INDIGENOUS TOURISM VENTURES IN MALAYSIA: EXPLORING ITS POTENTIALS AND LIMITATIONS

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Article info

Abstract

Agro and ecotourism activities in Cameron Highlands Malaysia play a vital role in promoting growth to its surrounding region. Tourism activities generate income to the local residents including the indigenous community that lives in settlements scattered within this tourism hub. Although previous studies have highlighted the economic needs to also introduce indigenous tourism to this area, limited studies have actually evaluated its potentials and limitations as a tourism product. Hence this study embarks on appraising indigenous tourism potentials and developing strategies for its successful implementation. SWOT analysis was performed to detail its internal strengths and weaknesses and its external opportunities and threats. TOWS matrix was used as a situational analysis in developing strategies for the implementation of the proposed indigenous tourism product. The SWOT analysis shows this product has 13 strengths, 10 weaknesses, 13 opportunities and 9 threats. These points are used in the TOWS matrix and relevant strategies were proposed. This study concludes that indigenous tourism has great potential to be explored in this region but appropriate measures must be considered in its development and implementation.

1. Introduction

The dynamic growth in tourism industry has enabled it to be seen as a tool in increasing and spurring economic growth especially in countries with scarce resources (Lou,Y., 2018). Studies have also shown that development in tourist destination areas would bring both positive and negative impacts in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental to its surrounding regions (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Boopen, 2011) . The community living in these regions consequently will be affected in many ways due to tourism activities. The direct and indirect effects of this industry will prosper other industries through the value chain especially transportation, hotels and food (Nowak et al., 2003). Hence, some studies concluded that tourism activities are a new form of income generation mechanism that enables local communities to prosper (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010).

Tourism activities have been gathering impetus in areas where tourism can be promoted to improve economic conditions of communities which are considered to be lagging behind from the mainstream economic development. This includes the indigenous communities whom have been the center of numerous tourism studies including those explored in regions like Australia (Hinch & Butler 2007; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010), Arctic (Notzke, 1999), New Zealand (Hall et al., 1996) and Africa (Veuren, 2003). Indigenous tourism as it is termed focus mainly on their lifestyles and cultures. In general, indigenous tourism refers to 'activities in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction' (Hinch & Prentice, 2004). The primary focus and pulling factors relies on tourism activities that revolve around their culture, heritage and lifestyle.

Findings pertaining to these activities are mixed, stressing the

facts that both negative and positive impacts are experienced by the indigenous communities whom are participating in tourism activities. However, the magnitude of the positive impacts especially in terms of economic and social outcomes (Kwon & Vogt, 2010), cultural preservation and appreciation makes it an important tool to be considered as a community development option. In Malaysia, indigenous tourism has been introduced though very minimally exploited, in certain states like Sarawak, Johor and Pahang. Cameron Highlands, the area under study is a well known destination both domestically and internationally for its agro and ecotourism. It is also a dwelling for approximately 60,000 indigenous people clustered in 28 settlements which are scattered around this mountainous region (JHEOA, 2010) where some are either directly or indirectly involve in tourism activities. Deserving attention however has not been given to indigenous tourism, where products highlighting their culture, heritage and lifestyles have not been a part of the central tourism attraction in Cameron Highlands. Thus, this study brings forth a unique scenario where introducing and exploiting this type of tourism seems inevitable because of the existing tourist in flow to the area under study. The inability to pursue this venture can be perceived as an opportunity not well taken.

However, it is crucial for an evaluation to be made on its potentials and constraints before any ventures and policy implementation is undertaken. Although numerous studies on tourism activities in Cameron Highland have made suggestions on incorporating this community in tourism activities (Passoff, 1991; Foucat, 2002; Chan et al., 2003), none however has made a comprehensive evaluation on its potentials. Hence, this study aims to embark on appraising indigenous tourism potentials in Cameron Highland, by focussing on the community's perception on tourism since it is vital for a long-term tourism development planning. The community is also viewed as stakeholders whom will be directly affected in the tourism development processes (Ap,1992; Gunn, 2002).

