

# Situation and Solutions for Tourism Development in the New Normal: A Case Study in Da Lat City, Vietnam

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## **Abstract**

Tourism is one of the important human needs, and it is becoming more and more essential when the quality of life of Vietnamese people, in general, is increasing significantly. The desire to visit and experience new lands with a cool, fresh climate and beautiful nature like Da Lat city is increasing, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic has kept many people for quite a while. When the new normal state was established in many provinces and Da Lat city, many tourists chose this place as their first destination after many days of living and working at home, in areas with hot and smoky climates such as in large cities lowlands of Vietnam. This research paper is completed from comparative and comparative studies, past and present documents, and a combination of surveys and actual interviews. Research results show that tourists' satisfaction level when traveling in Da Lat city during the new normal period is generally relatively low because of worries about being adversely affected by the pandemic. Meanwhile, the need to return to this tourist destination is very high, of course, when everything has been remedied to create a safer destination. This opens up the massive potential for tourism of Da Lat city in the coming period.

**Keywords:** Da Lat, New Normal, Tourism Development.

## **How to Cite:**

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## **1. Introduction**

The COVID-19 epidemic in 2020 and 2021 has severely affected many tourist accommodation businesses, tourist attractions, and service business activities, causing a sharp drop in tourism revenue. However, in the recent period, the number of tourists flocking to Da Lat city has brought many sources of income to the city. According to Mr. Le Anh Kiet, Head of Da Lat Culture and Information Department, the number of tourists staying in Da Lat in November 2021 reached nearly 63,000 arrivals, increasing 2-3 times over the same last month; in which 480 international guests stayed. The city welcomes 32,330 visitors, of which

international guests are 240 turns (According to dantri.com.vn). According to Vnexpress.net, recorded on famous booking websites like Agoda or Booking, famous luxury hotels such as Dalat Palace Heritage, Terracotta, Ana Mandara Villas Dalat, Colline, Golf Valley... are all fully booked, or double the price of the previous two weeks. Whole-house villas for large groups of about 10-15 people like An's Villa Da Lat or Han Thuyen Villa, etc are also complete from December 13 to 19.

However, in order to develop tourism sustainably and to continue to have more opportunities opened up for the smokeless industry following this new normal trend, there are still many things that the authorities, the Tourism business units, direct and indirect tourism suppliers, local people need to pay attention and earnestly implement. Because if we do not truly care about safety in the context of a pandemic with its new strains that can return at any time, then no tourist will dare to travel in general or return to Vietnam or back to Dalat in particular. In the research paper, the author will mention this issue and proposes solutions to continue developing tourism in Da Lat city, even in such limited conditions as this new normal period.

## **2. Literature review**

Talking about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social life in general and the tourism economy in general, Brouder et al (2020) argued that the pandemic had increased people's need to express themselves as a person. Ways to relieve anxiety and frustration caused by having to learn to work from home for too long; and travel is one of the solutions to help people have the opportunity to increase the opportunity to express themselves. Perhaps for that reason, as soon as the new normal state was established in many places in Vietnam, including Da Lat city, the number of tourists flocking here increased dramatically, despite the risks of disease spread. The disease is still lurking, the risk of being trapped in this city when the city leaders issue an urgent block down directive is as possible as it once was.

According to Cuomo et al (2021), for most people, there are three very stressful aspects of life which are cultural aspects, social aspects and economic aspects. The cultural and social aspects are relatively easier to overcome, the economic aspect because it is most impactful, it concerns the sustainability of the lives of people and their entire families. Therefore, when COVID-19 devastated the world economy, the demand for travel also decreased drastically. This is not only a story about the safety or travel restrictions of governments and regions, but even the most frequent travelers have to postpone trips because of their own wallets. they are also exhausted. Therefore, as soon as the pandemic situation was relatively stable and the concept of "new normal" appeared, many economic sectors were revived, continuing to do business and trade. And the inevitable result is that the demand for travel also increases accordingly.

