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STATE MANAGEMENT OF ORGANIZING TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS IN VIETNAM - CURRENT SITUATION AND SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Traditional festivals are an integral part of the spiritual and cultural life in Vietnam. The article delineates the characteristics of traditional festivals and emphasizes the necessity of state management in this regard. Analyzing the results achieved and limitations of state management in organizing traditional festivals in Vietnam, the article focuses on three main aspects: (i) Issuing policies and laws; (ii) Implementation organization; (iii) Inspection and examination of the organization of traditional festivals. The article proposes several solutions to enhance state management in organizing festivals in Vietnam in the near future.

KEYWORDS: State management, traditional festivals, Vietnam, current situation, solutions.

1. BACKGROUND

Traditional festivals are a form of community cultural activity organized according to traditional rituals to meet the spiritual needs of the people. These festivals evolve under specific historical, cultural, economic, and social conditions, reflecting the traditional cultural beauty of each region, ethnic group, and religion. They are closely tied to the communal cultural characteristics, preserved, and passed down through generations. Traditional festivals play a crucial role in educating ethical lifestyles, fostering patriotism, love for the homeland, national pride, and building solidarity within the community. In Vietnam, traditional festivals are an inseparable part of the spiritual and cultural life of the community.

However, due to the diversification of traditional festivals based on regional factors and emerging trends in social communication and culture, these festivals currently pose challenges related to commercialization, social issues, waste, and inefficiency (Son, T., H, 2021). These challenges necessitate state management in the realm of traditional festivals.

This article examines state management of organizing traditional festivals, encompassing three main aspects: the Issuance of policies and laws, Implementation organization, and Inspection and examination. In the hierarchical system of the State apparatus in Vietnam, the entities responsible for

carrying out these tasks include the Government and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism at the central level, as well as the People's Committees at the provincial, district, and local levels.

2. Overview of state management of traditional festival organization

Concept, characteristics, and role of traditional festivals

Traditional festivals are a form of communal cultural activity organized according to traditional rituals to meet the spiritual needs of the people (Government, 2018). Traditional festivals encompass:

(i) Folk festivals: These are annual festivals celebrated during Tet (Lunar New Year) and other traditional local occasions (Government, 2018). Activities such as folk painting, lion and dragon dances, drum performances, fortune-telling, fishing, and theatrical performances are common in folk festivals.

(ii) Historical festivals: These festivals are organized to commemorate significant events in the nation's history (Government, 2018). Common activities in historical festivals include parades, theatrical performances, and historical reenactments.

Over time, traditional festivals have spread and endured in the spiritual life of the people (Hong, L.X, 2018). In Vietnam, traditional festivals share the following basic characteristics:

- **Time:** The timing of traditional festivals is often tied to the seasons and agricultural production, typically occurring in spring (marking the beginning of the planting season) and autumn (harvest season). This characteristic stems from the agricultural production cycle of the people. However, due to the uneven distribution of ethnic groups across different geographical regions in Vietnam, the specific timing of festivals varies. While many festivals are held in spring and autumn, for many ethnic minorities, festivals take place in late summer (usually the 6th or 7th lunar month).

- **Space:** Festival spaces are multidimensional, including geographical, social, and spiritual dimensions, with a particular emphasis on spiritual space (Hoa., N.,D., 2023). In traditional festivals, important rituals and ceremonies are often concentrated in sacred locations. These may be artificial spaces like temples, shrines, pagodas, or natural spaces such as hills and fields.

- **Ceremonial organization:** Within a traditional festival, there are numerous rituals following a specific sequence, including the 'ceremony' and the 'festival.' These rituals are formed, sustained, and transmitted through generations, often linked to historical and cultural landmarks, associated with figures such as tutelary spirits village, trade guild founders, national heroes who contributed to the nation's establishment and defense, and notable personalities connected to folk beliefs.

- **Value and role of traditional festivals:** Traditional festivals serve as mirrors reflecting the cultural life of each locality (Luong., H., 2011). They symbolize the cultural identity of a region and convey the emotions of its inhabitants. Festivals are activities that honor the community's strength and act as

cohesive elements, fostering community solidarity. Traditional activities within festivals help convey and preserve cultural heritage across generations. Therefore, traditional festivals attract the interest of tourists. By participating in traditional festivals, tourists and cultural enthusiasts have the opportunity to engage with and deepen their understanding of the culture, history, and traditions of a community. This can bring economic benefits to the community by generating employment opportunities and business prospects.

