

## Success Factors of Hallmark Events: the case of Vietnam

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### Abstract

A Hallmark event is a major event of limited duration that occurs once or regularly, and represents the authentic and unique culture of any tourism destination. One of the primary purposes of Hallmark events is to provide the hosting community with an opportunity to gain prime exposure on their tourism market place. This study aims to highlight the success factors of a Hallmark event in Vietnam, as a pilot example to assist organizers in prolonging the life-span of their destination. “Nghinh Ong” or “Whale Worship Festival” is one of the most well-known Hallmark events in Vietnam. It has a unique theme and represents the distinctive Vietnamese culture. 150 questionnaires were distributed among the attendees of the event; only 117 questionnaires were valid for analysis. The study found that the festival’s organisation and high quality performances or activities were major factors that ranked highly in the success of this Hallmark event.

**Keywords:** Hallmark events, Success factors, Host community, Vietnam, Authenticity

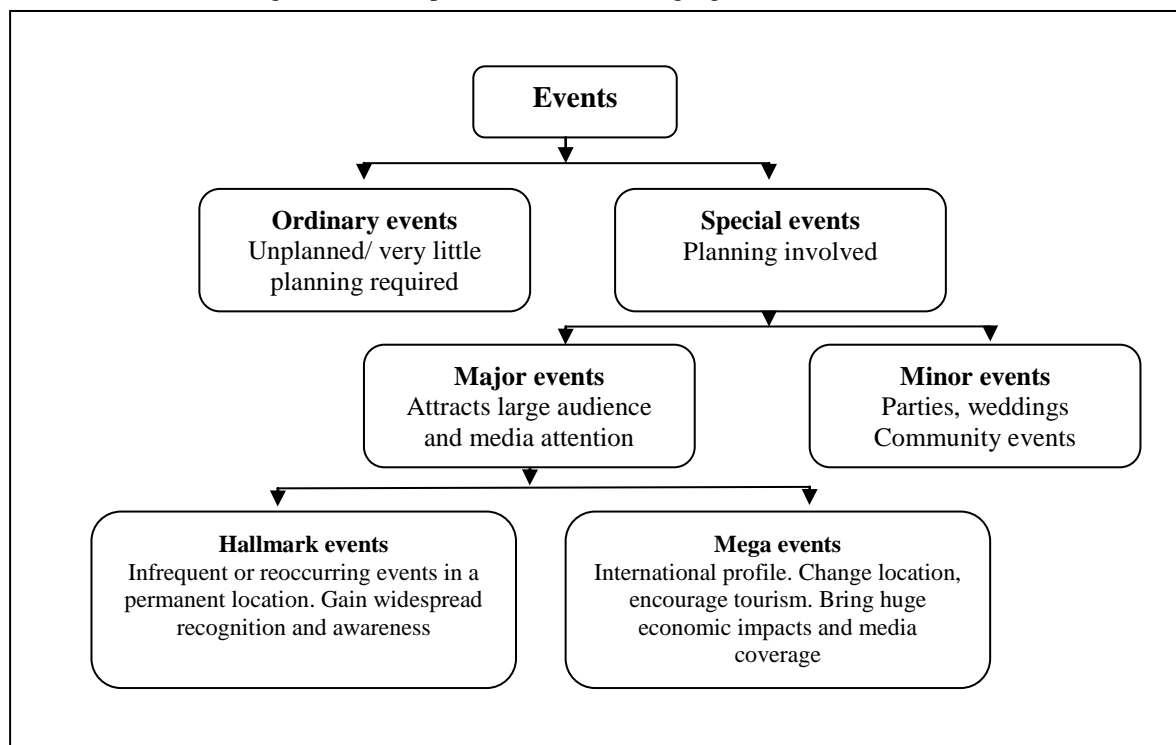
### Introduction

In the tourism industry, events and festivals are gaining more importance (Erfurt and Johnsen, 2003). Nowadays events are more central to any tourism destination culture than perhaps ever before. Governments and tourism authorities now promote events as a major part of their strategy for economic progress, national image and destination marketing (Bowdin, et al. 2012). Nowadays tourists are becoming more attracted to events of all kinds and will travel to far away places to participate in events that they see interesting. According to Getz (2005) events during the last decade have become an important way for communities and tourist regions to gain advantage from their destinations and achieve social, economic and environmental goals. Due to the growing competition among tourist destinations, the organising and developing of events have become a vastly important business. There are many definitions of events from which it can be summarised that they are a “temporary and purposeful gathering of people” (Bladen, et al. 2012) “Hallmark Event” is now a widely used term, but like Mega-Event, it resists being precisely defined. Some use it as a synonym for Special Event, while others suggest it as a specific type of event that has a unique image or appeal. Indeed in the dictionaries, Hallmark refers to a symbol of quality or authenticity that differentiates some goods from others. Hallmark events are considered as major one time or regular events of limited durations, developed primarily to increase appeal, awareness, and profitability of a tourism destination in the short or long term, such events rely for their success on the status of uniqueness, or on timely significance, to create interest and attract attention. Moreover, Hallmark Events are identified by the essence of the town or city (Robinson et al 2011). According to Rennan (2004), culture has become the central axis in the programming of Hallmark Events especially in Asia. Accordingly, the term Hallmark Event is best used when discussing a community or destination that is known mainly or to a large extent for its event, or where an event has become of great significance that the destination has adopted its tourism theme from that event.

### Literature review:

#### Hallmark events concept and importance

According to Robinson, Heitmann and Dieke (2011) events are classified into ordinary events and special events. Minor events and major events are further subdivisions of special events. There are two types of major events; Hallmark events and mega events as explained in the following figure.



Source: (Robinson et al 2011 )

