

**Local Community Participation and Responsible Tourism Practices in Ecotourism  
Destination: A Case of Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah**

**ABSTRACT**

Recognizing the importance of local community participation in responsible tourism and its benefits, this case study explores and analyses the local community participation and responsible tourism practices at Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah, a premier ecotourism destination from the stakeholders' perspectives. It also describes the perception and attitudes towards tourism development including the key issues and challenges faced by the local communities. The case study adopted multiple methods involving focus-group interviews and survey questionnaires with the respective local communities residing in Lower Kinabatangan. Findings reveal that local communities recognized that Lower Kinabatangan has great potential to be developed as a sustainable ecotourism destination and to generate economic benefit. Despite this, there is limited participation of local communities in ecotourism development and responsible tourism practices among the local communities. The socio-economic demographic of the local community shows that only 42.4% of respondents have work related to tourism activities. Lack of capital and knowledge in tourism activities are the key barriers for local participation in ecotourism development. For Lower Kinabatangan to be a sustainable ecotourism destination, the participation and engagement of the local community and the practices of responsible tourism can no longer be ignored.