



Visitation in 1994 was 1,20,000 when Ha Long Bay was inscribed on the World Heritage List. Now it is over 3 million. Diversifying experiences to disperse visitors across the Quang Ninh Province and construction of responsive infrastructure has enabled management of increased visitation. Challenges remain. Vietnamese are some of the hardest working people that I have had the privilege to work with and are endeavouring improvement.



Cua Van Cultural Centre and Museum is the first ever museum built on the sea about nineteen kilometres from main land. Limestone Karst jutting out of the sea provides for safety from cyclones, gale force winds and king tides. It is in the heart of the largest floating fishing villages, Cua Van, on the sea in the Ha Long Bay World Heritage Area. The whole museum was built by the fishing people themselves after intensive training over a period of two years by Prof. A Galla and with the help of the Vietnamese Defence Research Laboratory and Vietnamese Navy and Coordinated by the Ha Long Bay World Heritage Management Authority.

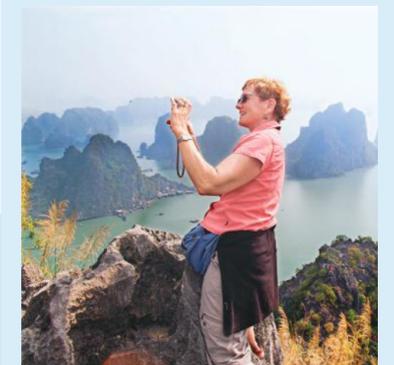
WHERE THE DRAGON SHED THE PEARLS

HERITAGE MATTERS

Images: International Institute for the Inclusive Museum



Kayaking at sunset is one of most enjoyable recreational activities in the Ha Long World Heritage Area. Once again strict conservation regulations ensure safety, use, commercial operations and waste management.



Baitho or Poem Mountain provides spectacular views from the highest point in Ha Long Bay. It was one of the demonstration projects in the Ha Long Ecomuseum making it a popular recreational heritage tourism product. Rae Sheridan is a leading expert on climate change and heritage impacts enjoys the climb to the top of the mountain.



PROF. DR. AMARESWAR GALLA

a.galla@yahoo.com.au
(Professor Dr. Amareswar Galla, an unhyphenated Indo Danish Australian, Worked for UNESCO and UNDP during the establishment of the UNESCO Hanoi Office and the Ha Long Ecomuseum)

Ha Long Bay is part of the province of Quang Ninh and is located in the northeast corner of Vietnam. It is an area of superlative natural beauty. It is also a treasure house of unusual and often unique geomorphic features, ecosystems and biodiversity. There are many sites of historical significance and archaeological remains in and around the Bay and it is strongly represented in the myths and legends of the Vietnamese people.

Ha Long Bay is a unique cluster of landscapes and waterscapes created when the rivers and valleys were overtaken by rising sea levels at the end of the Pleistocene or last ice age some 10,000 years ago, and during the current Holocene or warm period. There is significant material evidence of human cultures during these transitional periods of climatic history. It provides spectacular evidence of what would happen with the current global warming. River valleys and mountains went under water with rising sea levels. 1969 islands were created. Locals believe that these are the pearls that the mythical dragon shed.

Ha Long Bay was twice inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO, in 1994 for its outstanding landscape and aesthetic characteristics and then again in 2000 for its scientific and geological values. The natural features and the enormously complicated interaction between them and the climatic, hydrological and human influences upon them are researched and explained through the Ha Long Ecomuseum, the only Ecomuseum that is a national museum in the world. It is the only museum in Vietnam to be honoured with the National

Labour Award for its critical role in poverty alleviation and job creation, specially focussing on women, addressing the then Millennium Development Goals from 2000 to 2015. Ha Long Bay is an unusually large and unique marine natural heritage surrounded by vigorous industrial, commercial and urban development. This is certainly so inasmuch as it clearly shows the conflict between conserving a rich, but fragile, heritage whilst simultaneously promoting the industrial, economic and tourism development that is essential to alleviate the severe poverty and impoverishment of large sections of the community. Traditionally, this has been treated as an 'either/or' issue and therefore frequently results in an impasse. It is sometimes referred to as a microcosm of Vietnam. It illustrates the conflicts that arise with rapid industrialisation and tourism growth in Asia and the consequent impacts on the environment.