**Figure (1): Types of events**

One of the major problems that tourism destinations face is how to stick out among other destinations and be uniquely identified as a preferred tourism location, as each destination competes and jostles for the biggest slice of the tourism pie. Besides there is a major change in traveller profiles, having higher disposable incomes and more time, yet demanding a much wider range of travel experiences and more tourist destination activities (Jang et al., 2004). Moreover, many destinations are challenged by seasonality issues i.e. tourist flows are very concentrated into relatively short periods of the year (Moutinho, 2000). Events can contribute to overcoming those problems and attracting tourists during low-season periods. Wood and Thomas (2003) stated that hallmark events long term planning and more detailed objective monitoring of results, can raise the effectiveness of events in tourism strategies. Furthermore, events can have the influence of changing the image of the host community targeting a more positive perception as a potential travel destination. This positive image is thought to have an effect on improving the well-being of the local residents in a lot of different ways. Also Clarke (2005) states that events tend to be a crucial part of many local authority tourism strategies, although they are usually not explicitly documented within their strategic plans. Whitford (2004) declared that besides the entertainment that festivals and special events bring to communities, there are also economic benefits that accompany such events. According to Karlsen (2007) economic benefits seem to vary according to the type and size of the event, and the number of the event visitors coming from outside the host society. Therefore, events have become a major factor of a region's strategic development plan in many areas of the world.

#### **Hallmark Events and the host community**

A prime benefit of Hallmark events is to give the host community the chance to compete and achieve distinctiveness in the tourism market. Firstly events significantly promote and brand tourism destinations (Roesch, 2009). A Hallmark event is identified with the essence of a specific region. It contributes to the region and the country's economy. It brings foreign currency and develops the image of the destination. These events present the character of the tourism destinations and their citizens, along with bringing a strong feeling of local pride and international widespread recognition. However, these events need to be well planned and carefully organised to guarantee their success (Allen, et al 2005). A Hallmark event is a repeated event that provides the host community with a competitive advantage generated by the traditions, attractiveness, image and publicity of the event (Byers et al, 2012). Tayson et al (2005) concluded that Hallmark events can act as promoters for community tourism development. Community tourism investment that are stimulated by Hallmark Events need to be considered as a part of a longer-term strategic plan to develop the tourism industry, and establish national development. Rennen (2004) confirmed that Hallmark events as a tourist attractor has been integrated in a wider range of post-industrial marketing and selling strategies. However, recently it has become very common to hear about extensive hallmark event induced evictions to create space for hosting them, such as a World's Fair or the Olympics. As such events are characterised by their unique nature, communities in those host cities are often unaware of how to prepare for and prevent such evictions due to lack of knowledge and planning. Consequently, long term displacement of local residence can arise. In a lot of cases, these events have been used to initiate and force urban redevelopment plans. Long-term redevelopment planning can use a Hallmark event as a catalyst for change, but urban poor communities often pay the costs in terms of displacement, negative effects on health status, breakdown of social networks, and loss of reasonably priced housing (Damster and Tassiopoulos, 2005).

#### **Hallmark events in Vietnam**

Vietnam is one of the fastest- developing countries in Southeast Asia regarding tourism. This is due to the many Hallmark Events which present authentic Vietnamese traditions and culture; these events attract both international and national tourists alike.

