
RURAL DESTINATIONS AND TOURISTS' SATISFACTION

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Past studies have shown that good service quality often leads to a better performance and higher satisfaction level. This study examines service quality dimensions and its impact on Bario, a rural tourism destination in Malaysia. Five dimensions of service quality namely, places of interest, sceneries, outdoor activities, atmosphere, and motives interest, have been chosen as the focus of this study on tourists' satisfaction. This study focuses on tourists, who visited Bario between August 2009 and January, 2010, as a population of interest. One hundred and forty six local and foreign tourists participated in this study, which attempted to add to the sparse research and to bridge the gap between service quality and tourists' satisfaction in the rural destination. The analysis has shown that different service quality components had various impacts on tourists' satisfaction. The results of this study propose that places, outdoor and atmosphere are the important dimensions to enhance tourists' satisfaction. Implications of the findings, potential limitations of the study, and directions for future research, are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is seen as a valuable and growing sector of the overall tourism market, representing a significant source of income to rural economies. 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. Rural destinations are less visited by tourists as compared to well-known cities or reputable holiday resorts. They have more to offer as compared to urban destinations as they are vast, less crowded, and have greener areas for people to relax and to find a place for peace and tranquility; attributes that people all around the world are intensively searching for when choosing tourists' destination. In addition, tourists' destinations are friendly and provide enjoyment for visitors (e.g., jungle, forest, flora and fauna) and on top of that, the local inhabitants are open and hospitable to visitors and tourists, even