The Ecomuseum is a tool to resolve conflicts between conservation and development. It is the result of on-going stakeholder meetings, workshops and mapping of community heritage values. It promotes cultural democracy in local government areas that is community driven. The Ecomuseum concept views the entire Bay as a living museum and employs an 'interpretive' approach to its management. Interpretive management sees the components and processes of the Bay and its hinterland of Quang Ninh Province as continuously interacting with each other in a constantly changing equilibrium. The assumption is that all human and natural ecosystems are living, developing organisms that cannot be 'preserved' in a particular isolated state. Intensive research and monitoring, managers and stakeholder commu-



Vietnam has endured hundreds years of war and famine. One of the devastating impacts is from the American War and the use of Napalm bombs that were dropped by B52 bombers. Agent Orange killed hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese. The impacts on human beings last over at least six generations resulting in over a million people with severe disabilities. Ha Long Ecomuseum inspired several craft revitalization programs for young people with disabilities. They are very popular with visitors. They are a source of economic upliftment with dignity for local communities.

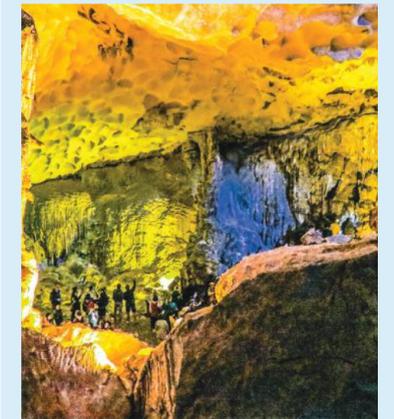
nity groups seek to 'interpret' what is happening to that equilibrium and to make carefully planned interventions to change the balance of the components when necessary. An important feature of this approach is that it views human activity, past and present, as fundamental components of the total environmental resource. The culture, history, traditions and activities of the human population on and around the Bay are as much a part of the heritage as the caves and plants on the islands and are in continuous interaction with it. It creates local cultural and environmental signatures through projects that provide unique experiences for both the locals and visitors in responsible heritage tourism. It created the largest number of new jobs for any heritage tourism project in Asia during the past decade with meaningful employment for over 15,000 people, mostly women and young people. It is recognised as a best practice by UNESCO.

One of the first projects that illustrate this approach is the world's first floating museum on the sea: Cua Van Floating Museum and Cultural Centre. It is conceived, built and run by local fishing communities that live on the sea in boats and houses. Young people from the Cua Van floating village were trained over three years to achieve this self-empowerment project. It is a site for intergenerational transmission of local intangible heritage values. The facility is a museum during the day and a community centre during the evenings used for a range of activities including youth training in tourism and hospitality, community health clinics and arts and crafts production. It is first a community centre and then for visitors from outside through strict regulations to protect the privacy of people living in the village. Another project is the

Ecomuseum Boat run by youth volunteers. It takes children from schools, which are mostly located along river banks, to the World Heritage Area for environmental educational classes. There is also the world's first floating primary school run by young female teachers. The curricula and teachers resource kits are developed as a co-curated project where the knowledge of the local elders is respected on par with the available scientific knowledge.

Content for the heritage interpretation of the Bay is achieved through scholarly research delivered from experts around the world and community generated knowledge through projects. The latter include cultural mapping by elders, women and youth leadership, essay and art competitions in schools. In the face of rapid globalisation of all forms that is destroying the cultural diversity of the world, Ha Long Ecomuseum is a demonstration model for putting the human face to globalisation. It benefits from the positive opportunities offered by globalising forces.

Ha Long Bay World Heritage has inspired the Jeju World Heritage project in South Korea including the centre for interpreting the life of women divers. Koreans have been generous in working and assisting Vietnamese. Both the countries have painful memories of war and famine and colonial destruction. Rebuilding local cultural systems is one of the shared strengths of both the countries. There is much more to achieve through cultural exchanges and cooperation. Amaravathi Heritage Town was planned to work with an ecomuseum approach under the HRIDAY and PRASAD Scheme Projects. Appropriate capacity for project personnel to work with communities and local cultural and heritage strengths has been a challenge.



Select limestone caves in the Ha Long Bay World Heritage Area were carefully researched and opened to visitors with strict regulations on interpretation, conservation and occupational health and safety. Visitor Management Plans also ensure waste management and cleanliness.

NEXT WEEK

Heritage Matters will focus on the approaches to Memory Mapping in India.