#### **Nghinh Ong Festival**

Nghinh Ong Festival or Whale Worship Festival is one of the well- known and popular Hallmark Events in Vietnam and takes place in Phan Thiet- Mui Ne city in the southern region of Binh Thuan. Nghinh Ong Festival has become one of Vietnam's most distinctive tourist attractions (VNAT, 2013). The festival usually happens in August between the 16th and 18th on the lunar calendar (Lantz,2009) and is associated with the tradition of whale worshipping in Vietnam. It is the largest fish festival of fishermen and its roots stem from the whale being viewed as a divine creature in the sea and the saviour of fishermen and marine trades. Vietnamese people consider the whale as a life-saver and a sign of good fortune and prosperity. The origin of whale worship goes back to the Champa people (Cambodian) and Vietnamese people have adopted it through a process of culture exchange. However, the Vietnamese people have made changes and modifications on the event (Phuong and Vu, 2015). Once every two years, the event is held in Phan Thiet with the purpose of preserving and developing local folklore. Nghinh Ong rituals travel through Phan Thiet city route with the participation of over 1,000 people. The festival is now a traditional festival for tourism development, contributing to promote the image of Phan Thiet - Binh Thuan destination to tourists. The Festival includes activities such as: Proclamation, Opening Ceremony, Statue of Holy Orders, Meditation, Launch Ceremony, The festival of Costumes, and the performance of the Dragon (Vu, 2018). The festival is connected with the establishment of the oldest temple devoted to whale worship in Vietnam. The temple was built in 1762, and now contains over 100 whale skeletons, most of which are 100 to 150 years old. The temple was recognized as a national relic site in 1996, although it is yet to be marketed to foreign tourists. The event is combined with the Chinese festival "Quan Kong". This combination gives the opportunity to promote an even larger tourism event (Bray, 2007). Nghinh Ong Festival is known as national intangible heritage and has its own distinctive characteristics compared to other festivals around the country (VNAT, 2013).

#### **Methodology**

The research was conducted in Vietnam applied to Nghinh Ong Festival held in Phan Thiet City in the period from 30<sup>th</sup> of August till 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2012. A mixed methodology was used to achieve the aims of this research; The Qualitative approach: through participant observation, and Quantitative approach: Through a pre-tested questionnaire (in English/ Vietnamese). The questionnaires were distributed to attendees of the event to investigate the success factors of Hallmark Events in Vietnam. 150 questionnaires were distributed , SPSS was used for analysis, 117 questionnaires were valid for analysis and 33 questionnaires were invalid.

**Results and discussion**

Nghinh Ong Festival in Phan Thiet (Vietnam) is one of the most unique festivals. The Vietnamese and Chinese people in Phan Thiet City celebrate the Nghinh Ong Festival once every two years. It is the most distinctive procession of Quan Kong who was considered a saint in the Chinese history and a symbol of power, bravery, goodness, and faith. The three-day festival involves many rites: praying for pleasant weather, copious crops and peaceful nation. Nghinh Ong festival attracts thousands of local people, particularly tourists that are interested in attending Hallmark Events. One of the most interesting activities at the event is the competition between the unicorn, lion, and dragon dance teams. Attending the festival is an opportunity to witness many other cultural activities, performances and a program of traditional costumes. A century Old Dragon winds its way through streets giving blessings to all the shops and local business that have setup shrines in honour of the dragon.

**Survey analysis**

**Table 1: Gender Sample Distribution**

		Gender	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	male	63	53.8
	female	54	46.2
	Total	117	100.0

Table (1) shows that the males represent 53.8% while females represent 46.2% of the sample surveyed knowing that the proximity of the percentages indicates that the sample surveyed well-represents the study community. Also, gender has no effect on the response towards the questionnaire.

**Table 2: Age Sample Distribution**

		Age	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	18-25	38	32.5
	26-35	57	48.7
	36-55	22	18.8
	Total	117	100.0

Table (2) shows that 48.7% of the individuals in the sample were within an age range of 26 -35, 32.2% were within 18-25, and 18.8% were within 36-55 years old. It was clear that younger people were most interested in attending these kinds of events as they represented 81.2% of the sample.

**Table No 3: Nationality Sample Distribution**

		Nationality	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Vietnam	85	72.6
	China	8	6.8
	New Zealand	1	.9
	France	3	2.6
	Italy	5	4.3
	America	5	4.3
	Canada	2	1.7
	Singapore	3	2.6
	Denmark	5	4.3
	Total	117	100.0

Table (3) shows that 72.6% of the individuals were locals and 27.4% were tourists. This indicates that not only locals are interested in the event; there is an international audience interested in Hallmark events as well.

