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# From Heritage Narratives to Mice Event Products: Digital Storytelling at Historic Sites in Vietnam

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**ABSTRACT:** Heritage destinations increasingly use digital media to transform historical places into memorable visitor experiences, yet their relevance to meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) remains insufficiently specified. This article investigates how narratives and digital interpretation can support MICE event marketing in Vietnam. A qualitative multiple-case study examines the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, the Temple of Literature in Hanoi, and the Imperial City in Hue. The evidence comprises two national policy decisions and six news reports issued between 2020 and 2026, analysed through systematic document comparison and thematic coding. Three experience logics emerge: interpreting archaeological traces, communicating the ethics of learning, and re-enacting royal ceremonies. Laser projection, projection mapping, digital calligraphy and virtual reality enrich these approaches, but their availability does not establish commercial readiness for corporate groups. Direct evidence of MICE reception and tourism incentives appears only in the Hue case; the documented digital night programme there took place separately from the earlier business-event visits. The article proposes a heritage-to-event conversion framework based on narrative suitability, modular programme design, operational arrangements and conservation safeguards. The findings identify a promising but incompletely commercialised resource and provide a cautious basis for future evaluation with organisers and delegates.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Competition for meetings and corporate events extends beyond the price and capacity of convention facilities. Planners also consider the wider image of a destination, its opportunities for networking, and the distinctiveness of activities outside formal sessions (Oppermann, 1996). As virtual and hybrid meetings became more familiar after the COVID-19 disruption, the value of in-person attendance became increasingly linked to shared experiences that could not be reproduced by the transmission of presentations alone (Jung et al., 2023). The surrounding city, therefore, is not merely a background to an event: it can be an active part of the event proposition.

Heritage sites offer a particular form of differentiation because their historical associations, architectural settings and collective memories are rooted in specific places. Nevertheless, possessing a significant monument is not equivalent to having a marketable event product. Organisers need experiences with a coherent theme, predictable duration, defined group capacity, clear booking procedures and appropriate levels of guest participation. A heritage performance may be appealing to ordinary visitors while remaining difficult to incorporate into a conference programme. This distinction between visitor attraction and event-ready offering is the central problem addressed here.

Storytelling and digital interpretation provide a possible bridge. Narrative design connects physical remains with characters, conflicts, values and episodes that visitors can understand, while technologies such as projection mapping or virtual reality make selected aspects of the past easier to visualise. Experience-economy research suggests that the value generated by such combinations

lies not in a technological display by itself, but in the meaningful engagement that results from its staging (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Technology-enhanced tourism research likewise emphasises interaction and co-creation rather than technological intensity alone (Neuhofer et al., 2014).

Vietnam offers a relevant setting. Its tourism development strategy to 2030 addresses MICE products, cultural tourism and digital transformation, while the national heritage digitisation programme provides a parallel policy foundation (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2020, 2021). Recent night-time programmes in Hanoi and Hue illustrate how cultural institutions can turn distinctive heritage material into structured encounters. Yet the existence of these programmes does not itself demonstrate that they are being sold systematically to associations or corporate clients.

The study consequently asks three questions: what narrative formats are evident in selected Vietnamese heritage experiences; how do digital technologies contribute to those formats; and what documentary evidence connects them to MICE marketing? Its contribution is to distinguish observed heritage experiences from proposed event products and to specify the organisational conditions needed to move between the two. Rather than estimating economic impact or participant satisfaction, it develops an evidence-based interpretation that can inform product development and subsequent empirical research.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODS

### 2.1. Heritage narratives, event experiences and digital mediation

Destination marketing has long recognised that a place is evaluated through more than its functional facilities. For event organisers, the social programme can communicate a city's identity and differentiate otherwise comparable bids (Oppermann, 1996; Getz & Page, 2016). Stories are especially useful because audiences process events and brands through sequences of meaning rather than isolated attributes (Woodside et al., 2008). In tourism, narrative is increasingly understood as a principle for designing experience: it shapes what visitors anticipate, notice, discuss and remember (Moscardo, 2020). Place stories can also circulate through networks of institutions, providers and visitors, including digital channels that extend communication beyond the visit (Bassano et al., 2019).

