**Community Based Tourism and Quality of Life**

Review of Integrative Business & Economics Research

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**ABSTRACT**

Community based tourism (CBT) has been acknowledged as a tool for community development through tourism projects. Majority of the rural communities involved in tourism to reap its economic benefits since theoretically an increase in income gained from tourism activities will improve their quality of life. This paper is intended to explore factors influencing rural communities' quality of life in Malaysia, particularly those who manage homestay program. It is important for tourism development program to highlight quality of life issues in order to manage and sustain the program for the benefit of its community. The aim of this paper is to provide a conceptual understanding of the community based tourism project in Malaysia by exploring its current development and its implication towards community in rural area. It is suggested that the quality of life of residents who operate homestay will largely depend on their own attributes economically, government involvement, community role and the issues of sustainability.

Keywords: community based tourism, quality of life, homestay program, Malaysia.

## INTRODUCTION

Quality of life is a concept to describe the living conditions of the individual. The concept of quality of life or well-being has played an important role in current social science research, as increased quality of life for society as a whole was the main agenda of the government in many countries, given that economic growth and development of a country do not necessarily reflect the increase in their residents' quality of life (Das, 2008; Lever, 2000; Norizan, Sulaiman, Wan Ibrahim, & Wan Salihin, 2011). This view also reflects the statement by former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia Quality of Life 1999 Report asserting that the actual progress of

a country is based on improving the quality of life in all aspects of life (Economic Planning Unit, 1999).

The focus of this paper is to review the effectiveness of a program or tourism projects which have given priority by the government. The selection of the homestay program operators based on the importance of community-based tourism project in order to strengthen the country's wealth and well-being that can be enjoyed by all walks of life particularly in rural communities so that they will not be marginalized. Usually, the local community who involved in tourism activities interested mainly with the perceived advantages in terms of economic gain, based on the theory that the increase in income derived from tourists will increase the quality of life of the community (Andereck & Jurowski, 2006). The study of quality of life is usually based on the motion to determine the specific domains that affect the assessment of quality of life by focusing on key elements of how people assess their situation. Sirgy et al. (2006) suggested that the quality of life studies should have been developed which include a detailed study on the issues of tourism, hospitality, recreation and leisure. With the publication of special journal on quality of life and tourism, more studies can be carried out and disseminated to public. This reflects the development of knowledge that deal with research interests in tourism, either the quality of life of the community or tourist destination.

## COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

Community-based tourism (CBT) has attracted the attention of many travel and tourism scholars nearly two decades ago (Singh, Timothy, & Dowling, 2006). CBT is typically cheaper compare to other type of accommodations such as hotels and resorts, and can reduce the side effects of environmental and cultural pollution. It is also a direct source of income for the local community. CBT has become an attraction to be exploited by local communities if they wish to take the opportunity to be involved in undertaking a tourism product, while preserving the environment and heritage. This is because the tourism industry is able to contribute to the income of a country, thus creating opportunities for local people to participate to generate income from this tourism industry.

CBT is a community development tool to enhance the ability of communities particularly in rural areas to manage the tourism resources while ensuring the extensive involvement and participation of village residents (Tuffin, 2005). CBT is the chance for tourist especially foreign tourists to experience the real way of life with the local

community to enjoy the lifestyle, culture, heritage and neutral environment that have never been experienced before. CBT is seen as an alternative to the existing mass tourism that led to some impact on the environment, socio-culture and economy of a destination (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares, & Pavón, 2011). CBT has become the aspirations of the people and local government alike to implement various tourism projects and programs with direct involvement of local people in planning, developing and marketing the tourism product in collaboration with the government and private sectors.

Community-based tourism in Malaysia is not a new thing. Many local communities have long been working on tourism products such as accommodation, crafts, food and beverages, transportation services and the like (Yahaya, 2008). One of the CBT products as practiced in Malaysia is the homestay program. According to Amran (2008) homestay program is a form of holiday programs involving tourists come and stay with the families who rent their homes. It involves the interaction between tourists and hosts in a real environment and get involve into the daily life of local communities (Ismar Liza Mahani, Rosyidah, & Nurulhuda, 2007). Such programs are vital in ensuring community participation in the tourism industry to generate income of their households. This is because in order to ensure a sustainable tourism industry to be successful, community involvement is one of the factors to achieve the goal.

Generally, people around the world are not the same and this means that not all people have the potential to develop CBT. There are some communities or villages are not located in an appropriate location for tourism purposes as they do not have access or route, and too far away or difficult to go there. Many tourists do not have enough time to spend a few days only for travelling purposes. Therefore, for the purpose of CBT development, society and the authorities need to identify the tourist attractions that are located within their vicinity whether natural attractions such as the natural beauty and unique natural landscape, heritage, traditions such as handicrafts, art and architecture of their own culture or the opportunity to participate in activities such as climbing, diving and so forth. CBT should address issues such as local involvement, empowerment, culture and heritage conservation and management of natural resources as the backbone to the success of the CBT.

