



DEVELOPING THE NIGHT - TIME ECONOMY: SUCCESS FACTORS AND SOLUTIONS FOR QUANG NINH PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

The night-time economy (NTE) is increasingly gaining attention from many countries and is regarded as a new driver of economic growth. In Vietnam, the NTE has existed for many years and is seen as a new opportunity for the country's socio-economic development. However, the development of NTE is not always successful. In practice, NTE flourishes in some areas while remaining stagnant in others. This article identifies factors that contribute to the successful development of NTE, analyzes the case of Quang Ninh province, and provides recommendations for the province to leverage opportunities arising from this new model.

Keywords: night-time economy, night products and services, Quang Ninh

1. Introduction

On July 27, 2020, the Prime Minister of Vietnam issued Decision No. 1129/QĐ-TTg approving the project on developing the night-time economy (NTE) in Vietnam. The decision set the objective of “exploiting the potential of the night-time economy to maximize opportunities for new economic growth.” Immediately after the issuance of Decision No. 1129/QĐ-TTg, many localities nationwide proactively developed implementation plans for the Prime Minister’s Decision (e.g., Ninh Binh, Ben Tre, Hanoi, Da Nang, Thua Thien Hue, Quang Ngai, etc.). Even at the district level (such as Hoan Kiem District in Hanoi and Hue City in Thua Thien Hue Province), pioneering initiatives were undertaken, such as the project “Pilot Organization for Night-time Economy Development in Hoan Kiem District” (August 2020) and the project “Improving and Developing Night Tourism

and Service Products of Hue City for the 2021-2025 Period, with Orientation to 2030” (Plan No. 1975/KH-UBND dated April 5, 2021).

In general, localities have taken many practical actions to promote the development of NTE in their areas. However, in reality, not all localities have succeeded in leveraging this new economic model. Some localities even allocated budgets for investment, infrastructure renovation, and improvement of streets and facilities to create attractive destinations for tourists and residents after 6:00 p.m. Nevertheless, the results have not met expectations. Therefore, what key factors or conditions are necessary for the successful development of NTE? This article focuses on analyzing the factors that contribute to successful NTE development and, from there, provides some recommendations for Quang Ninh Province in promoting NTE in its territory.

2. Expectations for Night-time Economy Development and Characteristics of the Night-time Economy

2.1. Expectations for Night-time Economy Development

The night-time economy (NTE) is a term and concept that has existed in the urban entertainment industry since the 1960s. Many urban scholars have assigned various names to this phenomenon. For example, Scott (2000) referred to it as the cultural economy; Hannigan (1998) called it the “fun economy”; and more simply, Hollands and Chatterton (2003) named it urban entertainment. NTE activities focus on entertainment and lifestyle (David et al., 2008). In fact, to better capture the essence of NTE, some countries even use the full term “night-time entertainment economy.”

There is still no universally accepted definition of NTE in terms of scope or operating hours. Some countries or cities adopt a broad interpretation, considering NTE as all social, cultural, and productive activities that take place during nighttime (Andreina, 2018), with Australia and Canada being typical examples. Meanwhile, many other countries or cities adopt a narrower view, focusing primarily on leisure and entertainment to meet tourists’ needs, after-work relaxation, or other consumption, cultural, and personal demands of residents, as seen in the United Kingdom, New York City, and Vietnam. Similarly, the time frame considered as NTE varies widely, ranging from 5:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. the following day (Peter et al., 2003), or more commonly, from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. (Sound and Andreina, 2018).

The development of the urban entertainment industry has also created prominent entertainment destinations in city centers, first emerging and most

clearly manifested in cities in the United States and the United Kingdom. Today, NTE continues to attract attention in many countries and is considered a new driver of economic growth. Many countries and cities have even set explicit expectations when developing NTE programs or plans. For instance, the United Kingdom has outlined 11 expectations for developing a 24-hour city, including: (i) optimizing time utilization; (ii) presence and vibrancy; (iii) social cohesion and development of social relationships; (iv) strengthening security; (v) economic efficiency and job creation; (vi) city branding; (vii) creating positive urban spaces; (viii) revitalizing city centers; (ix) promoting tourism; (x) enhancing a sense of belonging; and (xi) reducing traffic congestion (Rami Khorsand et al., 2020).

