

Wetland Tourism: Vietnam – Ba Bể National Park



Tay girls boating on Ba Bể Lake © Ba Bể National Park

The Ba Bể National Park (BBNP) was established to protect Ba Bể Lake, a freshwater lake, and its surrounding limestone and lowland evergreen forests. The area's rich biodiversity includes 65 mammal species such as the Asiatic Black Bear, two species of flying squirrel, and 27 bat species. Over 230 bird species and 350 butterfly species have also been recorded in the Park.

Ba Bể Lake is one of the few in the region that contains water all year – it is an important buffer for regulating flooding during the wet season and for maintaining the flow of the Nang River during the dry season. The lake itself has an average depth of around 20 metres and is about 8 kilometres long; it varies in width from 500 to 700 metres.

The scenic beauty of the lake and its surrounding karst limestone landscape is a major attraction for tourism in the Bắc Kạn Province of northeast Vietnam. Popular tourist activities include

sightseeing, boating on Ba Bể Lake, birdwatching, exploring the Puong Cave, a roosting sites for 18 species of bat, visiting the Dau Dang Waterfall, and experiencing the indigenous culture and festivals of the traditional villages in and around the Park.

The Park receives over 24,000 tourists each year, around 85% of them resident in Vietnam and the rest foreign tourists. While impacts are generally low, fuel from the increasing of number of tourism boats on the lake is contributing to water pollution, along with wastes that are not properly collected and treated by tourism facilities. This is negatively impacting aquatic species and birds, as well as small mammals and primates inhabiting the lake shores, and these species are also being affected by noise pollution from tourism activities.

To address these problems, the Park is encouraging changes to the motors used on boats from the current diesel engines to more environmentally friendly ones, and it is also encouraging local people to use their traditional wooden boats.



Puong Lake, one of most famous tourism sites in Ba Bể
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The Park is divided into three functional zones surrounded by a buffer zone. A Strict Protection Zone is fully protected to monitor the natural successions of the forests, where only tracking trails that can also be used for patrolling are permitted, and an Ecological Rehabilitation Zone is managed to help natural rehabilitation and generation of the forests, and where a small amount of tourism activities and facilities are also

permitted. The Administration and Service Zone is used for management facilities including the Park headquarters, living areas, research and experimental grounds, and for tourism and recreation activities.

The resources of the BBNP are vital for the livelihoods of the families who live in the Park and its surrounding buffer zone. They use the forests

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for their fuel wood, small timber and other needs, while wildlife hunting and fishing in the lake, rivers and streams in the Park are also a major source of their livelihoods. The total value of the resources used by local communities in the core and buffer zones of the National Park is estimated at over 6 billion Vietnamese dong (VND) annually – around 3.25 million VND/year/household (equivalent to about USD 158 in April 2012).

Lake-related tourism also offers substantial employment opportunities to local people through the provision of boat rides, homestay facilities, restaurants, and guide services. It also helps to conserve and develop indigenous culture including through art performances, traditional festivals, and handicraft production.

The economic benefits for local communities can be considerable: for example, the payment for a team for an art performance is VND 500,000-1,200,000 (USD 24-60), for a boat excursion VND 500,000/boat/trip, and for a homestay, around VND 70,000 per guest per night. There are 18 houses that are available for homestay (10 in Bo Lu and 8 in Pac Ngoi village). In 2011, the average revenue from home stay per household was 40 million VND/HH/year in Bo Lu and 25 million VND/HH/year in Pac Ngoi. There are 83 households that provide boat transportation service in the lake, so that each family can earn VND 800,000/month by that means.

Due to the differences in labour availability, capital, and investment capacity, however, only a small proportion of the communities can directly benefit from tourism. A Ba Bê Lake Management Cooperative has been established to enhance the local economic and employment benefits from tourism, for example, by providing training for the households that are doing business as homestays and local restaurants, collecting the service fees for the local state budget.

The BBNP management board has established and manages a visitor centre, a guesthouse with 55 guest rooms, and two restaurants in the Park's Administration and Service Zone. This generates

revenues of around 670 MVND every year and, after payment of taxes, the balance is re-invested by the Park. In addition, there are 21 community guesthouses and two souvenir shops in the village. Other tourism facilities have been developed through joint-venture investment or are owned and managed by local people or state enterprises.

The district levies an entrance fee on visitors to the Park of VND 20,000 /person (USD 1 = VND 20,600 in April 2012), which raises around 413 million VND, equivalent to USD 20,050, per year. Some 30% of the revenue from entrance fees is allocated to the National Park and is used for environmental clean-up activities and maintenance of tourism attraction sites, while the remaining 70% goes to the local state budget. A variety of other fees and taxes are collected and retained by the commune, district and provincial authorities in relation to the operation of tourist boats in Ba Bê Lake and homestay facilities offered by the local farmers.

The Ba Bê National Park Management Board is responsible for the daily management work of the Park. It is supervised by the Bac Kan Provincial People's Committee and technically overseen by the Forest Protection Department (FPD) of the Ministry Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). In its management work, the Management Board has to collaborate with and report to other provincial agencies on specific issues, e.g., Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (in forest protection and development), Department of Finance (on finance and accounting), Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism (on tourism activities), Department of Natural Resources and Environment (on resource management), Department of Investment and Planning (on planning work), Department of Internal Affairs (on personnel), and the State Treasury (on expenditure and revenue).

The Park is directly overseen by the Forest Protection Department (FPD) of the Ministry Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ba Bê National Park Management Board, and the Bac Kan Provincial People's Committee, along with the Bac Kan Provincial Department of Culture, Sport



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and Tourism and the local commune authorities

Tourism and the income it generates are helping to raise awareness amongst tourism businesses, local communities, and authorities of the value of the conservation of the Ba Bê National Park. The Park has developed and adopted a wetland management plan for 2011-2015 and is also working in the framework of Bac Kan Province's tourism development master plan for 2010-2020. The wetland management plan includes

programmes of work on management and protection of biodiversity and scientific research, as well as a programme on ecotourism.

The National Park Management Board undertakes activities to promote tourism in the Park, including via advertising in the media and production and distribution of brochures and leaflets about the Park. The Park's international status as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance is used in this tourism promotion.

Sources:

Information provided by Nguyen Duc Tu, IUCN Vietnam, and Nong The Dien, Director of Ba Bê National Park

Ba Bê National Park's annual reports

Bac Kan Province's annual statistical reports

Ba Bê Ramsar Information Sheet

Web: www.backan.gov.vn