Community involvement in community-based tourism has been given emphasis by the government as one of the implementation strategy for helping the poor, especially in rural areas to develop and involve in the tourism sector in this country (Kalsom, Nor Ashikin, & Mohmad Amin, 2006). Many local communities are aware of the

advantages of the tourism industry which gives them the opportunity to improve the economy and create awareness about the importance of environmental conservation. The homestay program was launched as one of the officially CBT programs in 1995 by the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia. Kalsom (2010a) categorized the homestay program as one of the rural cultural tourism products. The government has given emphasis to the development of rural tourism as a tourism development strategy in the country following the findings that showed 15% foreign tourists who visited Malaysia chose to stay in rural areas (Nanthakumar & Yahaya, 2010).

The homestay program began informally back in the 70's with some involvement of the local community who provide accommodation in their homes to foreign tourists with a very minimal charge compared to a hotel or resort (Amran, 2008; Kalsom, 2010a; Yahaya & Abdul Rasid, 2010). Involvement of entrepreneurs in Malaysia homestay program is one of the government's continuous efforts to develop tourism in rural areas in order to achieve the target of reducing the economic disparities of rural and urban as well as empowering the village community. Based on this understanding, a few of the local community meet the challenge by participating in the homestay program that allows foreign tourists and domestic tourists to stay with the local community and can learn better ways of life, culture and daily practices of the society (Yahaya & Abdul Rasid, 2010).

The government also has given special attention in terms of additional funds for improvements, marketing and development of more homestay program in Malaysia. Success after success is reported by the government as a result of the government's effort to promote the homestay program and the involvement of local communities in realizing them. The homestay program is said to have payoffs in terms of household income and reach thousands of dollars to continue to promote awareness of conservation of cultural heritage (Bernama, 2011).

## QUALITY OF LIFE

Based on the report of Quality of Life in Malaysia in 1999, government has emphasized the concept of quality of life because it involves a positive change from a condition not satisfactory to the greater good of society and social system as a whole (Economic Planning Unit, 1999). Therefore, the quality of life assessment should include all aspects of life in a holistic manner, including in terms of economic, social, psychological, cultural, political and environmental issues. This emphasis to upgrade the lives of the people has been pivotal to the Malaysian government towards achieving

developed nation by the year 2020. In the New Economic Model, the government placed the quality of life as main goal to be achieved in line with the physical and economic development (National Economic Action Council, 2010).

Quality of life which focus towards life satisfaction plays an important role to ensure that all the efforts of individuals to sustain and manage success. Many studies on life satisfaction showed a positive effect of the existence of life satisfaction with the individual efforts (Carrée & Verheul, 2011; Ciairano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, & Callari, 2010; Cooper & Artz, 1995; Kamo, 1998; Kautonen & Palmroos, 2010; Powell & Eddleston, 2008; Salleh & Zuria, 2009; Wan Edura, Mohamad Sahari, Azura, & Izhairi, 2011). Life satisfaction means individual life quality assessment which was based on criteria set by himself. This notion is further supported by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985) which states fundamental well-being focused on self-assessment of a person, not based on the criteria determined by others. In other words, values and life satisfaction will vary from one individual to another individual depend on the evaluations of their own satisfaction.

According to the Economic Planning Unit (1999) quality of life encompasses all aspects of life both in terms of economic, social, psychological, cultural, political and environmental. The meaning of quality of life in Malaysia includes "personal development, healthy lifestyles, access and freedom to pursue knowledge and standard of living beyond the basic needs of individuals and their psychological needs, to achieve a comparable level of social well-being of the national aspirations" (Economic Planning Unit, 1999). The study of life satisfaction is a branch of study which also referred to as well-being or quality of life study. Life satisfaction is one component of subjective well-being which includes three main components i.e. positive, negative and life satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Keyes (2004) emphasized the well-being is becoming increasingly important these days for its contributions to basic research and applications for the domain of mental health and human development.

Most studies on life satisfaction are to explain scientifically that the satisfaction or dissatisfaction felt by individual would determine whether the work or effort of that person will survive or not. This is because if they feel satisfied with their life then it will provide motivation for them to perform their jobs, particularly in improving their income sources with more enthusiasm toward building a better quality of life and sustainable living. Salleh and Zuria (2009) concluded that individuals who have a good

life satisfaction will be more comfortable and orderly daily life.