**Table 4: Being to the festival before**

		Attending the festival before	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	yes	58	49.6
	No	59	50.4
	Total	117	100.0

Table (4) shows that 50.4% of the individuals have not attended the festival before. This indicates that people are curious to experience and see these kinds of events.

**Table 5: knowing about the festival**

		Source of knowing about Nghinh Ong festival	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	internet	32	27.4
	word of mouth	81	69.2
	radio	2	1.7
	newspaper	2	1.7
	Total	117	100.0

Table (5) shows that 69.2% of the individuals knew about the festival through the word of mouth and 27.4% through the internet. This is indicative of the importance of the word of mouth and the internet. Also highlights the need for giving more attention to social media promotion.

**Table 6: Companion**

		Companion	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	friends	59	50.4
	partner	16	13.7
	family	42	35.9
	Total	117	100.0

Table (6) shows that 50.4% of the individuals in the sample went to the festival with their friends and 35.9% with their families. This indicates that people like to go to Hallmark events in groups.

**Table 7: Primary purpose of the visit**

<b>The primary purpose for coming to Phan Thiet</b>			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	the festival	57	48.7
	general holiday	56	47.9
	business	4	3.4
	Total	117	100.0

Table (7) shows that 48.7% of the individuals went to the festival with the main purpose of visiting Phan Thiet city, which shows that a high percentage of the visitors travelled to attend the event.

**Table 8: Event ranking**

<b>The overall festival ranking</b>			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Excellent	94	80.3
	Good	21	17.9
	Average	2	1.7
	Total	117	100.0

Table (8) shows that 80.3% of the individuals rated the festival excellent, which indicates that people were satisfied and the event met their expectations.

**Table No 9: Recommending the event to other people**

<b>Recommending the festival to friends-family</b>			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	yes	113	96.6
	no	4	3.4
	Total	117	100.0

Table (9) shows that 96.6 % of the individuals would recommend the festival to their friends and families. This refers to the good experience they had from attending the event and shows that they want their friends and relatives

**Table 10: Event attractions factor**

<b>What attracted you to attend or participate in this festival?</b>			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Unique theme	68	58.1
	High quality performance or activities	45	38.5
	Large and diverse program and activities	29	24.8
	Widespread promotion through media coverage	15	12.8
	Complementary services and attractions	8	6.8
	Kids benefits	5	4.3
	good reputation outside the community	2	1.7

Table (10) shows that 58.1 % of the individuals agreed that the unique theme was the main factor that attracted them to attend the event, then the high quality performance (38.5%) and the third factor was the large and diverse program (24.8%).

**Table No 11: Participants Expectations**

<b>Is the festival meeting your expectations?</b>			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	yes	115	98.3
	no	2	1.7
	Total	117	100.0

Table (11) shows that 98.3% of the individuals were satisfied with attending the event, as it met their expectations.

**Table 12: Hallmark Event Success Factor.**

<b>From your point of view which of the following items played an important role in the success of this festival</b>				
		Frequency	Percent	Actual percent
Valid	Festival organisation	48	41	23.2
	High quality performance or activities	44	37.6	21.3
	Widespread promotion through media coverage	37	31.6	18
	Sponsors with national or international interests	32	27.4	15.5
	Community support	31	26.5	15
	Volunteers	15	18.8	7

Table (12) shows that 23.2% of the individuals agreed that the festival organisation was one of the main factors responsible for the event success, then the high quality performances or activities (21.3%) then widespread promotions through media coverage (18%).

**Table 13: Repeating the visit**

<b>Attending the event again</b>			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	yes	97	82.9
	no	20	17.1
	Total	117	100.0

Table (13) shows that 82.9% of the sample would attend the festival again.

**Table 14: Reasons for not attending the event again**

If not, is it because of			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Less services provided	1	7.7
	the organisation of the event didn't go with its image	2	15.4
	Better performances and activities were expected	7	53.8
	High costs	1	7.7
	Difficulties of transportations	2	15.4
	Total	13	100.0

Table (14) shows that 53.8% of the individuals that would not attend the event again agreed that better performances and activities were expected.

**Table 15: Facing any Problems**

Did you face any difficulties or situations that you didn't expect?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	yes	5	4.3
	no	112	95.7
	Total	117	100.0

Table (15) shows that 95.7% of the sample didn't face any difficulties during attending the festival, while only 4.5% found some difficulties during their visit.

