

*Rivers, once cherished because they offered water and transportation, now have a new use - tourism*



*Tourists boating on the Ngo Dong River in Ninh Binh Province in the north of Vietnam*

For very long humans settled along rivers for obvious reasons – they provided water to drink and irrigate, offered transportation and formed natural barriers.

This seems especially true of Vietnam where most towns and cities are situated along rivers.

In modern times people have found another use for many of these rivers – they have made them tourism centerpieces that provide their livelihoods.

In Hue, the 33-kilometer Huong River with its blue water and gentle flow has mausoleums of Nguyen Dynasty kings, pagodas, and houses with gardens on both sides.

Dragon boats packed with tourists cruise along the river every day. The boats also offer night trips for tourists to watch life along the river and enjoy live Hue music on board.

In Ninh Binh Province's Hoa Lu District, 100 kilometers from Hanoi, the Ngo Dong River receives hundreds of tourists daily.

They take a boat trip here to watch the villages and limestone karsts alongside. During harvest time, the river and the golden rice fields on both sides conjure up a spectacular scene. It is often called “Ha Long Bay on land” since the limestone hillocks are reminiscent of the world-famous bay.

Up to 500 boats, each carrying four people, appear on special days. A trip of nearly four kilometers, which takes tourists to three caves, helps many local residents earn their daily

bread.

The Son River in Quang Binh Province flows through another spectacular place – Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, a world natural heritage site.

Boats on the two-kilometer river carry around 10 people each.

In Nha Trang, the Cai River that flows down from a 1,812-meter mountain peak traverses the town and flows to the East Sea after a 79-kilometer journey. There are canoes, wooden boats, and even ships sailing in this river.

During the trip, visitors stop at Ngoc Thao Islet to drink coconut water, visit some old houses, and view a wooden bridge across the river. Many restaurants along the river provide food and even cooks to take along.

Far to the south, on the Saigon River in Ho Chi Minh City, many ships serve as restaurants, carrying up to 100 people on night cruises. They provide food and entertainment and tourists on board the ships can watch the night life in the country's busiest and largest city.

And then there are the grand rivers of the Mekong Delta. Boat trips in My Tho, Ben Tre, and Vinh Long provinces take tourists to orchards, floating markets and craft villages. They can see how locals make coconut candies and rice paper and raise bees, eat tropical fruits, other specialties, and enjoy traditional music.

From Ninh Kieu Quay in Can Tho, visitors can travel by cruise ship on the Hau River, one of the two tributaries of the magnificent Mekong, to visit the Cai Rang Floating Market, some five kilometers away.

At the market, boats act as shops selling agricultural products and consumer goods or just breakfast.

Tourists can pull up alongside them to buy things or merely marvel at the way commerce is done in this part of the world.

*By Khue Viet Truong, Thanh Nien News (The story can be found in the February 17th issue of our print edition, Vietweek)*