2022*

No	Năm  Country	2018		2019		2020		2022	
		Thousand visitor	+/_ (%) compared to 2017	Thousand visitor	+/_ (%) compared to 2018	Thousand visitor	+/_ (%) compared to 2019	Thousand visitor	+/_ (%) compared to 2020
1	Korea	3485.4	+44.3	4290.8	+23.1	840	-80.4	970	+11.5
2	China	4966.5	+23.9	5806.4	+16.9	959.2	-83.5	71.8	-92.6
3	Japan	826.7	+3.6	952	+15.2	205.3	-78.4	128.7	-37.3
4	Russia	606.6	+5.7	646.5	+6.6	246.3	-61.9	28	-89.7
5	Australia	386.9	+5.2	383.5	-0.9	75.2	-73.8	99.2	+13.2
6	Taiwan	714.1	+15.9	926.7	+29.8	192.2	-79.3	89.5	-53.5



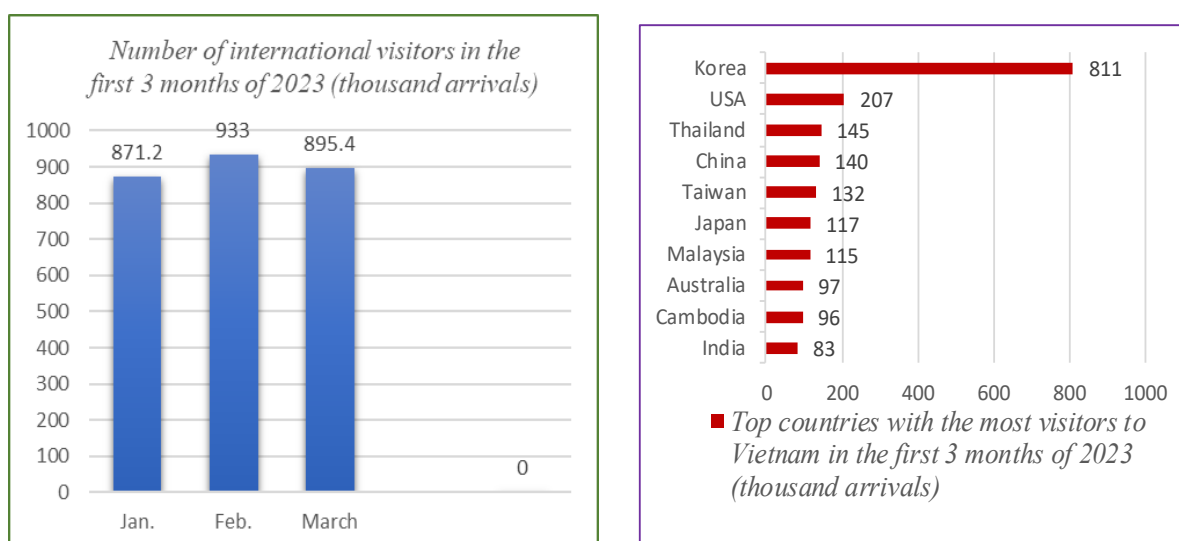
7	USA	687.2	+11.9	746.2	+8.6	172.7	-76.9	215.3	+12.6
8	Malaysia	540.1	+12.4	606.2	+12.2	116.2	-80.9	135	+11.6
9	Thailand	349.3	+15.8	509.8	+45.9	125.7	-75.4	162.6	+12.9
10	England	298.1	+5.1	315	+5.7	82.4	-73.9	67.3	-18.3

(Source: Vietnam Tourism Dept.)

Asia has 6/10 countries that are always in the top 10 countries sending the most tourists to Vietnam. Europe sends visitors to Vietnam mainly from two countries: Russia and the UK. Russia has always been a large market with a large population. The community of Eastern European countries still has many Russian-speaking tourists in Vietnam. After the COVID-19 pandemic was brought under control in 2022, all markets sending tourists to Vietnam have shown signs of recovery. However, as Russia waged a special military campaign against Ukraine, the Russian tourist market continued to decline sharply.

*In the first 3 months of 2023*, Korea was the largest sending market with 811 000 arrivals, followed by the United States (207 000) and Thailand (145 000). The positive signal from the Chinese market has risen to 4th place (140 000). It was hoped that, as of 15 March, restarting the organization of group tours to Vietnam would help increase the number of Chinese tourists and restore tourism activities between the two countries.

Besides, some markets continued to grow well, such as Taiwan (132 000), Japan (117 000), Malaysia (115 000), and Cambodia (96 000). Australia ranked 8th (97 000), while India ranked 10th (83 000).



**Chart 2.** Changes in the Vietnam Visitor Structure due March 2023

(Source: Vietnam Tourism Dept.)

The cruise passenger market has grown rapidly. Notably, in March 2023, international arrivals by sea reached 20 700, which was 2.8 times higher than in February. Recently, the cruise passenger market has been very active, with a series of cruise ships docking at the ports of Nha Trang, Da Nang, Bà Rịa–Vũng Tàu, Ho Chi Minh, and Quang Ninh, with most tourists from Europe and Asia.

Based on the above statistics, it can be seen that in the period before 2019, the number of international visitors to Vietnam increased 2.3 times from 7.9 million to 18 million, with an average growth of 22.7% a year. After the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam's tourism has made impressive recovery steps, growing strongly in both volume and revenue and contributing to the country's economy.

For many decades, Russia and Eastern European countries have always been very potential inbound markets for Vietnam's tourism. However, for the period 2020–2023, there is little information about tourists from Russia in particular and from Eastern European countries in general on the statistics table of tourists coming from traditional international markets. This is a consequence of the COVID-19

pandemic and of the special military operation in Ukraine, which has not ended. We hope that it will end soon, that Eastern European countries in particular and all countries in the world will soon recover and stabilize their economies, and that global tourism will recover as quickly as in 2019 and will continue to grow stronger.

### Conclusion

Vietnam has a market of nearly 100 million people, a stable political background, a priority policy for tourism development, rich natural tourism resources, as well as a culture imbued with national identity. It is clear that Vietnam's tourism has a strong development opportunity, and it is likely to become one of the leading tourist destinations in the region, in Asia, and in the world.

However, tourism products are still few and low quality. Vietnam's brand positioning is not clear in key markets, and many inbound tourists that go to Vietnam are not really satisfied to be able to revisit it due to the lack of investment. The advertising approach has not touched the high-end segment. Tourism is developing, but it is not commensurate with its potential: the number of visitors is large, but the effect is not exactly what we want. Besides, many challenges still lie ahead in the recovery of the international tourism market. Clearly, the pandemic has led to severe consequences. The armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine has also affected the development of international tourism in our country.

Vietnam's tourism also needs to quickly seize every opportunity to recover and build a prestigious destination with a competitive position in the international arena. Tourism companies need to focus on innovating main product lines and services, etc. Localities and companies need to have policies to bring back human resources who have quit and switched jobs; to organize training and retraining of human resources to ensure quality of service to tourists; to improve competitiveness and enhance destination attractiveness to motivate international tourists to revisit Vietnam in the near future.

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