The experience economy distinguishes entertainment, education, aesthetic immersion and active participation as overlapping dimensions of memorable encounters (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). A guided investigation of archaeological objects can combine education with problem-solving; a performance in a historic courtyard can connect aesthetic appreciation to local identity. For MICE groups, the relevance of a narrative also depends on the event purpose. Incentive journeys may emphasise recognition and surprise, whereas professional meetings often require interaction, learning or collective reflection. Matching a heritage story to those objectives is an interpretive proposal, not an outcome established by the available cases.

Digital mediation can reinforce this relationship when it makes heritage legible without reducing the site to spectacle. Smart tourism scholarship highlights the integration of technology, visitor experience and business ecosystems (Gretzel et al., 2015). Technology-enhanced experiences differ in their degree of technological use and guest involvement (Neuhofer et al., 2014), while acceptance of augmented-reality interpretation depends on information quality, system reliability and perceived risk (tom Dieck & Jung, 2018). The relevant issue for group events is consequently whether a technology helps many visitors follow a credible story under practical time and access constraints.

These perspectives support a four-stage analytical pathway: heritage evidence and cultural meaning are selected as narrative resources; the narrative is staged through physical and digital interpretation; the resulting experience is adapted into a bookable programme; and organisers communicate its value through destination and event marketing. Conservation, historical accuracy, operational capacity and collaboration influence every stage. The pathway is a framework for reading documentary evidence, not a tested model of causal effects.

### 2.2. Case selection and documentary evidence

A qualitative multiple-case design was adopted because the research concerns emerging programmes whose organisation is described mainly in policy texts and public reporting. The unit of analysis is a staged heritage experience, not a destination's entire MICE industry. Cases were selected purposively where a recognised heritage setting offered a group-oriented narrative programme, used at least one digital interpretation technique, and had accessible public documentation. Three settings met these criteria: the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, the Temple of Literature and the Hue Imperial City.

The documentary corpus contains eight items: two national decisions issued in 2020 and 2021, together with six press reports dated from March 2022 to April 2026. The reports describe tours, visitor routes, technology, large groups, incentives and cultural performances. They were treated as descriptive accounts of reported practices rather than as independent evaluations of programme quality. Table 1 records the source coverage relevant to the comparison.

**Table 1. Documentary sources used for case comparison**

| Document group | Sources and period | Analytical use |
|---|---|---|
| National policy | Tourism strategy (2020); heritage digitisation programme (2021) | Institutional priorities and enabling conditions |
| Thang Long, Hanoi | Night-tour report (2024); technology report (2026) | Narrative route, participation and digital additions |
| Temple of Literature, Hanoi | Night-tour launch report (2023); technology report (2026) | Learning narrative and digitally mediated presentation |
| Hue Imperial City | MICE group reports (March and April 2022); night programme report (April 2026) | Business-event reception, incentives and later digital interpretation |

**Source: Authors' classification of the eight documents listed in References.**

### 2.3. Analytical procedure and evidentiary limits

The analysis followed the logic of document analysis and thematic coding (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each source was examined for the experience theme, historic elements, route or performance, digital tools, guest interaction, operating arrangements and explicit mention of business-event groups. Descriptions were prepared within each case before comparing common features and differences. Where a statement described a proposed opportunity rather than a documented service, it was placed in the discussion. This distinction is necessary because press coverage may report a successful public night tour without disclosing corporate booking arrangements, group prices or actual delegate responses. No interviews, surveys, commercial transaction data or experimental tests were undertaken.

## III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 3.1. Policy support and the missing operational connection

Decision No. 147/QD-TTg, which approved the national tourism development strategy to 2030, identified MICE within the development of urban tourism. The strategy also supported cultural products linked to historic sites and the wider application of digital technologies (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2020). These objectives are complementary, but the policy does not establish a specific mechanism for turning an interpretive heritage programme into a contracted business-event service. Its significance for this study is therefore strategic rather than operational.

Decision No. 2026/QD-TTg approved a heritage digitisation programme for 2021–2030, including the digitisation of UNESCO-recognised heritage and special national relics by 2030 (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2021). It envisaged digital heritage resources and virtual forms of access that could support promotion, education and tourism. However, the document does not specify their integration with event bids, incentive programmes or delegate communications. The two decisions jointly create policy space for innovation while leaving product configuration to local institutions and commercial partners.

