

An Evaluation on the Attitudes of Residents in Georgetown towards the Impacts of Tourism Development

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Abstract

The study confirms the usefulness of social exchange theory in explaining residents' perception toward tourism development in Georgetown. There are positive and significant relationship between personal benefit gained from tourism development, perceived positive impacts and support for tourism development. Nevertheless, only one finding which is not in aligned with social exchange theory. There is no significant relationship for perceived negative impact towards support for additional tourism development. In short, residents who benefit from tourism development in Georgetown perceived greater positive impact than those who receive less benefit or do not receive any benefit. The positive impact that resident perceived has a positive relationship with their support level toward tourism development.

Keyword: Tourism development, social exchange theory, Georgetown, Malaysia, attitudes.

Introduction

Tourism industry has become one of the main income generators for Malaysia since few decades ago. It was estimated to be the second largest income generator in year 2007 (Economic Report, 2006). The World Tourism Action Council Annual Report for 2006 highlighted an impressive projection that the travel and tourism sector is expected to contribute 40 percent of foreign exchange revenue by 2010 (Lim, 2006). The local community becomes the main stakeholder of tourism development. The attitude of local community can directly affect the development of tourism industry. Positive attitude from local residents not only can help in boosting tourists' satisfaction level, at the same time, it contributes to "word-of-mouth" promotion among international tourists. The focus of this study will be Penang, which is one of the states in Peninsular Malaysia. Penang is a state that is rich with culture and history. Founded in 1786 by Francis Light and became the first British trading post in the Far East. It had attracted for more than 10,000 settlers and traders within few decades. Penang known as Pearl of Orient, has attracted massive flow of visitors and tourists from far and near in many years (Tan, 2006). Tourism industry in Penang has gone downhill after it hit its peak point in the 90s and never regains its strength. Issues such as cleanliness, traffic congestion, unconcern from public sector and lack of cooperation within tourism sector itself are impediments to the growth of Penang's tourism sector (Ong, 2003). Eccles and Costa (1996) noted that attractions should offer the visitors a real feeling for the place and facilitating the interactions between tourists and local. Many believe that Penang's charm is diminishing slowly and phasing out by newly developed attractions such as Phuket, Bali and other Indo China countries. In the eyes of foreigners' especially Western tourists, those attractions are more attractive to them (Tan, 2006).