Concept of State management and State management of traditional festivals

According to the World Bank (WB, 1992), state management is defined as the "*way in which power is exercised in the administration of a country's economic and social resources for development.*"

State management of traditional festivals is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of festival activities through State guidance, setting specific goals aligned with the broader objectives of cultural policies. State management is a State power-related activity, utilizing State authority to regulate social relations. In a broader sense, state management of traditional festivals encompasses the entire State machinery, including legislation (issuing legal documents on traditional festivals and organizing them), administration (organizing implementation, inspection, and examination), and judiciary (resolving disputes and handling violations). In a narrower sense, state management of traditional festivals includes only administrative functions. In this article, state management is understood in the broader sense:

"State management of traditional festivals is the process whereby the State develops and issues policies, laws on traditional festivals; disseminates and promotes policies; organizes implementation; inspects and examines to regulate relationships arising during the organization of traditional festivals."

Therefore, considering the content, state management of festivals includes three main aspects: (i) Issuing policies and laws; (ii) Managing the implementation; and (iii) Inspection and examination. The objective of state management of traditional festivals is to ensure that festivals occur positively, in line with their purposes and essence; safeguard the freedom of belief and culture of the people; and contribute to the development of tourism and the local socio-economic development.

The necessity of state management of traditional festivals

Traditional festivals play a significant role in the community's life as well as in tourism development; however, the reality reveals existing challenges in the organization of traditional festivals. Despite the increasing number of traditional festivals, there are signs of declining quality, with tendencies toward transformation leading to complex phenomena, necessitating a reevaluation of management practices (Son., T., H, 2021). The necessity of state management of traditional festivals is evident from the following perspectives:

- Perspectives and cultural behavior: This shift results in the dilution and misinterpretation of the pure cultural elements left by previous generations. These cultural nuances are often mixed or

misinterpreted, serving primarily ritualistic purposes rather than venerating sacred elements as in the past.

- Organization of traditional festivals: Within the 'ceremony' and 'festival' components, the 'festival' aspect undergoes the most significant changes due to shifts in societal values and customs, coupled with the increasing demand for entertainment among the general population. Distortions in the 'festival' component give rise to new values that may "counteract" traditional cultural values, providing a platform for the development of superstitious and divisive elements.

- Environmental issues: The infrastructure system, especially the venues of historical and cultural sites, faces limitations. Consequently, there are issues such as disorderliness, traffic congestion, compromised security, escalated service costs, inadequate access to clean water, and insufficient hygiene and food safety measures.

- Trend of traditional festival transformation: The organization of traditional festivals is transitioning from being primarily community-driven to being governed by authorities. The downside of market-oriented mechanisms, with the trend toward promoting the 'commercialization' of festivals, treating festivals as commodities or business tools, poses a series of challenges in festival organization and management, demanding effective solutions.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Data collection method:

The authors utilized a literature review method to systematize the theoretical foundation regarding state management and traditional festivals. This included the content of state management, relevant legal provisions in Vietnam concerning state management of festivals in general and traditional festivals in particular. The documents were sourced from online libraries of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, websites of local People's Committees, specialized journals, and other relevant sources. The analysis was conducted thematically through a synthesis method and narrative.

To study the current state of state management concerning the organization of traditional festivals, the research team focused on analyzing each aspect of state management: issuing policies and laws, organizing implementation, and inspection and examination. Data on the current situation were collected from scientific journals, publications, and consolidated data from the Department of Cultural Foundations - Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, as well as government websites and websites of People's Committees at different levels. The authors employed descriptive statistical methods to elucidate the current situation, and the synthesis analysis method was used for comparing legal provisions, results, and existing limitations.

Data processing method:

The collected data were synthesized, calculated, and presented in tabular form. To evaluate and analyze the data, the article employed comparative methods and analysis across the three aspects of state

management. Based on these analyses, the research team proposed solutions to enhance state management of the organization of traditional festivals in Vietnam.

4. Current situations of State management on traditional festivals in Vietnam

4.1. Achievements

- Issuance of policies and laws on the management and organization of festivals:

Currently, Vietnam has promulgated regulations and assigned responsibilities to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and provincial People's Committees. Government Decree No. 110/2018/ND-CP dated August 29, 2018, regulates the management and organization of festivals, and related legal documents. This decree serves as the basis for enhancing the management and organization of festivals, outlining procedures, objectives, and general principles. Detailed provisions on implementation and management are continually supplemented and refined. Specifically:

- Decision No. 2139/QĐ-BVHTTĐL by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2021 approved the Digitalization of Festival Data Project in Vietnam for the 2021-2025 period. This initiative facilitates convenient data collection, preservation, and communication on traditional festivals nationwide.

