



## **Preservation of Traditional Culture and Creativity Towards the Future of Hoi An City, Vietnam**

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Hội An World Cultural Heritage Site, located on the banks of the picturesque Hoài River, is considered the “Peaceful Meeting Place” of Central Vietnam because it provides a sense of comfort and peace, as well as ancient features that may not be found in other cities. Around the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hội An became the major trading port in Cochinchina (the South of Vietnam) with the exchange of many international merchant ships that created unique cultural intersections. The Japanese Covered Bridge, the Chinese Fujian Assembly Hall, the Chăm people's Bá Lễ well, the Vietnamese Trần Family Chapel, and many other historical relics have made it a lively, colourful museum, bearing the mark of many cultures throughout the world.

Today, Hội An has a distinctive appearance with lanterns and modern Asian and European-style coffee shops, as well as a rustic appearance with small alleys and ancient houses under moss-tiled roofs. The tranquillity of beautiful vestiges from the past is still preserved here, despite the fast pace of modern life. It is also blessed by nature, as evidenced by the Chàm Islands, Cửa Đại beach, Hoài river, Bảy Mẫu nipa palm forest, etc. The friendliness and hospitality in the eyes and smile of the local people, serve to make Hội An, an even more attractive destination. All create an irresistible attraction to anyone who has ever set foot in this land. This city's cuisine is also a major drawcard for visitors. Special and unique specialties with culinary value that cannot be found elsewhere include Cao Lầu, Quảng noodles, chicken rice, white rose dumplings, wontons, etc. Each dish contains sophistication in the combination of ingredients and processing along with its long-standing tradition that will appeal to all diners.



**Figure 1-2** Folk art of Hat Boi (classical opera) in Hoi An  
Photos taken by Mai Thanh Chuong (2023)

In particular, Crafts and Folk Art are outstanding strengths and fields that Hội An has preserved and promoted effectively in recent times. It currently has 5 traditional craft villages with nearly 50 craft crafts including carpentry, pottery, lantern making, coconut/bamboo making, garment making, etc. The ecosystem of craft villages and communities, as well as the long-standing customs, activities and beliefs of residents, have contributed to inspiring, forming and nurturing the richness and diversity of multiple folk arts such as boat rowing singing (bả trạo), repartee chant singing (hò khoan), traditional bingo with singing (Bài Chòi), poems recital, 4 line-singing (hò vè), classical opera (hát



Bội), ritual dance, etc. which truly and vividly reflect the socio-cultural characteristics of this region and have become an essential part of the spiritual life of Hôi An people. Those include the Art of Bài Chòi, which was inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2017).

To make locals and the public absorb, appreciate, and be able to live with crafts and folk arts so that the government can rely on them to effectively conserve, restore and develop. When the State of Vietnam issued a strategy to develop Vietnam's cultural industries, Hôi An caught up with the implementation of these cultural activities, and continued to take culture as a driving force for socio-economic development. Over the years, Hôi An city has focused on investing in developing cultural industries and these steps contributed to Hôi An becoming one of the 66 creative cities for crafts and folk art joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2023.



**Figure 3** Sacred dog's head, Unicorn's head, Earth God's mask-making (Left) and  
**Figure 4** Taboo Bamboo Workshop in Hoi An (Right)  
Photos taken by Mai Thanh Chuong (2023)

Being aware of the thickness and depth of the inherent historical and cultural values during the journey of construction and development, Hôi An has preserved and promoted traditional art forms, created typical cultural tourism products, and marked the destination's own identity. It has established and maintained many cultural tourism products based on culture, history, and community life, typically periodical traditional art performances, water puppet shows, Bài Chòi singing, hò khoan singing, folk singing, bà trạo singing, tuồng singing, and “Hôi An Legendary Night”.



