

Validating a Tourism Instrument in Rural Tourism Destination. A Test on Bario

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ABSTRACT

Past researches have observed a shift in the dimensions of tourism scales. The purpose of the research reported here was to test empirically and to validate the conceptualization of tourism scales that consists of six dimensions based on Ap and Crompton's (1998) research. Data was gathered through a survey using a structured questionnaire to local communities at Bario Highland, a rural tourism destination at Sarawak with a total of 66 respondents. Findings obtained from the confirmatory factor analysis and reliability tests indicated that only five dimensions of social cultural, amenities, entertainment, values and community attitudes are highly suited

for measuring the tourism scales at rural tourism destination, also proving that the instrument is applicable in the Malaysian rural tourism industry. Through the correlation analysis, it was shown that these dimensions are confirmed of their distinct dimensions from one another. Implications regarding the value of conducting validity and reliability test for practitioners and researchers are discussed.

Keywords: Rural tourism destination, social cultural, amenities, entertainment, values, community attitudes, structural equation modeling

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is known as one of the industries that have the highest potential to contribute towards economic development and job creation particularly in rural areas (Bredhenhann & Wickens, 2003; Ruiz Molina, Gil-Saura, & Moliner-Velazquez, 2010). It is one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) under the Tenth Malaysia Plan and it is Malaysia's third largest revenue generating industry, after oil and gas, and manufacturing sectors. Statistics have shown that in 2010, an estimated 690,000 visitors from some foreign countries that visited Malaysia and 54% of these opted for rural tourism. Hence, it is important to ensure environmental sustainability of tourism activities in rural tourists' destination. Ecotourism is seen as a valuable and growing sector of the overall tourism market, representing a significant source of income to rural economies. It is becoming popular and is crucial for the development of rural areas and an ideal way of avoiding further decline of rural areas. Economic growth, social-cultural development, protection and improvement of both the natural and built environment and infrastructure are some of the significant contributions of rural tourism.

Ecotourism is seen as a valuable and growing sector of the overall tourism market, representing a significant source of income to rural economies. It is becoming popular and is crucial for the development of rural areas and an ideal way of avoiding further decline of rural areas. The problem with tourism in rural destination is that the people's levels of knowledge and skillfulness on average are found to be much lower than in the city. This hinders efforts to bring in development into the region and may cause severe damages in the destination, for example, the locals destroy parts of their heritage or give up their traditional lifestyle for modern global trends.

The advancement of the internet as a commercial channel has been well recognized for bringing in tourists and making it almost impossible to overlook in the marketing mixes of tourism organization (Castañeda, Frias, & Rodriguez, 2009). Nonetheless, this sudden exposure of ICT raises meaningful questions concerning the impact of ICT and tourism planning on local communities particularly at rural destination. The effect of the internet on communities' attitude towards tourism is little-researched area and as stated by Govers (2005), if these issues are not handled carefully, rural tourism would be fragmented and ephemeral. There is a lack of published commercial research on rural tourism destination studies in Malaysia and it is still remains true that many public sector tourism organizations are not yet convinced of the value of