2.2. Characteristics of the Night-time Economy

To understand the key factors that contribute to the development of the night-time economy (NTE), it is essential to identify its defining characteristics. The main features of NTE are as follows:

Firstly, there is a significant difference in the nature of activities between two time frames: from 6:00 p.m. to midnight (0:00 a.m.) and from midnight to 6:00 a.m. The period from 6:00 p.m. to midnight is typically considered the evening economy, characterized by dining and entertainment activities, with a growing number of cafés, restaurants, theaters, cinemas, sports centers, and concert venues. The period from midnight to 6:00 a.m. is regarded as the late-night economy. This is a more dynamic period, concentrated in city centers and primarily involving young people aged 18-30 (Tran Thi Thu Thuy et al., 2022).

Secondly, bars, nightclubs, and pubs remain at the core of night-time activities.

Research by Sandra Mallet and Céline Burger (2015) indicates that the increasing presence of hotels, bars, pubs, and nightclubs has been a key factor in the emergence of NTE in many European cities. In particular, the consumption of alcohol and even addictive substances is considered a characteristic feature of night-time activities in many countries.

Thirdly, NTE activities are generally more vibrant on weekends (Friday to Sunday), as this is when local residents have time off after a long workweek. Additionally, families often organize recreational and entertainment activities during weekends to strengthen family bonds.

Fourthly, the workforce involved in NTE is highly diverse, ranging from low-skilled labor such as cleaners, security personnel, and sales staff to trained or skilled professionals such as singers, actors, and artists.

Fifthly, unlike the daytime economy, NTE relies on artificial lighting because activities take place from approximately 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. the following day. This period falls outside regular working hours of state management agencies (typically from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), and in some countries (such as Vietnam), there are no specialized agencies to oversee NTE, so there is often no dedicated staff for after-hours management. Moreover, in many countries, NTE is associated with alcohol and, in some cases, drug consumption, which introduces risks such as unsafe conditions, criminal behavior, and disturbances to public order, affecting local residents. These factors generate substantial management and regulatory costs for local authorities.

3. Factors Promoting the Development of the Night-time Economy

Experiences from the development of the night-time economy (NTE) in many

countries around the world indicate that numerous factors influence the growth of this economic model. The main factors promoting NTE development are as follows:

Firstly, NTE serves the interests of individuals who participate in experiences, use services, and consume products. Therefore, the diversity of night-time products and services, combined with the exploitation of local cultural characteristics (cultural capital), can attract various groups of participants, differentiated by age, gender, education, lifestyle, personality, or ethnicity. This creates opportunities for tourists to have richer experiences and engage in entertainment activities. In particular, entertainment services such as bars, pubs, nightclubs, performing arts (impressive shows, music lounges), therapeutic services (spa, massage, tattooing, etc.), photography with traditional local costumes, casinos, betting (races, contests, etc.), gambling/gaming, and certain fast-food outlets are likely to attract and sustain late-night activities. Even leisure services (e.g., game shows, LGBTQ+ bars) and sex tourism (such as in Pattaya, Thailand's "Red Light District") have become popular international tourist services, contributing to repeat visits.

Secondly, in addition to creativity and diversity in night-time products and services, these services must be delivered professionally, with reasonable, stable prices suitable for tourists of different income levels, ensuring satisfaction for all visitors. Marketing, promotion, and communication about iconic destinations, local traditional culture, and night-time activities beyond the province, city, or national borders are also emphasized by many localities.

Thirdly, the development of infrastructure and convenient, interconnected facilities is considered the foundation for promoting NTE.

Key infrastructure such as transportation systems, public sanitation, lighting, water supply and drainage, surveillance cameras, internet access, and ATMs, along with amenities such as public seating, outdoor electrical outlets, free internet connectivity, currency exchange, and nearby parking, must be systematically invested in, well maintained, and reasonably priced. This ensures comfort for residents and tourists, motivating longer and more frequent participation in NTE activities.

Fourthly, flexible and targeted NTE development policies, combined with proactive local government management and a consistent, stable legal framework, are critical factors in promoting this economic model. To ensure that NTE activities are vibrant, safe, and accessible to all groups in diverse ways, city authorities often focus on: (i) developing and issuing strategies and policies, including planning public spaces and designated areas for certain NTE activities such as bars, pubs, dance floors, and casinos; (ii) allocating sufficient budgets to provide funding for programs such as night cultural events, major festivals, and night business development; (iii) establishing specialized night management agencies to coordinate and strategize NTE development while balancing the interests of stakeholders (local residents, tourists, entertainment workers, service providers, licensing authorities, police, etc.); and (iv) creating mechanisms to control NTE-related risks, such as establishing regulations, rules, or principles for public entertainment spaces, specifying business types, operational areas, restricted zones, hours of operation, licensing, and operational standards (noise, lighting, etc.).

