

Dimensionality of Communities' Belief Attitude toward Rural Tourism Development

Abang Azlan Mohamad

*Faculty of Economics and Business,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Sarawak, Malaysia
Tel: +60 82 582459; Fax: 60 82 671 794,
Email: maazlan@feb.unimas.my*

May-Chiun Lo

*Faculty of Economics and Business,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Sarawak, Malaysia
Tel: +60 82 5824375; Fax: 60 82 671 794,
Email: mclo@feb.unimas.my*

Peter Songan

*Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Sarawak, Malaysia
Tel: +60 82665102; Fax: 60 82 665111,
E-mail: songan@cans.unimas.my*

Alvin W. Yeo

*Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Sarawak, Malaysia
Tel: +60 82 583765; Fax: 60 82 583 764,
Email: alvin@fit.unimas.my*

Abstract

Rural tourism is becoming increasingly important to the Malaysian economy and tourism product offering. Rural tourism enables tourists to reunite with nature and the culture of the destinations, and that it contributes to the economic and social recovery of the rural areas, as well as to the conservation of the environment and the spreading of local cultures. Nonetheless, development projects are often designed and implemented in which indigenous people have minimal voice in policy and management of it. Tourism which simply transplants urban investment and enterprises to a rural setting does little to improve communities' incomes. As a result, many indigenous people rightly feel that tourism industry has a poor track record, in disregarding their legitimate interests and rights, and profiting from their cultural knowledge and heritage. The present study in the paper involved looking at validating the dimensionality of the four tourism impact namely, economics, environment, social and cultural impact as perceived by local communities. Data was gathered through a survey using a structured questionnaire and administered to the community members residing at Bario. A series of tests such as factor analysis, correlation, and reliability analysis was conducted to confirm that the instrument is valid (content, construct, convergent, discriminant and nomological) as well as reliable. Implications regarding the value of conducting validity and reliability test for practitioners and researchers are discussed.

Keywords: Tourism development, communities' attitudes, goodness of measure, validity, reliability, Bario

Introduction

Tourism is one of the industries that have the highest potential to contribute towards economic development and job creation particularly in rural areas (Bredhenhann & Wickens, 2003; Ruiz Molina, Gil-Saura, & Moliner-Velazquez, 2010). Rural tourism is a valuable and growing sector of the overall tourism market. Economic growth, socio-cultural development, protection and improvement of both the natural and built environment and infrastructure are some of the significant contributions of rural tourism. Although rural destinations are less visited by tourists compared to cities or urban holiday resort, rural destinations has more to offer as they have wide open spaces, are less congested and have more natural amenities for the purpose of relaxation. These are the attributes that people particularly seek when choosing tourists' destination. In addition, the people at the tourists' destinations are friendly and may possess natural attractions that provide enjoyment for visitors (e.g., jungle, forest, flora and fauna). Furthermore, the local inhabitants are open and hospitable to visitors and tourists, even if they are not involved in the tourism activities in the destination.

Tourism sector has been recognized by Malaysian government as a valuable and growing sector and a catalyst to Malaysian economic renaissance and it is listed as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) under the Tenth Malaysia Plan, Malaysia was ranked the Ninth most visited country in the world and received approximately RM1 billion receipts per week from foreign visitors. It is estimated that in year 2020, Malaysia will receive more than 36 million tourist arrivals and RM168 billion tourist receipts which has the potential to generate high yield to the country.

With that, it is imperative for rural destinations preserve their natural environment and culture as it is these attributes that attract tourists to visit these destinations. There is a lack of published commercial research and studies on rural tourism destination in Malaysia and many public sector tourism organizations are not yet convinced of the value of these studies and therefore still rely on the fairly standard quantitative visitor survey. This study therefore endeavors to fill the gap in the existing literature concerning the lack of communities' perceptions in rural tourism development.