

Community's experiential knowledge on the development of rural tourism competitive advantage: a study on Kampung Semadang – Borneo Heights, Sarawak

Abstract

Purpose - Rural tourism has emerged as one of the potential economic contributors to the country's economic growth. To this extent, tourism stakeholders are aware of the rural tourism destination competitiveness where the development should be aligned with the objectives in order to achieve destination competitive advantage. Given the importance of studying factors that contribute to the development of rural tourism competitive advantage, the present study proposed a research framework by identifying six predictors from the local community based on their experiential knowledge.

Design/methodology/approach - Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire survey where 144 respondents comprising local communities from Kampung Semadang – Borneo Heights, Sarawak, Malaysia were involved. To assess the developed model, SmartPLS 2.0 (M3) was applied based on path modelling (measurement model assessment) followed by bootstrapping analysis (structural model assessment).

Findings - Interestingly, the findings revealed that the communities believed economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts significantly contributes to the development of rural tourism competitive advantage. Additionally, communities from Kampung Semadang viewed that both community knowledge and support for tourism greatly affect the development of rural tourism destination competitive advantage. Surprisingly, there was no significant relationship between stakeholder involvement and rural tourism competitive advantage.

Practical Implications - From a practical point of view, the findings of the study provide valuable information to tourism stakeholders and policy planners about the importance of tri-dimensional tourism impacts as well as community knowledge and support in the development of rural tourism destination competitive advantage. In line with policy development or planning for rural tourism development, the tourism stakeholders should pay more concern on the tri-dimensional impacts, the importance of community knowledge about tourism, and gaining the community support for tourism development in order to achieve the goal of competitiveness.

Originality/value - There is lack of study in investigating the development of rural tourism competitive advantage with a holistic framework. This paper studies the intended or unintended economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts triggered by the tourism activities. This study has also investigated the local communities' knowledge and supports towards tourism as the community efforts determine the success of a destination management, especially in the rural area. Stakeholder involvement was also examined as the collaboration among relevant parties to create competitive advantage is essential to achieve sustainable rural tourism.

Keywords - Tri-dimensional Impacts; Stakeholder Involvement; Communities' Perspective; Rural Tourism; Competitive Advantage; Malaysia

Paper Type: Research Paper

Introduction

The tourism sector is experiencing a tremendous growth over the decade. Likewise, many tourists are seeking for places in authentic and sustainable holiday experiences to rest and relax (Buffa, 2015). With the decline of traditional agrarian industries, various tourism stakeholders (i.e. local communities, government, and industry players) have recentered their focus on rural tourism due to its potential as an alternative solution to generate income (Ruiz Molina *et al.*, 2010; Moric, 2013). In fact, rural tourism has been recognized as an imperative tool to improve local welfare and standards of living (Peptenatu *et al.*, 2009; Pröbstl-Haider *et al.*, 2014; Aliman *et al.*, 2016). In this regard, some researchers propounded that rural tourism development should be community-based and involved a wide range of community resources (Cawley and Gillmor, 2008). Although rural tourism has been growing over the last decade, there is a number of challenges experienced by the tourism destinations. Past studies have observed an increased competition among tourism destinations (Chen and Gursoy, 2001; Zainuddin *et al.*, 2013; Ramseook-Munhurrun *et al.*, 2016) to attract more international and domestic tourists (Chon *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, Adeyinka-Ojo and Nair (2016) also highlighted the growing importance of clearly postulating the destination appeals of a tourism destination in order