Fifthly, in practice, NTE activities mainly occur in urban areas with high population density, a large middle and upper class, and many young people. Additionally, only

areas attracting significant tourism can support NTE development, as tourists often aim to maximize their leisure experiences, particularly international tourists who may experience time-zone differences and participate in night-time activities. International visitors from regions such as Europe, the United States, Australia, and Taiwan are accustomed to night entertainment in their home countries and expect to explore local night tourism offerings.

Moreover, heritage tourism has been recognized as the fastest-growing segment in the tourism industry. According to Insider Exclusive, heritage tourists typically spend 60% more than average travelers (approximately USD 1,319 per trip compared to USD 820 per trip for general tourism) and take more trips annually (3.6 trips/year versus 3.4 trips/year). UNESCO statistics indicate that locations with recognized world heritage sites attract significantly more visitors who stay 2.5 times longer than similar sites without such recognition (People's Committee of Thua Thien Hue Province, 2020). Therefore, areas with world heritage sites can become promising locations for NTE development.

Sixthly, a stable and safe political environment is an ideal condition for NTE development. Maintaining social order reassures residents and international tourists participating in activities in public spaces. Additionally, service provision, particularly food and beverage services, must comply with quality, hygiene, and safety standards while maintaining reasonable prices.

4. Some Suggestions for Developing the Night-time Economy in Quang Ninh Province

Among the key factors contributing to the success of night-time economy (NTE) development mentioned above, Quang Ninh Province already possesses several advantages:

Tourism potential: Quang Ninh is one of the major tourism centers in Vietnam, with over 600 scenic spots, historical sites, and cultural relics. Notably, it is home to world heritage sites and wonders such as Ha Long Bay and Bai Tu Long Bay, as well as famous spiritual tourism destinations including Yen Tu Historical Site, Tran Dynasty Relics, and the Bach Dang Victory historical complex. Overall, Quang Ninh’s rich and diverse tourism space contributes to a variety of high-quality tourism products. The province has identified tourism as a key economic sector to drive local socio-economic development, focusing on four major tourism product lines: island and sea tourism; cultural and spiritual tourism; border tourism; and community-based eco-tourism.

Tourism performance and competitiveness: In recent years, Quang Ninh has consistently ranked among the top 5-10 provinces with the highest tourism

revenue and visitor numbers in Vietnam. For example, in the first six months of 2024, Quang Ninh ranked 4th in tourism revenue (after Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and Khanh Hoa), with total tourism revenue of VND 22.4 trillion and over 10.4 million visitors (Phuong Anh, 2024). The province is also recognized for its tourism competitiveness. According to the Tourism Advisory Council assessment in January 2022, Quang Ninh ranked 2nd out of 15 provinces and cities in pilot assessments of provincial tourism competitiveness, after Da Nang City. Among 12 evaluated criteria, Quang Ninh ranked first in “environmental sustainability,” second in “business environment,” “health and hygiene,” “tourism prioritization,” and “transportation infrastructure for tourism,” and third in “safety and security” (Nguyen Loan, 2022). These are significant advantages for Quang Ninh and Ha Long City in attracting tourists, especially international visitors.

Table 1. Comparison - Ranking by Pillars

RANK	Business Environment	Safety & Security	Health & Hygiene)	Human Resources & Labor	Readiness for ICT Adoption	Priority to Tourism	Competitiveness & Price Policy	Environmental Sustainability	Air Transport Infrastructure	Ground/Sea Transport Infrastructure	Natural Resources	Cultural Resources
Da Nang	1	9	6	1	6	1	11	1	1	1	13	7
Quang Ninh	2	3	2	2	7	4	2	13	2	2	5	4
Khanh Hoa	3	7	15	3	13	3	2	5	4	2	11	11
Quang Nam	4	7	11	10	15	12	1	11	13	8	6	2
Thien Thien Hue	5	3	14	4	2	3	4	5	4	9	7	8
Ha Noi	6	14	12	9	15	11	14	4	13	12	3	15
Quang Binh	7	10	9	7	5	12	8	6	7	8	9	2
TP. HCM	8	12	13	6	13	2	15	3	3	11	4	14
Kien Giang	9	13	4	12	4	5	6	12	14	3	6	3
Ninh Binh	10	6	8	5	8	8	10	10	15	10	13	5
Binh Dinh	11	8	2	10	11	6	7	9	9	5	14	10
Lam Dong	12	15	10	14	9	7	11	14	6	6	11	1
Lao Cai	13	1	5	8	12	10	9	7	10	15	10	9
Binh Thuan	14	5	15	13	1	14	5	8	12	14	12	7
Can Tho	15	11	1	3	14	9	13	15	8	7	15	12