## CBT AND QOL

The relationship between community-based tourism and issues of rural community well-being involved in community-based tourism in Malaysia has yet to be fully explored. The question of whether the operators of the homestay program really satisfied with their life and satisfaction with community-based tourism program that they have earned rarely been discussed. The main issue is not all communities who engaged in conducting the homestay program receive a good income as noted in the newspapers and this resulted in their quality of life is also not increased even after a long involvement in the homestay program. For example, based on studies by Amran & Hairul Nizam (2003) in terms of quality of life of people involved in the homestay program does not show any significant changes, as well as changes in terms of increase in total household income is less encouraging.

In fact, according to Liza Mahani Ismar, Rosyidah and Nurulhuda (2007) direct income earned by the homestay program operators throughout the implementation of these programs is very low. The operators considered earning the income only a mere consolation, not helping them to increase revenue as expected. Average income as a result of the program received by the operator is only about RM51 for one night stay or RM17 for each one of the visitors after deducting some other expenses (Kalsom, 2010a, 2010b). Yahaya and Abdul Rasid (2010) stated that although many studies show the homestay are able to change the socio-economic condition of rural communities, but their findings do not reflect changes in the quality of life as a whole for the homestay program operators.

The second issue involves the participation of entrepreneurs in the homestay program which showed a slight decrease in 2010 of only about 3005 entrepreneurs than in 2009 which amounted to 3283 (Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2011). Withdrawal of the homestay program operators were due to problems with the program operation less well received and did not receive visitors or tourists in a given period. This issue also received attention based on the study by the Bureau of Innovation and Consultancy UTM (2009) who find a homestay program operators were unable to increase tourist arrivals to their homestay despite development funds injected by the government. The issue of lack of tourists who choose to join and stay in a homestay has affected the expected sources of income. Based on the statistics of tourist arrivals to Malaysia, the number of foreign tourist arrivals continued to rise in line with the promotional efforts

undertaken by the government. However, statistics of foreign tourist arrivals to the homestay program shows a very small percentage (less than 1%) when compared with the inflow of foreign tourists to Malaysia as a whole (Table 1). Low percentage of arrival is not a surprise because according to Goodwin and Santilli (2009) most of the operators in the same category of accommodation including community-based tourism low budget establishments could only meet 5% occupancy rate in a year. This means that the source of additional income as expected will not be achieved.

**Table 1: Comparison of International Tourist Arrival to Malaysia and Arrival to Homestay Program**

| Year | Total Tourist Arrival to Malaysia (Millions) | Total Number of Tourist to Homestay Program | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2010** | 24.6 | 49,126 | 0.19 |
| **2009** | 23.6 | 31,523 | 0.13 |
| **2008** | 22.0 | 23,117 | 0.11 |
| **2007** | 20.9 | 21,368 | 0.10 |
| **2006** | 17.4 | 14,458 | 0.08 |

Source: Tourism Malaysia and Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2011

A further issue involves some of the homestay operators who are too dependent on aid from the government alone, and some of the village homestay establishment was initiated by the Member of Parliament, but their local communities having problem to manage the homestay program because they had no basis in the field of entrepreneurship, does not have a formal homestay management system, leadership problems and lose focus (Bureau of Innovation & Consultancy UTM, 2009; Kalsom, 2011). All these issues have led to decreased motivation among the homestay program operators, thus resulting in their dissatisfaction with the program. The attitude of the operators is also one of the challenges that must be addressed to ensure that community-based tourism program really give the benefits and positive impact on the quality of life of the community.

One study of rural community well-being is the study by Mohd Shaladdin, Wan Abd Aziz, and Nik Wan (2006) on the well-being of coastal fishermen in the stateof Terengganu, Malaysia. According to their study, well-being or quality of life issues are important to explore because the majority of the coastal fishing villagers aer a rural community and classified as poor, hence should be given attention by the government in the development of human capital so that they will not be isolated and can also enjoy

a better quality of life for themselves and their generations. However, their study found that levels of well-being of fishermen still at low levels despite the help and support from the government. This reflect a quality of life in society in Malaysia is still not fully enjoyed by all communities, especially rural communities and communities involved in agriculture and fisheries sectors. In the case of homestay program operators, most of them working and located in rural areas and their original work is derived from farming or fishing.

## CONCLUSION

There are still deficiencies in the operation of homestay program which requires particular attention from several main players such as homestay operators, relevant government agencies and private sector that require close cooperation to ensure the success of the homestay program. Continuous effort is needed to increase tourist arrivals to the homestay which in turn will increase the additional income as expected by the homestay operators. Therefore, homestay operators must be able to market and manage their homestay aggressively to attract more visitors which in turn could increase their quality of life through better income and nicer environment of their homes and surrounding villages.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to extend warmest appreciation to the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu for the research grant and assistance which make this presentation possible.

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