



ASLI QoL2015, Annual Serial Landmark International Conferences on Quality of Life
ASEAN-Turkey ASLI QoL2015
AicQoL2015Jakarta, Indonesia. AMER International Conference on Quality of Life
The Akmani Hotel, Jakarta, Indonesia, 25-27 April 2015
"Quality of Life in the Built & Natural Environment 3"

Responsible Tourism Practices and Quality of Life: Perspective of Langkawi Island communities

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Abstract

Responsible tourism practice (RTP) has become the most popular concept and principle for modern tourism development. RTP promotes the protection and conservation of the natural environment, local cultures and contributes towards a better quality of life (QoL). This paper endeavors to discover the Langkawi Island communities' perceptions of RTP and its impacts on their quality of life. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the Langkawi Islands' community using a quota sampling method. The research conjunctures were tested by using Baron and Kenny's four-step analysis with RTP as the moderating variables.

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Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers) and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment- Behaviour Studies, Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia).

Keywords: Responsible tourism practice; tourism development; quality of life

1. Background of the study

The importance of tourism as a significant income contributor has been recognized widely (M. H. M. Hanafiah & Harun, 2010). In order to cater to the needs of the tourists travelling from one place to another and escaping from

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their daily life by being involved in and experiencing many things, numerous destinations have been identified and developed as tourist attractions. The development of tourism areas involves various socially conscious policies such as sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, ethical tourism and other tourism development best practice (Mowforth & Munt, 2008). Previously, over the years, sustainable tourism has received widespread interest from tourism scholars (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Hunter, 1997). The sustainable tourism development has gained attention and been adopted as a policy in tourism planning by many governments. However, currently there are numerous debates on the effectiveness of sustainable policy in managing tourism development (Bramwell & Lane, 2014).

It is important to note that the tourism industry is based on the people and places and the interaction between them. The industry is extremely sensitive to the social and physical conditions of the destination micro and macro environment (Hanafiah & Harun, 2010). In fact, the tourism industry faces numerous sustainability challenges, such as resources manipulation, economic uncertainty, and changes in tourist demand. For this reason also, the tourism policy makers must promote and make available the benefits of renewal and resilience to the residents and the area. This is why responsible tourism practice (RTP) was introduced at the first place and currently has become an established area of tourism research pertaining in enhancing the current sustainable tourism development (Spenceley, 2010). RTP shares the same goals as sustainable tourism, focusing on environmental integrity, social justice, and maximizing communities' benefits. Further, RTP is by far the most favored policy to be used for marketing a tourism destination mostly by the European and African nations (Bramwell, Lane, McCabe, Mosedale, & Scarles, 2008).

In the beginning, the tourism industry was developed with the support of the residents who were involved in this industry. The residents play a pivotal role as the primary stakeholder in tourism development. The local community support is the key element in successful tourism development as tourism planners and other authorities engaged in the tourism industry have to be concerned with the communities' views on development plans. The involvement of communities is particularly crucial to the success of tourism development and the implementation of responsible tourism and the residents' attitude may directly affect the development of the tourism industry (Ling, Jakpar, Johari, Myint, & Rani, 2011). However, the central principle of community participation in planning the tourism development has been proven difficult to achieve (Shani & Pizam, 2012).

2. Langkawi Island

Langkawi is a district of the state of Kedah, Malaysia consisting of a cluster of 99 islands. The total land mass of the islands is 47,848 hectares while the main island of Langkawi itself has a total area of 32,000 hectares. The coastal areas consist of flat, alluvial plains punctuated by limestone ridges. Two-thirds of the island are dominated by forest-covered mountains, hills, and natural vegetation. The rapid investments by the federal government and the private sector in developing Langkawi can still be seen. The Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) is the local governance agency responsible for expanding and supporting tourism development in Langkawi by encouraging and carrying out the economic restructuring of lower productivity to higher productivity sectors.

LADA is also responsible for creating attractive opportunities for foreign investors using the existing available tourism products and resources. This government body is also involved in the social, economic and physical development of Langkawi, as well as preserving the natural resources and offering a conducive environment for tourism business activities. The development of Langkawi as a tourist destination is given a much-needed boost by being a tax-free island. Furthermore, the richness of the flora and fauna has stimulated the number of tourist arrivals to the island. Based on Table 1, the numbers of visitors have blossomed from year to year in line with the number of developments in Langkawi Island. In line with that, the growing numbers of visitors posit a serious challenge for the Island's management in dealing with environmental concerns, maintenance, socioeconomic impacts and also sustaining the resources whilst fulfilling the needs of the tourists and the local communities.

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