**Table 16: Relation between the age and attending the event**

Age * have you been to Nghinh ong festival before					
		have you been to Nghinh ong festival before		Total	
		Yes	no		
age	18-25	Count	16	22	38
		% within have you been to Nghinh ong festival before	27.6%	37.3%	32.5%
	26-35	Count	28	29	57
		% within have you been to Nghinh ong festival before	48.3%	49.2%	48.7%
	36-55	Count	14	8	22
		% within have you been to Nghinh ong festival before	24.1%	13.6%	18.8%
Total		Count	58	59	117
		% within have you been to Nghinh ong festival before	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table (16) shows the relation between the age and attending the festival. The young people were keen to attend the event; 38% between the ages of 18-35 YEARShad been to the festival before.

**Table 17: Relation between Age and the Reasons of Attending the Event**

Age * what attracted you to attend or participate in this festival			
factors	18-25	26-35	36-55
Unique theme	13 19.1%	37 54.4%	18 26.5%
Kids benefits	0 0.0%	2 40.0%	3 60.0%
High quality performance or activities	13 28.9%	22 48.9%	10 22.2%
Widespread promotion through media coverage	9 60.0%	6 40.0%	0 0.0%
Large and diverse program and activities	11 37.9%	19 51.7%	3 10.3%
Complementary services and attractions	1 12.9%	9 62.5%	2 25.0%
good reputation outside the community	0 0.0%	1 50.0%	1 50.0%

Table (17) shows the relation between the age and the reasons that attract people to attend the event; it was found that the unique theme was the first reason to attract the ages of 26-35 (54.4%). This refers to the importance of giving more promotion attention to this age category.

**Table 18: Relation between Age and Event Success Factors**

Age * from your point of view which of the following items played an important role in the success of this festival			
Factors	18-25	26-35	36-55
Sponsors with national or international interests	13 40.6%	13 40.6%	6 18.8%
Widespread promotion through media coverage	13 35.1%	15 40.5%	9 24.3%
High quality performance or activities	10 22.7%	23 52.3%	11 25.0%
Community support	9 29.0%	14 45.2%	8 25.8%
Volunteers	2 13.3%	8 53.3%	5 33.4%
Festival organisation	7 14.6%	26 54.2%	15 31.3%

Table (18) shows the relation between the age and event success factors; it was found that the festival organisation was the first factor that was responsible for the event success.

### **Conclusion**

Hallmark Events are one of those events that represent the unique and authentic culture of any tourism destination. It can contribute with direct social and culture impacts to both participants and host communities, also it can be one of the reasons for cultural perspective expansion. Moreover, Hallmark Events can help in creating a glamorous image of the tourist destination and can expand business opportunities and commercial activities. Vietnam hosts many Hallmark Events that take advantage of promoting and developing its tourism sector, as well as increasing the international tourist numbers through advertising and promoting these events. There are many factors that attract locals and international tourists to attend these events, such as: the unique theme, high quality performance or activities, large and diverse programmes and activities, and widespread promotion through media coverage. All these event features make people interested in experiencing and attending different Hallmark Events. Event organisation, high quality performance or activities, widespread promotion through media coverage, and sponsors with national or international interests are the main factors responsible for any event success. Egypt has its unique and authentic culture. This unique theme is one of the main attractions to any Hallmark event as shown in many Hallmark Events such as; Tourism Festival in Siwa, Horse Festival in Sharkia, Abu Simble Festival and other events. By following Vietnam's steps in promoting and organizing these events, Egypt's events attract more tourists thereby prolongs the destination's life cycle and insure redistribution of tourist traffic all over Egypt.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Recommendations for the Egyptian Tourism Authority**

- Consider all the event success factors (Festival organisation, high quality performance or activities, widespread promotion through media coverage, sponsors with national or international interests, community support and volunteers) when planning Hallmark Events in Egypt.
- Perform press coverage and special campaigns to promote and highlight Hallmark events all over Egypt.
- Spread awareness about Hallmark events in Egypt and their benefits to the local community to gain community support.
- Establish and promote Hallmark events agenda.
- Include Hallmark events in the strategic promotion plan and its budget.

#### **Recommendations for special event organizers and private business**

- Plan diverse programmes, activities, and high quality performances.
- Establish and promote Hallmark events agenda.
- Cooperate with tourism Authorities (ministry of tourism and Egyptian tourism authority) in Egypt to maximize the benefit of organizing Hallmark events.
- Attract different interested international and national sponsors.
- Cooperate with specialized media for Hallmark wide-range coverage.
- Encourage volunteers to participate in organising Hallmark events.

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