According to Anh (2019), word-of-mouth is one of the four most important factors influencing the choice of Da Lat as a destination for the majority of tourists. That is why tourism in the new normal state in this tourist city is being organized quickly to the ears of potential customers. In case there are too many potential risks in this destination, very quickly, this negative news will quickly spread and surely make this place quickly become deserted and lack tourists serious. In the opposite direction, if in Da Lat, many effective measures are taken to ensure safety against epidemics, then even though it is inconvenient for

tourists, most people will appreciate the safety. people pay attention. From there, through word-of-mouth, the development of tourism in Da Lat city in this new normal period will be sustainable tourism, to some extent.

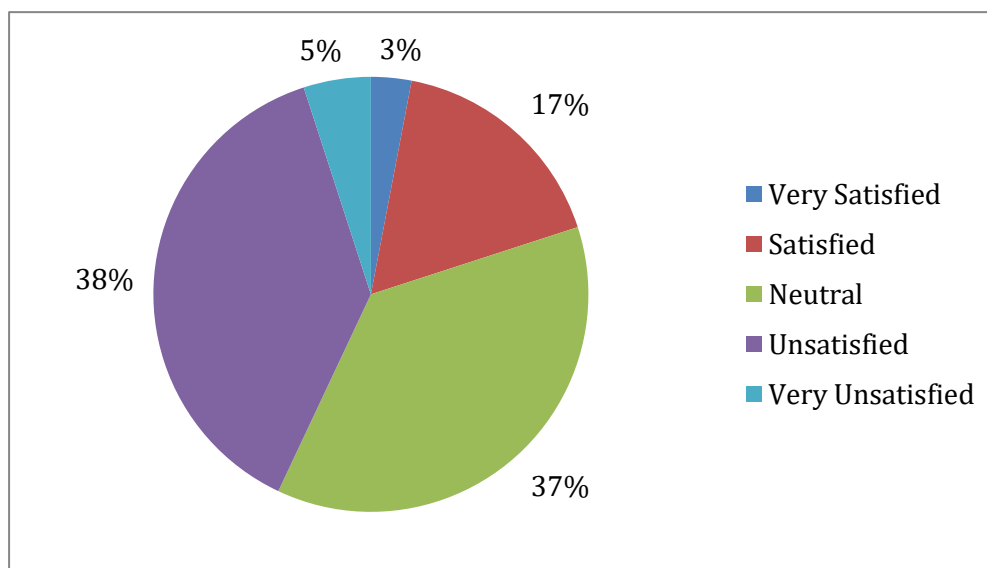
### **3. Research Method**

In this study, the author used a synthesis of two main methods, qualitative and quantitative, namely, synthesizing information from studies, books, and articles with content related to developing tourism, tourism development in the new normal state, and tourism in general in Da Lat City, Vietnam; observing, interviewing, exchanging ideas with 28 tourists who traveled to Da Lat in the period from October to December 2021. After that, the author conducted a situation analysis based on the assessment of These tourists and their observations, and other studies can then suggest practical solutions to help develop tourism in Da Lat City in a sustainable way, especially in the context that has been and may continue to be significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The time to conduct the survey and research the topic for more than two months, by sending the survey questionnaire through many different media channels such as Facebook, Zalo, Viber, Gmail, etc.

### **4. Results and discussion**

In the present time, when it comes to everyone's wishes, their safety and their families and loved ones will be the top priority. However, people cannot stay in one place forever to find security (Bauman, 2013), especially when the COVID-19 epidemic has generally been controlled in many places worldwide, and a new normal has been established in many places, including Vietnam and Da Lat city. Accordingly, the travel demand of the majority of people also increases. However, we cannot rush to conclude that this is a sustainable situation, that people will continue to travel to many places as they did before the pandemic. Because, after only one or a few first trips, many people realize that society in general still has many potential risks of unsafety for their health and that of their relatives and friends; So should we keep postponing trips? A survey of 28 random tourists of various ages and professions, who came to Da Lat from October to December 2021, produced the results as shown in Figure 1 below.

