

# Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, Sarawak: Tourists' Perceptions towards Its Rural Destination Competitiveness

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to examine and discuss the relationship between relevant influencing factors in tourism destination competitiveness.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A competitive model is proposed to evaluate these important factors that link to destination competitiveness. The factors to be discussed in this study include natural resources, cultural, tourism infrastructure, range of activities, entertainment, special events, lodging, accessibility, and local communities. Data was gathered using technique of convenience sampling with a total of 100 questionnaires from Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. SmartPLS 3.0 is applied to analyse the collected data on path modelling and bootstrapping.

**Findings:** Interestingly, tourism infrastructure, entertainment and local communities have significant influence on destination competitiveness.

**Research limitations/implications:** The findings of this study are believed to benefit tourism authorities in their decision making on the right tourism development paradigms in each of the rural tourism area. Findings implications, study limitations and future research directions are further discussed.

**Practical implications:** It was suggested that understanding destination competitiveness through various important factors is important because it provides tourism stakeholders with the knowledge related to the development and operation of their rural tourism destination and motivates them to

be conscious of the potential positive or negative effects of their actions from the tourists' perceptions.

**Originality/value:** This study demonstrates that rural tourism destination competitiveness can be improved and the negative impacts can be minimised if they are willing to equip themselves with the optimal competencies.

**Keywords:** Destination Competitiveness, Rural Tourism Destination, Tourists' Perspective, Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, Malaysia

### **Introduction**

Semenggoh Wildlife Centre enables tourists to interact with wild orang utans and enjoy the orang utans feeding time for the amazing experience. For more than thirty years, Semenggoh's staffs have trained young orang utans how to survive in the wild. The programme has successfully provided those orang utans, which had been orphaned or rescued from captivity, to have their freedom by living in a natural habitat. The tour operators usually arrange trips to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre combining with other local attractions. With the potential attraction and marketability of Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, it is vitally important to look into the tourists' perceptions towards destination competitiveness. To date, destination competitiveness research has been matured enough to clearly define the competitiveness and data gathering is likely to be more feasible and reliable. This is evident from the research by Liu (2006), who asserts that the Malaysian context in rural tourism is mostly related to the determined ethnic disparities, geographically, socio-culturally and economically. It is beyond doubt that when a community recognise tourism as a tool for development, its unspoilt nature and rurality become the competitive advantage. The objectives of the research include to find out the tourists' perceptions towards its rural destination competitiveness and to identify the competitive advantages for the tourists' destination.

### **Materials**

#### ***Tourism Destination Competitiveness***

Jenkins (1999) conducted a research on the conception of destination images as perceived by tourists and those reflected in different academic subjects and also by practitioners. According to Lawson and Bovy (1977), definition for destination image refers to the expression of all imaginations, objective knowledge and emotional thoughts of a group of people or even an individual. To improve and sustain destination competitiveness, it is vital to acknowledge that higher tourist satisfaction level should be established by creating a positive post-purchase tourist behaviour (Yoon & Uysal, 2003). In such case, Alegre and Garau (2010) conducted a survey to examine the tourists' overall satisfaction and dissatisfaction as well as their intention to return to the specific destination.

#### ***Natural Resources***

Nature resources refer to the naturally occurring sources of wealth for a specific region which may consist of land, forests, mineral deposits and water that occur in nature and can be used for economic gain. Nature resources are important for human to survive and contribute to the economy of the nation in which they exist. Mazilu (2012) defined destination as a complex element connecting geographical resources or the natural and anthropic dimensions that are accessible by tourists. Dugulan, Balaure, Popescu and Veghes (2010) strong agree that natural resources and