

## Rural tourism quality of services: fundamental contributive factors from tourists' perceptions

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### ABSTRACT

Despite the importance of quality of services in the rural tourism sector, it is somewhat surprising that little study has been done to delve into the fundamental contributive factors that contribute to quality of services from the tourists' perceptions. This is the first known study undertaken with a view to understand the fundamental contributive factors (i.e. climate change, carrying capacity, relaxation environment, and community support) from the environmental perspectives that link with quality of services in rural tourism destinations. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the tourists who visited four study sites from Borneo Heights, Sarawak, and 215 were returned and used for analysis. To assess the developed model, SmartPLS 2.0 (M3) is applied based on path modelling and then bootstrapping. Interestingly, the findings revealed that tourists are more concerned about the changing of climate and relaxation environment at the destination. They also agreed that community support plays a significant role in the development of quality of services in the rural tourism. This study further discussed on the implications of the findings, limitations, and directions for future research.

### KEYWORDS

Rural tourism; quality of services; tourists' perceptions; stakeholder theory; Malaysia

### Introduction

Tourism sector is considered as one of the world's largest growth industries and significantly contributes to the development of a country's economy (Grigaliunaite, Pileliene, & Bakanauskas, 2015; Stetic, 2012). Recently, UNWTO World Tourism Barometer revealed that international tourist arrival has grown by 4.4% in 2015, and is projected to grow by 4% worldwide in 2016 (UNWTO, 2016). Past studies have evidenced that tourism has contributed to the welfare of local communities and travellers' experience as well as a country's income (Peptenatu, Pintilii, Drăghici, & Stoian, 2009; Zoto, Qirici, & Polena, 2013). Within Malaysia, the tourism industry is ranked the second most important industry after the manufacturing sector for the last 20 years (Tsonis, Cheuk, Ing, & Razli, 2009); and is listed as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) under the Tenth Malaysia Plan. Malaysia ranked the ninth most visited country in the world (Lo, Songan, Mohamad, & Yeo, 2013). In

addition, Malaysia is presumed to attract 36 million inbound tourists by 2020 (Osman & Sentosa, 2013). With such a large number of tourists, Malaysia's tourism industry has a significant impact on the country's economy and is a contributor to the nation's GDP.

Quality is well known as the fundamental determinant that contributes to the success and failure of the service sector (Tabaku & Cerri, 2016; Yusof & Rahman, 2011). Past studies have repeatedly propounded service quality as the antecedent of customers' satisfaction and that it subsequently leads to revisit intention or loyalty (Choi & Ann, 2013; Dires & Anteneh, 2016; EL-refae, 2012; Lai, Chu, & Petrick, 2011; Loureiro & González, 2008). As stated by Fotiadis and Vassiliadis (2010), the ability of a rural tourism destination to provide excellent services to tourists is important to ensure more promising income generation. It is believed that when excellent services to tourists are provided, not only new tourists can be attracted, but there will also be more likely to revisit the place and