- Government Decree No. 38/2021/ND-CP on administrative penalties in the fields of culture and advertising provides a legal basis for handling violations in the cultural sector, including specific provisions on violations related to the organization of traditional festivals.

- The criteria for the cultural environment during traditional festivals, issued alongside Decision No. 2068/QĐ-BVHTTĐL on August 3, 2023, serves as a tool and measure to evaluate the management capacity and effectiveness of festival activities at the local level.

- Circular No. 04/2023/TT-BTC (effective from March 19, 2023) specifies the financial sources for organizing festivals related to heritage sites and festival activities. Traditional festivals may receive support from the state budget.

From general policies and laws; localities issue guidelines and directives for managing and organizing traditional festivals based on general policies and laws. These documents are typically issued annually and are tailored to the specific characteristics of local festivals.

Current situations of traditional festival management:

Based on specific legal provisions, the hierarchical structure of state management on traditional festivals is implemented as follows:

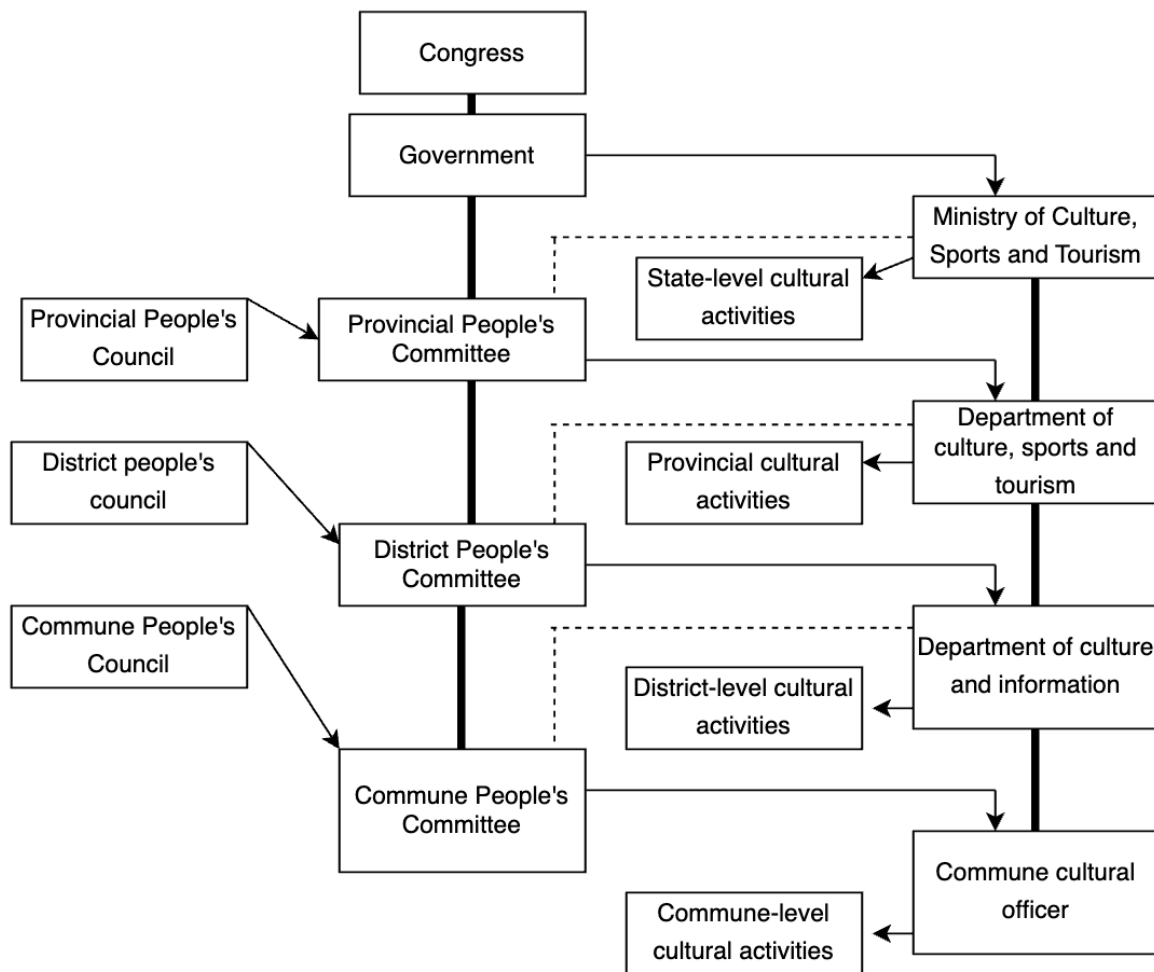


Diagram 1: System diagram of State management on traditional festivals

Source: Compiled from Government Decree No. 110/2018/ND-CP dated August 29, 2018, and related guidelines.