2. The Indigenous Community in Cameron Highland

The indigenous people or better known as Orang Asli in Malaysia is divided into three main ethnic groups which are Negrito, Senoi and Melayu- Proto. These ethnic groups speak different languages, practices different culture, each with its own uniqueness. They live in settlements located in rural areas far from the city dwellings. To provide aid, assistance and facilitate their integration into the society, the government has set up JHEOA, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs under the ministry of National Unity and Social Development. It safeguards their welfare in matters pertaining to basic facilities such as water supply, community hall, school and generator for electricity. Many of the indigenous households belong to the hardcore poverty group. Studies showed that their perpetuating dependence on forest base resources are the main factors contributing to poverty (Mustafa, 2004; Siti Nor Awang Edo and July, 2003) since these economic activities does not provide a fixed and stable income. They collect and sell forest products including fruits, rattan, wild orchids to visitors and farmers for livelihood. Due to environmental damages cause by farming, plantations, logging (Wazir-Jahan, 1990, Barrow et al., 2003) and exposure to alternative livelihood activities, many has been seen taking up employment either directly related or indirectly related to the tourism industry. However, limited initiatives, attention and development has been done to promote indigenous handicrafts, culture and heritage as an additional tourism product to Cameron Highlands (Nicolas, 2000).

3. Literature Review

Indigenous tourism relates to tourism servicers, products and businesses that are either completely or partially associated with the indigenous community. It is broadly defined as "tourism activities in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction" (Hinch and Butler, 1996) where the emphasis of this definition is the word 'control' (Zeppell, 1998). Their life style which is unique and different from the tourist becomes one of the key attractions for those seeking new experience, different from their own culture (Harron & Weiler, 1992). Indigenous tourism products therefore must be owned or operated by at least in part by an indigenous group (Alexis Bunten & Nelson Graburn, 2010). The strength of indigenous tourism product relies on the uniqueness of their culture and lifestyles (Northern Development Ministers Forum, 2008; Pascal Tremblay and Aggie Wegner,2009).

Studies on tourism which relates to the indigenous community have primarily focus on the issues of economics, social, cultural and environmental impact (Dogget 2001, Salleh et al, 2012a; Mason, Peter, 2012). Findings are mixed, depending mainly on the community's attitudes towards tourism itself (Lepp, 2007; Harrill, 2004; Vargas-Sánchez, 2009). Positive attitudes towards tourism bring more gains to the community (Aref, 2010). Most however, have highlighted the importance of practising sustainable tourism to enable this community to prosper with a

long-term economic benefit (Nepal,1997; Roseland, 2012). Concerns have also been raised on the effects of tourist arrivals which have brought changes to the community culture (Stone, M. T., & Nyaupane, G. P., 2018) and disruption to their social life (Mercer, 1994).

Studies on indigenous community that has participated in the tourism industry highlighted some major hurdles that are of concerned. The issues revolve around the inability of those involved to attain some level of success in the industry due to their socio demographic background. These include the lack of skill and low educational attainment (Craig-Smith & French, 1994), limited knowledge of the industry (Notzke, 2004) and their limited financial capabilities (Altman & Finlayson, 1993). Although there are some degree of community's involvement, it is limited to the 'low skill low pays' type of jobs (Hunter, 1997) indicating low overall benefits to the community.

In Malaysia, tourism in general has brought positive impacts to the economy (Othman, et al., 2012 & 2012b) especially in employment generation (Liu, & Wall., 2006). Studies on tourism impact to the indigenous community though limited, have found both positive and negative impacts on their health and cultural preservation (Man, Zanisah et al., 2009; Zuriatunfadzliah Sahdan et al., 2009), environmental degradation (Evelyn,1985). These impacts vary among different indigenous groups and location of their settlements. Hence analysing tourism potentials will provide greater insights on best practices that should be undertaken to ensure sustainable tourism development growth is achieved and benefits the community.

