

Kampung Bantang, Serian, Sarawak as a Tourism Area: Attractions and Challenges

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of this paper is to discuss some of the major attractions identified in Kampung Bantang besides highlighting the challenges faced to make the village a tourism destination.

Design/methodology/approach: Research methods adopted in this study include documents analysis, observation, and in-depth interview.

Findings: Kampung Bantang is located between Mount Nambi and Mount Sadong in Serian, Sarawak. Mount Sadong is an early Bidayuh Bukar settlement. Few villages of Bidayuh Bukar community and their orchards are still found at the foot of Mount Sadong. Rich natural resources, both flora and fauna, still exist in these two mountains. These could become an attraction to tourists besides being an important source of livelihood for the villagers in Kampung Bantang. Located at Mount Nambi is an important archaeological site named Sireh Cave in Kampung Bantang. It was believed that Sireh Cave could have been occupied about 20,000 years ago. This archaeological site was protected and conserved by the Sarawak Museum under the Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance 1993. The historical value and the attraction of natural beauty around Sireh Cave have made this village a potential site for tourism. However, transforming Sireh Cave into a tourism site is challenging. The cave is situated close to the villagers' orchard under Native Customary Right (NCR) land area. To upgrade this area to be a

tourism site might incur a high cost. Some of the villagers also refuse to surrender their lands and gardens to be included in an upgraded area for tourism purposes. A big amount of compensation to the landowner is needed if it is to turn this area into historical tourism site with archaeological value. The findings of the study show that cooperation between the community and the Museum Department of Sarawak is essential for making this tourism site a success.

Research limitations/implications: This is a case study in Kampung Bantang with its unique local social-cultural characteristic. The findings cannot be generalized to other tourism sites as each location has its own unique history and attractions.

Practical implications: The findings give some insight to the policy makers in making tourism in Sarawak a success.

Originality/value: This study explores the attractions found in Kampung Bantang as a tourism site by incorporating not only its natural settings, but also taking into account its historical development.

Keywords: Kampung Bantang, Challenges, Tourism, Natural Resources, Sireh Cave

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the major attractions and uniqueness found in Kampung Bantang and to explore the potential of Kampung Bantang as a tourism destination. Challenges faced in turning Kampung Bantang into a tourism site will also be discussed. Kampung Bantang is located between two mountains namely Mount Nambi and Mount Sadong. Kampung Bantang is in Serian Division and is about 55 kilometers from Kuching town. Mount Sadong is an early Bidayuh Bukar settlement. At Mount Nambi, there is a cave named Sireh Cave or also known as ‘*Gua Sireh*’ in Malay language and ‘*Gua Baid*’ in Bidayuh language. Sireh Cave got its name from a kind of plant called ‘*sirih*’ or ‘betel’ which is a climbing plant and can be found growing wild at the cave entrance.

Methodology and Research Area

This study used documents analysis, observation and in-depth interview to obtain information before further analysis was carried out. Fieldwork for data collection was also conducted at Kampung Bantang on the 8th July 2017. An interview was conducted with the headman of a village named Mr. Eshap anak Saeh besides doing on-site observation. The secondary resource such as books, articles and literature collection from museum written on Sireh Cave in Mount Nambi, Kampung Bantang and all related information was also referred to gain useful information on the study area for document analysis.

Background of Kampung Bantang, Serian

Kampung Bantang was founded by Daon anak Nayeng and Baot anak Nayok in 1940. They led five families and moved out from Kampung Lanchang to a new agriculture place in Kampung Bantang. They arrived at a river known as Sungai Bantang and decided to settle down there. The five families opened new land for paddy farming. They also built a longhouse and a *baluh* headhouse or *baruk*. Towards the end of the 1950s, the villagers started to embrace Christianity (Anglican) and built a chapel known as St. Bartholomew. According to Sapur anak Kinton (personal communication, July 8, 2017), the roof of the old chapel, a longhouse, and a headhouse were built with bamboo, *miruat* woods and sago leaves which they found in the forest nearby. The bamboo and *miruat* woods were tied with rattan to make the construction solid. Ever since