Traditional festivals are identified as cultural activities; therefore, the system of state management is structured according to the diagram. The issuance of laws to regulate cultural areas, including festivals, falls under the authority of the Government. The implementation of state management functions on traditional festivals is decentralized from central to local levels based on jurisdiction. According to Government Decree No. 110/2018/ND-CP dated August 29, 2018, festivals are classified based on their importance/complexity/scale, requiring pre-registration before organization. The responsibilities for state management of festivals at the district and commune levels are assigned to the (i) Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and (ii) the provincial People's Committees. In other words, the entities carrying out specific state management functions issue directives and oversee the relevant local administrative agencies, represented by the People's Committees at various levels.

Thanks to the diversity and richness of the cultural identities of the 54 ethnic groups, Vietnam is considered the country with the most diverse traditional festivals. According to data from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2023), traditional festivals take place throughout the country, exhibiting a wide variety and richness, with each festival occurring in a specific space and time.

Table 1: Compilation of types of festivals in Vietnam

TT	Types of festivals	Quantity	Rate %
1	Traditional festival	8103	91,37%
2	Imported festivals from abroad	4	0,05%
3	Cultural festivals	687	7,75%
4	Occupational festivals	74	0,83%
Tổng		8868	100%

Source: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2023

Therefore, traditional festivals account for a large proportion (91.37%), cultural festivals make up 7.75%, occupational festivals serve as promotional activities highlighting the characteristics and strengths of various industries, and imported festivals from abroad constitute a smaller proportion. Specifically, traditional festivals include 88.12% folk festivals and 11.88% festivals at historical and cultural sites.

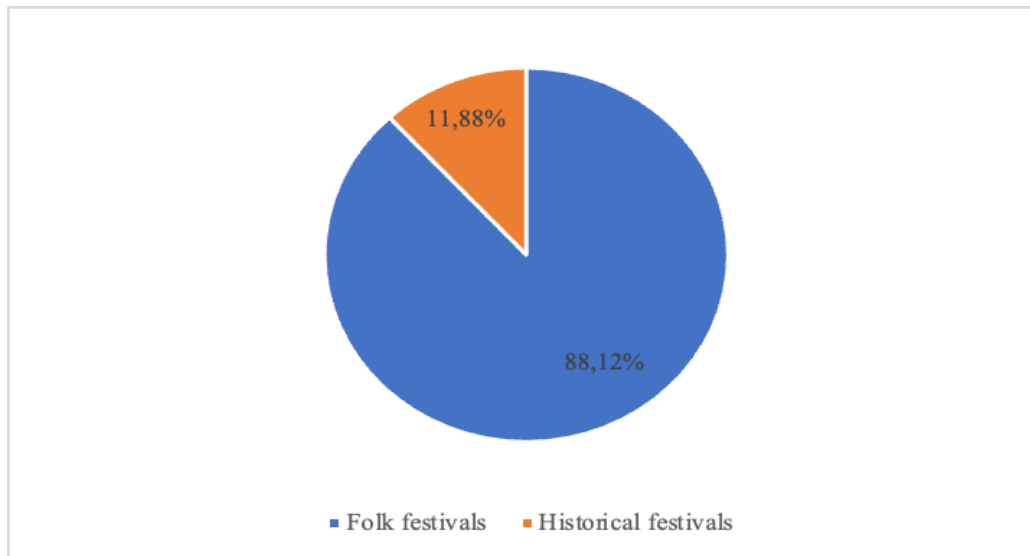


Figure 1: Structure of traditional festivals in Vietnam

Source: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2023

In terms of scale, Vietnam hosts large festivals that attract tourists, such as the Hung Kings' Temple Festival, Huong Pagoda Festival, Kiep Bac Temple Festival, and Quan Am Festival (in Ngu Hanh Son), along with traditional regional festivals like Truong Yen Festival, Lim Festival, and Phu Giay Festival. The majority of festivals, however, are folk festivals held in rural villages. With 8,103 traditional festivals annually, averaging 22.2 festivals per day, it is essential to review, classify, and manage them to meet the diverse spiritual needs of the people while preserving and developing the rich and unique cultural heritage of the nation. The Department of Cultural Foundations - Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has completed the development of the Vietnam Festival Information Portal (lehoi.com.vn) software to compile, store, and provide access to information on festivals in Vietnam. The data is categorized into four types: Traditional festivals, Cultural festivals, Occupational festivals, and Festivals imported from abroad. Additionally, the portal displays relevant information, including state management documents on festivals, news and events related to ongoing and upcoming festivals, as well as reports, statistics, and research on festivals, covering all 63 provinces nationwide.