Current night-time economy activities: NTE activities in Quang Ninh are primarily concentrated in two tourism hubs: Ha Long City and Mong Cai City. In Ha Long

City alone, many night-time products and services are available, including: recreational activities at Ha Long Ocean Park, 30/10 Square, large-scale entertainment complexes

such as Sun World Ha Long and Vinpearl Ha Long Resort, FLC Ha Long Resort and Golf Complex; festivals such as the Ha Long International Music Festival, street performances, Ha Long Carnival, food festivals, chef and bartender competitions; and numerous music venues, nightclubs, bars, karaoke establishments, and specialized culinary streets. Some hotels also provide reward-based entertainment services and casinos for foreign tourists.

However, in several tourism centers, night-time activities are mostly limited to the evening (18:00-24:00), with some operations ending as early as 22:00. Establishments offering music or alcohol services (e.g., karaoke, bars, nightclubs) operate until 24:00 in compliance with regulations. Late-night economic activities (typically from 00:00-06:00) are minimal, mainly restricted to hotel-based entertainment, night cruises on Ha Long Bay, and late-night dining establishments. Therefore, to attract more tourists and extend their stay into the late night, Quang Ninh needs to focus on several key measures:

Increase tourism revenue: To ensure that revenue corresponds to visitor numbers, Quang Ninh must improve earnings per visitor. Despite ranking 4th in total revenue among the top 10 provinces in the first half of 2024, its average revenue per million visitors (domestic and international) was only VND 2.13 trillion, nearly the lowest among the 10 provinces, compared to Khanh Hoa (VND 5 trillion), Ho Chi Minh City (VND 4.7 trillion), Hanoi (VND 4.22 trillion), Da Nang (VND 3.13 trillion), Phu Quoc (VND 3.39 trillion), and Nghe An (VND 3.02 trillion). Tourism revenue primarily comes from entrance fees, accommodation, food and beverage services, shopping, entertainment, and auxiliary

services. To increase revenue, Quang Ninh should enhance food and beverage and entertainment services, offer unique and high-quality local products, explore new tourism products (e.g., waterway tourism), and leverage information technology for marketing and promotion of day and night tourism.

Improve tourism-related indices: Quang Ninh should address indicators ranked lower in the January 2022 Tourism Advisory Council report, such as “tourism infrastructure” (5th), “tourism human resources” (7th), and “price competitiveness” (13th) (Nguyen Loan, 2022). Human resources are critical in determining service quality, professionalism, and the standard of provided tourism services. Decision No. 80/QD-TTg (11 February 2023) approved the provincial development plan for 2021-2030, with a vision to 2050, highlighting tourism as a key economic sector with high-quality, internationally-class services. To achieve this, professional tourism services and sufficient, well-trained human resources are required across state management, accommodation facilities, small and individual businesses, and household services. Standards for tourism human resources should align with international criteria, particularly emphasizing management, professional, communication, and foreign language skills for participants in NTE activities.

Price competitiveness, currently the weakest index affecting Quang Ninh’s tourism competitiveness, also requires careful study. Any pricing strategies must balance international-quality service objectives with visitor numbers to prevent over-tourism, which could degrade heritage sites and the environment. Focusing on quality tourists rather than sheer volume

should be prioritized. Quang Ninh should also plan for future tourist volumes to meet or exceed the targets set in Decision No. 80/QĐ-TTg: approximately 25 million visitors by 2030, including 8 million international tourists.

Plan and manage night-time zones: Designated NTE areas should be located at a suitable distance from residential areas to avoid disturbing local residents. Simultaneously, the province should encourage and support (financially, administratively, and technically) scattered businesses offering night shopping and entertainment (bars, pubs, karaoke) to relocate to planned NTE zones.

Additionally, establishing a specialized night management organization is crucial for strategic coordination and oversight of NTE activities, as these activities inherently involve risks, including social disorder and crime. Successful examples worldwide, such as Amsterdam, Paris, London, Berlin, Toulouse, Nantes, Geneva, Seattle, San Francisco, New York, and Beijing, show the effectiveness of dedicated night management authorities. By December 2018, over 40 cities had established such organizations.

5. Conclusion

Although the night occupies half of the day, fully leveraging this time and space remains challenging for many localities in general and for Quang Ninh Province in particular. Vietnam, however, is considered a country with significant potential for developing the night-time economy (NTE), due to its stable political environment and the growing tourism sector, especially its wealth of world heritage sites, scenic landscapes, and diverse cuisine. Therefore, identifying and understanding local advantages for NTE development, and proactively researching and formulating development plans for each locality, is essential.

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