### 3.2. Thang Long Imperial Citadel: an investigative heritage story

The night experience at the Thang Long Imperial Citadel was developed through cooperation between the heritage management centre and Hanoitourist. A 2024 report described a route of approximately 90 minutes, beginning at the Doan Mon gate, passing through performance and archaeological exhibition spaces, including an incense-offering stop at the Kinh Thien area, and ending at the archaeological site on Hoang Dieu Street (Bao Lao Cai, 2024). The route connected the visitors' movement to layers of historical evidence rather than presenting the monument as an isolated architectural image.

Its distinctive narrative device was a process of investigation. Visitors received a clue card and encountered successive hints that invited them to interpret the story of the imperial city. Costumed performers, a court dance and lotus refreshments made the encounter more social and sensory. Laser images projected at the archaeological site related selected objects to the physical remains from which knowledge of the former citadel is reconstructed. The story thus joined tangible evidence, guided discovery and theatrical elements within a recognisable sequence (Bao Lao Cai, 2024).

A subsequent account of technology in Hanoi night tourism reported projection mapping, a holographic display and an artificial-intelligence virtual receptionist in the citadel setting (Tuong Bach, 2026). This provides evidence of a widening interpretation repertoire, but it should not be assumed that every technology was used in the same tour or during every performance. The analysed documents contained no direct statement that this night experience was provided as an exclusive MICE package. Its investigative structure may suit collaborative corporate groups, but that suitability remains a proposal for product design rather than an observed market result.

### 3.3. Temple of Literature: the narrative of learning and achievement

The Temple of Literature night programme opened in October 2023 under the theme of the essence of learning. Visitors moved through illuminated courtyards and historic spaces, encountering visual interpretation of the pavilion, stone stelae, historic teaching institutions and scholarly ideals. At one stage, visitors could practise digital calligraphy; a major projection-mapping sequence used the architecture of the Thai Hoc building as its visual surface (Giang Nam, 2023). The technology was organised around a theme with direct cultural relevance to the institution rather than around an unrelated visual display.

The programme drew on the pursuit of education, the examination tradition, determination and scholarly success. Images and performances helped translate an intellectual and moral heritage into an accessible sequence. A later report again described the programme's combination of lighting and traditional arts in communicating these themes (Tuong Bach, 2026). In comparison with Thang Long, participation was less focused on solving clues and more on reflection, symbolic learning and selected hands-on interaction.

An event organiser might find this narrative relevant to academic conventions, professional gatherings or recognition ceremonies, particularly where learning and achievement are part of the meeting's purpose. Nevertheless, neither of the cited reports provides verified information on a corporate package, dedicated group booking, delegate capacity or event-linked branding. The documented output remains an interpreted public heritage visit, with potential for adaptation to MICE rather than proven use in that market.

### 3.4. Hue Imperial City: event reception and later digital interpretation

Hue offers more direct evidence of business-event involvement. A report from March 2022 described a team-building group of nearly 600 visitors, arriving on several flights, whose itinerary included the Imperial City and cultural performances organised through provincial tourism and monument-management bodies. The group was divided into smaller visiting units, reflecting public-health arrangements at the time. The report explicitly connected these activities to the promotion of MICE, team-building and charter tourism (Thuy An, 2022).

The same source described proposed provincial incentives, including admission reductions, support with spaces and visitor services, and arrangements for performance and promotion. A further report recorded a customer-conference group of more than 1,100 visitors in April 2022, welcomed by an artistic programme in the area of the Ngo Mon gate (Minh Tich, 2022). These accounts demonstrate coordination between tourism authorities, heritage managers and event operators, as well as the use of royal heritage for large-group reception. They do not, however, establish digital technology as part of those specific 2022 events.

The digitally mediated experience appeared in a later programme during the 2026 Hue Festival. The reported night activities included lighting on a palace bridge, a virtual-reality presentation of parts of the lost imperial palace, a changing-of-the-guard performance, representations of court ritual, martial arts, food and handicrafts (S. Thuy, 2026). The narrative relied on ceremonial reconstruction and historical atmosphere. Combining the 2022 business-event evidence with the 2026 digital programme reveals institutional and creative resources within the same heritage complex, but it does not establish that corporate clients had already purchased the later digital experience.