- Current situations of inspection and supervision

Local authorities annually issue plans for inspecting and supervising the organization and management of festivals. Inspections and supervision are typically conducted before and during the festivals. Pre-festival inspections cover festival preparation procedures, notifications, and organization. During the festival, inspections focus on both the ceremonial and festival aspects. Examples include checking for the exploitation of religious beliefs for disseminating superstitious doctrines, business activities, distribution of culturally inappropriate products, and the circulation of violent or hazardous toys, disguised gambling as well as inspecting against encroachments on heritage sites, unauthorized

construction of religious structures, and environmental degradation within the festival area. Inspection and supervision activities take two forms: regular inspections and surprise inspections.

Local People's Committees are responsible for inspecting the adherence to laws and policies in the state management of festival organization. The reinforcement of inspections is often tied to the timing of each locality's festival. After each inspection, the conclusions are detailed according to festival organization content.

BOX 1: ORGANIZATION OF INSPECTIONS FOR FESTIVAL ORGANIZATION IN HANOI CITY

In Hanoi, there are approximately 1,200 festivals, including many large-scale festivals that attract hundreds of thousands of participants. Therefore, inspection and supervision activities are planned and organized.

- Inspection locations: Districts with a high concentration of traditional festivals, such as Gia Lam, Dong Anh, Soc Son, Phu Xuyen, Ba Vi, My Duc, and at historical and cultural sites where festivals take place, such as the Huong Pagoda, Co Loa Citadel, Giong Temple, Thuong Temple and Ha Temple.

- Inspection team: Representatives from the Cultural and Sports Departments of the districts and the Monument Management Board.

- Basis for inspection: Directives from the city's People's Committee, for example, in 2022, following Directive No. 03/CT-UBND dated January 20, 2022, of the People's Committee of Hanoi City.

- Inspection timing: After the Lunar New Year holiday and during the organization of festivals in each locality.

- Inspection objectives:

+ Ensure traditional festivals are organized with seriousness, frugality, preserving and promoting the cultural identity of the nation, maintaining local customs and traditions; strictly adhere to regulations promoting civilized behavior during festivals.

+ Detect and timely prevent negative expressions, illegitimate exploitation of festivals for personal gain; activities promoting superstition and sects, and disguised gambling.

+ Prepare solutions to promptly handle any arising situations during the festivals.

+ Inspect the implementation of financial management, budgeting, and expenditure

for organizing festivals, following the guidance in Circular No. 04/2023/TT-BTC dated January 19, 2023, from the Ministry of Finance on financial management, budgeting, and expenditure for organizing festivals, as well as financial support for monuments and festival activities.

- Inspection content:

+ Ceremonial aspect: Inspect the organization of traditional offering ceremonies, ensuring adherence to traditional rituals, solemnity, safety, and cost-effectiveness.

+ Festival aspect: Inspect environmental sanitation at the festival sites, ensuring security and order, preventing street vending, encroachment on roadsides, superstition and sects, and other distortions.

Inspect the implementation of safety measures for festival participants, preventing overcrowding and robbery.

Based on inspection results, promptly prevent and strictly handle any violations.

Source: Hanoi Department of Culture and Sports, website <http://sovhtt.hanoi.gov.vn>

4.2. Existing limitations

- Issuance of policies and laws on traditional festivals:

Regulations on the assignment and decentralization in the state management of festival activities remain vague, leading to an unclear determination of the leading and coordinating entities in managing these activities. This ambiguity is particularly evident given the diverse scales of traditional festivals. The statistics on various scales of traditional festivals in different localities are not comprehensive. The current Circular No. 16/2022/TT-BVHTTDL defines the reporting and statistical regime for the culture, sports, and tourism sector, focusing on the total number of traditional festivals without providing detailed information. The evolving trends in festivals, influenced by various socio-economic factors and globalization, have not been thoroughly studied and reflected in existing policies and laws.