4. Methodology

This study uses both secondary and primary data to analyze tourism potentials in Cameron Highlands. Secondary data is collected to give a better understanding of the issue at hand and these are gathered from various state and district publications. Primary data was collected in three stages with the cooperation of JHEOA, Cameron Highland especially in the ice breaking process between the researchers and the community leaders. The first stage involves having a roundtable talk with representatives of JHEOA and leaders of the indigenous community in each settlement. A guide was assigned to the research group to help penetrate into the settlements and get an insight of the area under study. Nine settlements located in urban, suburban and rural areas were assessed in terms of infrastructure facilities, community's social interactions with outsiders, environmental conditions, health issues and general economic activities. A questionnaire

was then developed as a research instrument with two main objectives which are to measure the perceptions of these communities on tourism and secondly, to collect a comprehensive baseline data on the demographic profiles of individuals in the community. A multistage stratified sampling technique was used to identify potential respondents from the total 27 settlements which were stratified into three strata namely rural, urban and suburban. A second stage stratification was based on whether respondents were head of households or household members. A total of 475 respondents were successfully interviewed. A third stage data collection involves an in-depth interview with 20 individuals including the community leaders and those involve either directly or indirectly in the tourism industry. This includes indigenous individuals who work as tourist guide, golf caddies and hotel cleaners.

Swot analysis technique is used in this study to explain the possibilities of developing indigenous tourism incorporating the indigenous community living in this area. This technique has been used in studies to assess potentials of tourism products (Ndenecho, 2008; Hasan Acka, 2006; Rahmani Seryasat M, 2013). It enables detail analysis on the strengths and weaknesses (internal factors) and opportunities and threats (external factors) if indigenous tourism is to be introduced to this community. The strengths would identify the niche factors that would make indigenous tourism a success while weaknesses focus on areas that require improvements. Opportunities evaluate factors that can be exploited to the advantage of this venture and threats are elements that could cause harm and detrimental if overlooked. For the purpose of this study, all the items for each category are sub categorized for detail analysis. The second stage of the analysis is strategy development with TOWS matrix (Weihrich, Heinz, 1982). TOWS matrix develops strategies, tactics and actions based on the internal and external factors. Four strategic categories in the matrix are Strength-Opportunity (SO), Strength-Threats (ST), Weaknesses-Opportunities (WO), and Weaknesses-Threats (WT). SO maximizes its internal strength and opportunities while WO attempts to minimize its weaknesses by maximizing its opportunities. The strategy formulated for ST relies on its strengths to overcome external threats. WT strategy is to minimize internal weaknesses and external threats. In summary, strategies that should be considered before exploring indigenous tourism in the area under study which is Cameron Highlands are

$$\sum_{i=1}^{n} S_i = \sum_{j=1}^{7} P_j + \sum_{r=1}^{5} W_r + \sum_{s=1}^{5} C_s + \sum_{t=1}^{7} I_t + \sum_{u=1}^{4} T_u + \sum_{v=1}^{4} NP_v$$

Where $\sum_{j=1}^{7} P_j$ - proposed strategies related to product, $\sum_{r=1}^{5} W_r$ - proposed strategies related to workforce, $\sum_{s=1}^{5} C_s$ - proposed strategies related to community, $\sum_{t=1}^{7} I_t$ - proposed strategies related to infrastructure, $\sum_{u=1}^{4} T_u$ - proposed strategies related to typology, $\sum_{v=1}^{4} NP_v$ - proposed strategies related to national policies.

Result and Discussion

The developed SWOT matrix for this study is shown in Table 1. Each SWOT categories were further refined to six criteria which are products, workforce, community, infrastructure, typology and national policies. Each criterion is evaluated in terms of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats if indigenous tourism is explored in this region.

The strengths of this product rely heavily on the uniqueness of their culture and heritage expressed in their lifestyles and handicrafts. Another factor is the abundance of resources that could be gathered from the surrounding forest to produce these cultural products which includes handicrafts and traditional huts. Most of the indigenous individuals surveyed have good knowledge and skills in producing these products which consequently provide enough manpower to exploit indigenous tourism in this community. Almost 45 percent of the respondents have attained at least a lower secondary educational level. Absorption of employment by economic sectors shows that 39.0 percent are already involved in the tourism industry. Since the area under study is a tourist destination area, the indigenous community attitudes and exposure towards tourism (measured on a Likert scale of five) scored a high mean of 3.8 and 3.9 respectively. Infrastructures have also been well maintained and all settlements are equipped with the basic facilities. The settlements are usually located away from the busy township, nestled away in the thick forest with lush greeneries and cool fresh air.

