

# Harmonizing Rural Tourism and Rural Communities in Malaysia

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## Abstract

Malaysia rural tourism is composed of a large number of rural communities, each with distinct and varied assets. Within Malaysia, it is noticeable that tourism demand drivers play an important role in generating trips to rural tourism areas. Nonetheless, there are a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in rural tourism. Clearly, rural tourism marketing efforts need to leverage on the existing strengths and maximize the available opportunities. Hence, the purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of tourism on social, economics, environment and cultural from local communities perspectives in rural setting. 184 respondents comprising of local communities from 34 rural tourism sites in Malaysia took part voluntarily in this study. Twelve hypotheses comprising the dimensions of social, economics, environment and cultural on three components namely, positioning, communities' value and destination environment were developed. To assess the developed model, SmartPLS 2.0 (M3) was applied based on path modelling and then bootstrapping with 200 re-samples was applied to generate the standard error of the estimate and t-values. Interestingly, the findings suggested that local communities were most concerned on the cultural and social impacts of tourism on their values, repositioning of the destination and environment. The present study provides lessons on the importance of continuing the efforts to understand the impact of rural tourism development from the local communities' perspectives and to take into considerations views from the local communities in developing rural tourism destination.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, local communities, economics, environment, social, cultural, positioning, Malaysia

## 1. Introduction

Rural tourism is becoming increasingly important to the Malaysian economy and tourism product offering. The importance of tourism to local economies varies across Malaysia. Some places, like major cities, have an enormous investment in the tourism industry, while rural areas may lag behind. In fact, rural tourism can provide a unique opportunity to fulfill visitors' desires in searching out for new destinations and experiences. In addition, rural areas are a rich and often untapped source of cultural and heritage tourism. Past studies on tourism research have repeatedly evidenced that tourists tend to participate in cultural and heritage tourism on their trips to rural tourism destination. Malaysia is a heterogeneous society where the local communities are from various demographic and social economics background. Hence, *promoting tourism in rural destination in Malaysia* covers major issues in rural tourism including agrotourism, cultural/heritage tourism, ecotourism, planning, marketing, economic impact and many others. Malaysia rural tourism is composed of a large number of rural communities, each with distinct and varied assets. The uniqueness of rural destination for visitors is its peaceful relaxation, inspiration, recreation, education and entertainment. Within Malaysia, it is noticeably that tourism demand drivers that play an important part in generating trips to rural tourism areas. As shown in Appendix 1, the number of tourists visited Malaysia and the income generated from tourism has been increasing from year to year. For the past 10 years, tourists' arrivals have more than doubled from 10.2 million in 2000 to 24.6 million in 2010. In the corresponding time frame, tourists' receipts increased from RM17.3 billion to RM56.5 billion.

Past researchers indicated that rural tourism has resulted in different needs, aspiration and attitude toward tourism among the local communities (Wang, Pfister, & Morais, 2006). It is crucial to involve local communities in decision making to ensure effective performance and the sustainability of the required output. As stated by