

Financial outlays have increased steadily, but have not been focused on the right areas. Tourism promotion campaigns launched over the years have not paid off because the money has not been spent in the right places, industry insiders say. Do Tung, director of TUN Travel and Service Company, said there should be a focus on preferences and spending habits of tourists from key markets including China, France, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and the US.

Most of the arrivals to Vietnam in the first four months this year with [Vietnam visa](#) were from these countries, but local companies have failed to promote Vietnam successfully in these markets, he told Thanh Nien. “French and Japanese arrivals are declining. Travelers from South Korea mostly book tours with Korean companies. And Chinese tourists just visit northern provinces bordering China.” It’s hard to bring visitors from familiar markets into Vietnam, not to mention those from countries that are still ranked as having “potential” like Germany, Russia or Australia, Hue said.

An economist who requested anonymity said the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism treated key and potential markets as homogeneous while they needed different marketing strategies. Even if the administration spends a huge amount of money promoting tourism, it will not be enough to secure success with too many markets to take care of, he said.

Vietnam has in fact spent increasingly more money every year on tourism promotion. The country has earmarked VND71 billion (US\$3.75 million) for this year, compared with VND50 billion in 2017, as it targets 4.2 million foreign arrivals. But experts said the money has not always been well spent. For instance, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism chose to have commercials promoting the country aired on international channels like CNN and BBC, but this has been criticized as being the wrong platforms. Critics have also said the broadcasts were too short to make an impression.

Pham Xuan Du, director of Xuan Nam Tourism Company, said it was also financially inefficient to visit a foreign country every time the administration starts a new campaign there. “There should be representative offices in key markets abroad. It’s expensive but ineffective to go to a country to promote tourism every now and then. That is a short-term view.” It’s not necessary to launch expensive promotion campaigns, said Paul Stoll, CEO of hotel management firm Celadon International. He said social networks are good places for promotion and a slogan like “Visit Vietnam Now” can be the right message to send out to tourists.

Vietnam is a developing country and hence an attractive destination for allocentric tourists who look for new places and want to experience new cultures and lifestyles, Stoll said. There are around 160 million allocentric tourists in the world, but Vietnam is only attracting around four million, compared with 15 million for Thailand, 22 million for Malaysia and 126 million for China, he said. Culture, history, safety and friendly people are the advantages that Vietnam should put to best use in the competition, said Stoll, who has developed the World Heritage Road project to promote tourism in Vietnam’s central region.

Tran Kim Long, general director of hotel and restaurant operator Bong Sen Corporation, said it’s good for the country to take measures to boost tourism, but it

was important now to ensure local tourism products are attractive enough, infrastructure is sufficient and local people are welcoming. The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism has just launched the “Vietnam – Your Destination” stimulus program, offering discounts and value added tax refunds for tourists to encourage more shopping.

Hue of Viet Circle said the program is well prepared, but it can be a little late as other regional countries have launched similar campaigns much earlier. “The administration needs to have a long-term strategy, with concrete plans for every year. It’s a job that requires consultancy from experts. Right now, the administration develops stimulus programs by itself and as a result they don’t really meet the real demands of tourists and companies,” Hue said.

The government last year launched a similar national campaign called “Impressive Vietnam”, which authorities found successful in helping the tourism sector weather the global economic slump. More than 100 travel agencies, [hotels in Ho Chi Minh](#), Hanoi and transport operators in the country participated in the year-long program, reducing their prices by 30 to 50 percent. Although foreign arrivals fell 11 percent to 3.8 million last year, the number of domestic tourists increased 19 percent, reaching 25 million, the tourism administration said. Foreign arrivals to Vietnam reached 1.8 million in the first four months this year, up 35.7 percent from the same period last year, official figures show.