**Figure 5-6** Performing art and releasing paper lanterns on the Hoai River, Hoi An Ancient Town at night. Photos taken by Witiya Pittungnapoo (15/06/2023)





Hội An has combined traditional cultural identity with modern trends, restored traditional festivals, combined with contemporary cultural and artistic events, and organized annual traditional festivals such as the Lunar New Year Festival, Lantern Festival, Nguyên Tiêu Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Hội An traditional occupations' beauty, Hội An – Japanese Cultural Exchange, Korean Cultural Days in Hội An, etc. In addition; culture and tourism events such as the Quảng Nam Heritage Festival, International Choir Competition and Festival; and national and international events like Miss Vietnam, Miss Universe, Miss Earth, APEC conference, etc. were also hosted by Hội An. This helps the local cultural industry to become more diverse, expand, exchange, and integrate regional and multinational cultures.



**Figure 7** Traditional Lantern Shop (Left) and **Figure 8** Lanterns decorating the alleys of Hoi An (Right). Photos taken by Witiya Pittungnapoo (10/10/2019)

With the unique characteristics of the land and people of Hội An; in recent years, although it encompasses a modest area and population and is a district-level administrative unit, it has always welcomed artists and artisans from all over the country to create Vietnamese culture. This city has gradually formed many models, and cultural creative spaces that started to become famous; such as Hội An Lune Centre for the Performing Arts with plays À Ó show, Tedar, Morning Dew, Hội An Impression Theme Park with its famous “Hội An Memories Show”.

The results of these activities in the field of crafts the folk arts in Hội An have actively contributed to the cause of preserving and promoting culture imbued with a national identity. This is also the driving force to contribute to the key economic development of the locality. The preservation and promotion of traditional culture, in conjunction with contemporary artistic and cultural trends, have brought socio-economic effects; contributed to educating and raising the awareness of the younger generation about culture, history, and tradition; as well as actively contributed to creating more jobs and income for the community. This is a very special thing in Hội An city, showing that, once the traditional culture is effectively promoted, it will offer great economic value. Culture also becomes an income-generating product for locals and businesses, and it helps to promote and introduce Hội An's image to friends and visitors. International organizations and many countries have invited Hội An to exchange, cooperate, perform cultural and artistic activities, and introduce craft products such as Japan, Hong Kong, China, Thailand, Korea, Italy, Hungary, Germany, etc. Through these trips, Hội An culture and tourism have the opportunity to be widely promoted in the international arena, especially the potential tourist markets of Hội An like Korea, Japan, Germany, and other European countries. All of the afore-mentioned efforts have contributed



to an average annual increase of 20% in tourist arrivals to Hội An World Cultural Heritage Site, increasing spending, and continuously improving the income of businesses and people.

Traditional craft villages and crafts in Hội An have also created significant income for locals, such as Trà Quế Vegetable Village, Thanh Hà Pottery Village, Kim Bồng Carpentry Village, and others. In addition to producing products for the market, they are also exploited by the city for tourism purposes, which has resulted in long-term employment for locals. Other crafts, such as lantern making, carving, sculpture, tailoring, etc. are also growing in popularity, attracting many young people to engage and earn a steady income from craft work.



**Figure 9** Lang Gom Thanh Ha Pottery Village (Left) and **Figure 10** Lang Cui Lu Driftwood Village (Right). Photos by Witiya Pittungnapoo (16/06/2023)

Preserving and promoting traditional cultural values, focusing on building and developing cultural industries in Hội An, and joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network benefit Hội An in terms of positioning its brand, promoting its image in all fields of culture and creativity, attracting investment, and focusing on educational development programs as well as cultural and creative events for sustainable development. The resources and strengths of its history, culture, nature, and people will also be maximized in the right direction. This is the basis for the city to focus on introducing its images and policies to preserve and develop the cultural field more widely. Furthermore, Hội An can mobilize resources, knowledge, and creativity to focus on crafts and folk art activities, as well as other fields. At the same time, it provides chances for learning, education, and replication of innovative models; as well as creating a foundation for startup activities.

“Hội An - a UNESCO Creative City” is more than just a title, it is a goal to strive, fulfil commitments, and bring values and benefits to the community. In addition to continuing activities to preserve and promote crafts and folk art; Hội An will have to implement committed initiatives; create conditions and promote development and creativity in other fields; connect, exchange, and share experiences with other cities inside and outside the Network; and strengthen activities to expand and promote the development of creative cultural fields in the Network.