### 3.5. Comparative findings

The cases show three contrasting methods of making heritage meaningful: discovering archaeological layers, interpreting the values of scholarship, and entering a ceremonial reconstruction of royal life. Their digital tools likewise perform different functions: making buried evidence visible, staging symbolic narratives on architectural surfaces, or presenting spaces no longer physically available. In every case, physical heritage and human performance provide context for the technology. Table 2 distinguishes reported activities from the narrower evidence about business events.

**Table 2. Narrative design, digital mediation and documented MICE links**

| Heritage setting | Experience and technology reported | Evidence of MICE use |
|---|---|---|
| Thang Long Imperial Citadel | Clue-based archaeological discovery; live performance; laser projection; later reported mapping and holographic interpretation | No explicit corporate or association programme in the examined reports |
| Temple of Literature | Learning and achievement story; architectural projection, lighting and digital calligraphy | No explicit corporate or association programme in the examined reports |
| Hue Imperial City | Royal reception and court performance in 2022; separate 2026 light show and virtual-reality programme | Large team-building and customer-conference groups, with provincial incentives, documented in 2022 |

**Source: Authors' comparative synthesis of Bao Lao Cai (2024), Giang Nam (2023), Minh Tich (2022), S. Thuy (2026), Thuy An (2022) and Tuong Bach (2026).**

Across the three settings, the strongest common asset is a locally grounded narrative capable of supporting collective experience. The principal difference is market evidence. Only the Hue reports explicitly mention organised business-event visitors, whereas the Hanoi reports document general night-tour products and their technologies. Absence of such detail cannot be interpreted as proof that corporate use never occurred. It indicates only what the selected sources do and do not establish. The findings therefore support a distinction between narrative readiness, digital interpretation capability and verified MICE commercialisation.

## IV. DISCUSSION

### 4.1. From a heritage attraction to a marketable event module

The cases illustrate the importance of narrative identity for destination differentiation. A generic evening entertainment package can be reproduced in many cities, whereas an archaeological puzzle at Thang Long, a story of learning at the Temple of Literature and a royal reception in Hue each express a particular place. This finding is compatible with the view of storytelling as experience design rather than promotional decoration (Moscardo, 2020), and with the argument that event destinations compete through their overall appeal, not facilities alone (Getz & Page, 2016). Yet narrative distinctiveness is only the first step towards a saleable product.

An event module needs a specified visitor journey, predictable timing, a defined service bundle and booking terms that organisers can communicate to clients. The documentary record suggests the necessary creative components are already present, but it provides limited information on exclusive use, accessibility, contingency arrangements, pricing or company-specific customisation. The gap is therefore not simply one of publicity; it concerns the operational translation of cultural interpretation into a reliable service. Table 3 offers three applications as proposals to be evaluated, not as products shown to exist in the case evidence.

**Table 3. Proposed matching of heritage narratives with MICE functions**

| Narrative basis | Potential event application | Minimum design and safeguarding conditions |
|---|---|---|
| Investigative discovery at Thang Long | Small-group incentive excursion; collaborative problem-solving activity | Clue-based group rotation; trained guides; timed stations; limits on crowding around archaeological remains |
| Learning narrative at the Temple of Literature | Academic conference social programme; professional awards or recognition visit | Concise interpretive script; optional calligraphy interaction; educational integrity; approved event messaging |
| Royal ceremonial setting in Hue | Welcome reception; incentive programme; selected gala-related cultural activity | Authorised space and schedule; performance standards; safe access; transparent group booking; conservation controls |

**Source: Framework proposed by the authors from the comparative findings; its commercial effectiveness has not been tested.**

### 4.2. Digital technology should serve the event narrative

Projection mapping, virtual interpretation and interactive displays can increase comprehension and emotional engagement, but technological novelty is not a substitute for an appropriate story. Thang Long's laser-based interpretation has value because it connects artefacts with archaeological context; digital calligraphy at the Temple of Literature becomes meaningful because writing is linked to scholarly tradition. This aligns with research indicating that the quality of information and the ease of use shape responses to digital heritage applications (tom Dieck & Jung, 2018). Accordingly, heritage event designers should evaluate tools by clarity, cultural fidelity and group usability.

Different technologies create different logistical demands. A large group can observe one projection together, while a single-user virtual-reality installation may require rotation and extend waiting time. The 2022 Hue reports show that dividing large visitor groups can be operationally necessary, although the cited reason was public-health management, not a technology bottleneck. For MICE use, a practical design could pair a shared visual sequence with optional smaller-scale activities and a clearly managed route. These are implementation implications inferred from the evidence, rather than observations of completed corporate packages.