This Figure 1 clearly shows that although travelers' first trip after at least half a year of not traveling anywhere is full of excitement and anticipation, 37% of the respondents answered is neutral; in other words, the trip is normal, there is nothing to talk about satisfied or not. Meanwhile, up to 38% of tourists surveyed answered that they were not satisfied with the trip, 5% answered that they were very dissatisfied. The rate of satisfied and very satisfied is only one-fifth. These figures more or less show us that the picture of Da Lat tourism is quite bleak if there are still no corrective actions to improve the current inadequacies. And the following presentation will show the findings on the rationale for the presented results.



**Figure 1. Satisfaction level of tourists when traveling to Da Lat during the new normal period**

According to Ha and Thao (2017), destination image and positive word of mouth are the two most important factors affecting tourists' intention to return to Da Lat. Destination image is a theory many researchers are interested in and have given different definitions. Also discussing this concept, Tasci et al. (2007) argue that destination image is often understood as an essential aspect of successful tourism development and destination marketing due to its impact on supply and demand. More specifically, according to a study by Beerli et al. (2004), the elements that form the image of a destination can be mentioned as Natural Resources, General Infrastructure, Infrastructure. Tourism infrastructure, Recreation and leisure tourism, Culture, History and Art, Political and Economic Factors, Natural Environment, Social Environment, Atmosphere of the Place. And under the impact of COVID-19, Kreiner and Ram (2020) have come up with many strategies to maintain and develop tourism, including strengthening equipment for tourist destinations to make them safe in many ways. In addition, many measures should be taken to raise public awareness of disease prevention, including tourism providers and tourists.

From these theoretical points of view, the author has selected Natural resources, Tourism infrastructure, Rest and leisure tourism, The safety of the destination, People's awareness in epidemic prevention to survey the satisfaction of tourists after traveling in Da Lat, on that basis, continue further research. The details of these factors and the survey results of 28 tourists are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Satisfaction level of tourists after traveling to Da Lat City**

| <b>Factors</b>                               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>Total Reply</b> | <b>Total Score</b> | <b>Average Level</b> |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Natural resources                         | 0        | 0        | 6        | 13       | 9        | 28                 | 115                | 0.27                 |
| 2. Tourism infrastructure                    | 1        | 2        | 4        | 13       | 7        | 27                 | 104                | 0.24                 |
| 3. Rest and leisure tourism                  | 1        | 9        | 3        | 9        | 6        | 28                 | 94                 | 0.22                 |
| 4. The safety of the destination             | 7        | 14       | 6        | 1        | 0        | 28                 | 57                 | 0.13                 |
| 5. People's awareness in epidemic prevention | 8        | 9        | 7        | 4        | 0        | 28                 | 63                 | 0.15                 |
|  |          |          |          |          |          |                    | <b>433</b>         | <b>1</b>             |

The results from the table above show that if there is no raging epidemic in the normal social context, in terms of conditions for tourism development of Da Lat, this destination is a great place, excellent natural tourism resources. Up to 79% of visitors are satisfied and very satisfied with this destination, with a relatively high score of 115. In terms of tourism infrastructure, this place has also received positive reviews; only 25 % of the answers are very dissatisfied, satisfied, and neutral, in which neutral accounts for the most - 0.14%; and the total score of satisfied and very satisfied for this factor is 104 points. These results are not surprising when Da Lat is inherently one of 52 attractive destinations globally that tourists should choose in 2016 (according to The New York Times, USA). However, when we consider the third element of the survey, we begin to notice inadequacies. Although a land located on the plateau with suitable climate and natural conditions for rest and leisure tourism, nearly half of the respondents answered very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or neutral - accounting for 46%, with a total score of only 94. One of the reasons identified for this situation is that many people have to stay in place after a very long time due to the epidemic; when traveling, visitors expect to have a new, beautiful, spacious place to rest and entertain. However, the fact that the number of tourists spiked as mentioned above has made many tourists experience another suffocating deprivation; even if they are traveling, they can escape the cramped quarters of a familiar house.