The regulations for traditional festivals are currently applied uniformly, and the two main categories of traditional festivals, folk festivals, and heritage-cultural festivals, have not been adequately analyzed and evaluated. Therefore, there is a lack of specific guidance and appropriate development directions for each subgroup.

- Organization and implementation of traditional festivals:

Violations during festival activities still exist, with common offenses including exploiting historical sites, festivals, and beliefs for personal gain, engaging in superstitious and sect-related activities, and organizing wasteful and costly festivals.

According to Circular No. 04/2023/TT-BTC, the two main sources of funding for organizing festivals are (i) religious contributions and sponsorships and (ii) voluntary contributions and support from organizations and individuals, both domestically and internationally. The revenue from service activities in the festival area, including rental of locations for souvenir sales, food and drink, filming, photography, parking, tourist transportation and other services in accordance with local regulations. The specific regulations on this financial aspect are insufficient, leading to festivals expanding and prolonging their activities, especially during the "festival" part.

After restoration, many festivals have become monotonous and lackluster, as they are merely reconstructed based on memory and experiences borrowed from other locations. Festivals face the risk of becoming standardized and simplified in terms of rituals and the content of traditional folk games. (Nhung., N., T., 2017)

The synthesis and digitization of local festival activities, aimed at assessing their current status, lack specific guidance and have not been effectively implemented.

- Inspection and supervision:

The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism mainly focuses its inspections on the management and organization of large festivals that attract a significant number of participants and famous historical sites. At the local level, inspections and checks on traditional festivals are based on issued directives and the establishment of organizing committees. Long-term impacts, such as overcrowding, pushing, and environmental hygiene issues during festivals, have not been adequately addressed.

5. Solutions to strengthen State management of traditional festival organization:***Accomplishing policy and legislation on traditional festivals***

The decision No. 2068/QĐ-BVHTTDL dated August 3, 2023, by the Minister of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, outlines guidelines for the implementation of plans for organizing traditional festivals at the local level. Localities should closely adhere to the criteria set forth in this decision, which serves as a basis for uniformly applying solutions, honoring cultural values in a healthy, safe, and effective manner.

Strengthen management of traditional festival activities

It is imperative to compile, review, and research the historical significance of traditional festivals, recognizing their transformations. Establish cultural behavior models to preserve and promote the values of traditional festivals.

Enhance the responsibility of local authorities in managing and organizing festivals in a hierarchical manner. Direct the festival organization and emphasize the community's role as the subject in organizing festivals.

Conduct a thorough review of festival organization plans, adjusting frequencies and scales according to the practical situation of each locality. For major festivals like the Huong Pagoda Festival, the Soc Temple Festival (Hanoi), and the Tran Temple Festival (Nam Dinh), develop annual plans, scenarios, and measures to ensure social order, safety, and efficiency.

Proactively create plans, scenarios, and conditions to ensure the safety of festivals, including maintaining social order, fire and explosion prevention, traffic safety, water safety, and combating social issues. Implement requirements for food safety and environmental hygiene.

Organize and manage the acceptance of registration documents and notifications for festival organization within the jurisdiction, ensuring a tight and efficient process.

Conduct comprehensive and digitize local festival activities aiming to evaluate the current status of festivals and propose solutions for state management of festival activities.

Conduct extensive public awareness campaigns to elevate the consciousness and responsibility of all levels of government, various sectors, citizens, and tourists. Emphasize strict adherence to State regulations regarding festival organization, the origin of festivals, historical sites, and revered figures. Highlight the true values and significance of traditional beliefs and rituals.

Enhance festival value through tourism integration: select a few representatives, distinctive, and culturally rich festivals and events for substantial investment in content, scale, timing, and connection with other destinations. These festivals should be chosen based on their importance, the nature of the festival, the value of the historical site, and the ability to connect with other destinations, forming complete tourist tours. Emphasize creating a chain of festivals, events, and cultural activities in a broad geographical and culturally diverse space. Effective promotion of festivals to tourists is crucial, understanding travel trends and meeting tourist needs to promote suitable markets and connect with travel companies to organize tours and provide diverse services.

Strengthen inspection and oversight

Increase the responsibilities of local government officials in managing and organizing festivals at different levels.

Intensify inspection, monitoring, and oversight activities before, during, and after festival organization: promptly prevent and address violations during festival activities, especially those exploiting historical sites, festivals, and beliefs for personal gain, engaging in superstitious and gambling activities. Adequately prepare infrastructure and human resources for large festivals.

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