Digital heritage materials may also support the event lifecycle before and after the site visit. Images, virtual previews or concise historical introductions could inform proposals and delegate communication, while post-event interpretive materials could extend recall. The national digitisation programme provides a possible foundation for such content (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2021). However, organisers would need agreed rights, curatorial approval and truthful descriptions of what delegates will actually experience. Digital promotion should not promise access or features that a heritage site cannot consistently deliver.

### 4.3. Governance and responsible commercialisation

Commercial expansion creates tension between public heritage responsibilities and private event requirements. The narratives and performances examined here were shaped by heritage management institutions, which gives those institutions a necessary role in deciding what may be represented and where activities may occur. Partnerships with tour operators can contribute marketing and operational expertise, as illustrated by the Thang Long collaboration; provincial coordination can support large groups, as shown in Hue. Neither approach removes the need for heritage-specific rules concerning sound, lighting, capacity, visitor circulation, ceremonial spaces and historically accurate interpretation.

A feasible governance arrangement would allocate curatorial authority to the site manager, commercial packaging and delegate logistics to the organiser, and coordination or destination promotion to the relevant tourism body. Customisation should concern duration, language, hosting and selected interaction rather than rewriting historical meaning to suit a sponsor. Organisers should also consider accessibility, weather interruptions, technical failure and the implications of using individual devices in crowded settings. These safeguards express a broader principle: heritage contributes most sustainably to event marketing when its cultural importance is preserved within the service design.

### 4.4. Implementation priorities and research limitations

Before releasing a heritage experience to the corporate market, a site manager and an event operator could jointly audit the proposed programme against a small number of practical questions. The audit should establish the factual basis of each narrative segment, identify spaces that are unsuitable for gathering or recording, confirm the maximum number of simultaneous participants, and test the duration of each activity under realistic conditions. It should also determine whether projection equipment, guides, interpretation in foreign languages and accessibility measures are reliably available. This converts a general intention to attract business visitors into a documented service specification while keeping conservation decisions in the hands of the responsible institution.

Evaluation should then proceed beyond attendance and media exposure. Useful process indicators include the proportion of groups beginning on schedule, completion time, waiting time at interactive stations, technical interruption frequency and compliance with site rules. Visitor feedback could measure whether delegates understood the heritage story, considered it relevant to the event and felt that participation encouraged interaction with other attendees. Commercial information could track repeat bookings and the proportion of event proposals converted into confirmed visits, subject to appropriate access to company records. These measures are not findings of the present documentary study; they are proposed criteria for testing whether narrative strength is successfully translated into consistent event delivery.

The analysis has important limits. Its evidence is restricted to eight documents, including press coverage that may privilege positive or visually notable events. It cannot establish sales volume, pricing, profitability, satisfaction, effects on destination choice or long-term conservation outcomes. The two Hue business-event reports and the later digital night programme demonstrate complementary capacities but not one continuous, digitally integrated MICE product. Future work should interview managers and destination management companies, inspect contractual booking arrangements, and survey delegates about narrative comprehension, shared experience and willingness to recommend the destination. Comparative testing across more cities would help determine which proposed modules are commercially and culturally viable.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study examined how heritage storytelling and digital interpretation might contribute to MICE event marketing in Vietnam. Three cases revealed distinct approaches to historical communication: archaeological discovery at the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, a narrative of scholarship at the Temple of Literature, and royal ceremonial reconstruction at the Hue Imperial City. Digital elements strengthened the presentation of these stories, but the evidence did not support treating technological availability as proof of business-event readiness. Directly documented MICE group reception was limited to Hue, and its principal digital night programme was reported in a later period.

The proposed heritage-to-event pathway identifies four connected requirements: credible narrative resources, suitable digital and physical staging, clearly specified event modules and coordinated marketing and management. Heritage operators and event planners can use this framework to assess potential programmes before introducing exclusive bookings or customisation. The main research contribution is therefore an evidence-sensitive distinction between a compelling public experience and a verified MICE product. Successful development will depend on protecting historical meaning while establishing the operational reliability and institutional cooperation expected in the business-events market.

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