The following two factors discussed in this survey are The safety of the destination and People's awareness in epidemic prevention. These factors achieve relatively low total scores, 57 and 63 respectively, with average levels of only 0.13 and 0.15. In the context that the whole world has to bear the heavy effects of COVID-19 in many fields, the above figures reflect more or less the limitations of the organization of social life in general and awareness of sustainable development in tourism in particular. People and potential tourists will inevitably be willing to postpone their trips or not return to this tourist city when their safety needs are not met. This becomes apparent according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, travel. According to Simková and Holzner (2014), each tourist destination must satisfy two basic needs, namely physiological needs and safety for tourists, before considering other needs in tourism at a higher level, for example, social needs - such as being part of a particular group, cognitive and aesthetic needs, etc.





**Figure 2. Maslow's hierarchy of needs**

Thus, individuals and organizations involved in tourism activities must take appropriate corrective actions to improve the aforementioned difficult situation.

## 5. Conclusion

Changing an individual's behavior is not easy (Heimlich and Ardoin, 2008), and this becomes even more difficult when we want to change the behavior of a group of people. Therefore, if we want to change people's awareness of epidemic prevention, it requires the participation of many individuals and groups, especially those directly related to the organization and use of tourism services. As mentioned above, in Da Lat city, this place has not been evaluated as a safe destination in this new normal state. Because somewhere, there are still many open shops as if there was no pandemic. Almost no 5K-regulation was followed (The Ministry of Health has officially announced a message featuring 5K (in Vietnamese) no gathering – health declaration to help citizens get used to living safely with the COVID-19 pandemic in 'new normal' state.) Thus, all government levels must first check strictly control tourism activities in the area to comply with 5K. State management agencies need to strengthen propaganda work among the people, aiming at each tourism business unit about the sense of the application of directives, even being ready to apply sanctions for intentional violations. These strict moves will certainly encounter varied reasons that negatively affect tourism development. However, we need to consider on a large scale, with a longer view that it is necessary to develop sustainable tourism, not a few months, then the epidemic broke out, we will close again as before, this is terrible, causing much damage to tourists and the safety of the community.

For travel suppliers, in the organization of travel programs, with a closed tour schedule, strictly managed and prepared in advance, visitors are tested for COVID safety before, during, and right at the end of the tour. If a case arises, it will be zoned right in that group; the destinations in that itinerary should be easy to trace, limiting the spread in the community or spreading to other tours. This is also an opportunity for travel businesses to organize tours and take responsibility under the control of State management agencies. It is necessary to pay

attention to finding solutions to limit the exploitation of retail and self-sufficient customers because these are the customers who use the service less, operate a lot, and the scope is difficult to control if there is a problem, the trace is complicated and caused the disease to spread widely.

Another object that must be mentioned is the tourists themselves when coming to this city. Da Lat is a plateau with excellent climate conditions, even very cold in the evening or the last months of the year. Therefore, tourists often tend to cluster together; Plus, the weather conditions just mentioned are more favorable for the Coronavirus to survive, spread, and develop. Then it is essential to increase the awareness of tourists when traveling to this city. Of course, this is not a quick and straightforward job; it needs the cooperation of everyone. Authorities at all levels need to strengthen communication and reminders through mass media channels; Tourism businesses and travel agencies need to promote the announcement, establishment, and monitoring of the strict implementation of epidemic prevention regulations for tourists. Willing to refuse customers who intentionally do not comply. This may at first be seen as going against the business philosophy (according to Brown, 1916). However, rejecting a customer is necessary for the context of the new normal and the severe harm that COVID-19 has caused, but keeping many other customers and maintaining long-term tourism activities is perfect.

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