This study also details the foreseen weaknesses if indigenous tourism is to be introduced to this community. The main issues include the market unreadiness of the product and the lack of proper tools and manpower to embark on successful marketing strategies. Since the project involves the whole community, profit after being shared would be minimal for each individual. This acts as a disincentive since another source of income is required to supplement the needs of the family. Their partially nomadic way of life remains a constrained to the 9-5 work hour's routine. Although most respondents can communicate in the national language, most are not able to speak the English language. Environmental issue that needs to be addressed is the lack of systematic waste disposal where most households do open burning to rid of their waste. Recycling is still at its introductory phase where small traders would come by the settlements to buy used paper, glass bottles and tin cans. Public facilities especially public transportation is almost nonexistence in some remote settlement areas. Since the region is mountainous, some areas have no access to telecommunication signals which makes it difficult in times of emergency. Hence, there is frequent breakdown in the dissemination of information between JHEOA and the community.

Embarking on indigenous tourism venture would provide an opportunity for the recognition of this product both domestically and internationally. As in Australia and New Zealand where this type of tourism has garnered worldwide exposure, indigenous tourism product from Malaysia too can be exploited with its own unique signature to give an economic advantage to this community. Product growth in terms of new demand for other related tourism activities would spur the creation of linkages between the community and other agencies. Entrepreneurship would also mushroom among individuals in the community with the development of small cottage industry to meet the new demand. Threats would include market globalization and commercialization. These would erode the distinctive nature and traits of the community to meet the new demand and also to ensure perpetual demand. Deforestation due to the need for more agricultural land and housing projects would eventually deny the community of its rich fauna and flora environment. Exploitation of labor is another threat that needs to be considered seriously. Some respondents have mention not being paid, underpaid and made to work for long hours.

The TOWS matrix is used to outline strategic planning procedures if this venture is to be undertaken. All the strategies are outlined in detail as shown in Table 2. A joint concerted effort between the community, the government and non-governmental bodies is needed to realize the success of this venture. The community in its initial stage needs to be guided and trained in the specific skills that is required to meet the new demand.

Table 1. SWOT Matrix for indigenous tourism potentials in

SWOT	STRENGHTS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Products	• Uniqueness; • Craft, • culture, • lifestyles, • experience not destination, • Abundance of Resource; • forest produce (seasonal) • Forest provides raw materials for crafts etc • ungle tracks	• Handicrafts; • Not market ready • Dependent on availability of resources • Marketing; • Lack communicative skills • Dependent on middleman • Not 'business ready' • Signature events and festivals performed elsewhere • No linkage with tour operators • Profit; • Low • Disincentives since they have to supplement with other source of income	• Recognition; • Development of Malaysian indigenous tourism • Signature products • Product growth; • Interactive activities • Demand for other related types of tourism • Networks; • Creation of linkages between agencies and the community	• Market globalization • Cheaper imitation products • Products become too consumer oriented • Deforestation • Resources become scarce • Settlements lost the beauty of its flora and fauna
Work force	• Skill; • Skilled in traditional crafts culture • Allocation of Fund for training • Experience in recreational involving indigenous people	• Lifestyle; • Not profit/wealth driven • Not used to 9-5 working environment • Service quality; • Communications barriers • Reserved by nature	• Entrepreneurs among indigenous community • Creation of quality workforce amongst indigenous people • Increase awareness on the importance of education and training in the	• Employment: • malpractices/Labor exploitation • Low pay • Long working hours

	• Education; • Sufficient educational attainment	• Not English speaking • Lack of skill and educated staff	community	
Community	• Attitudes • Good attitudes towards tourist • Good Communication • Exposure • Participated community, national events • Easy to organize	• Environmental issues; • Waste Disposal • Forest being explored for resources • Barriers; • Unable to speak English • Some not speaking the Malay language • Literacy level • Participation level must be coercing	• Promote sustainable tourism practices • Link with other agencies in the development of programmes with • the community • Economic gains in terms of employment for the community	• • Compromise culture for commercialization of products
Infrastructure	• Settlements; • Easily accessible • clean water • electricity (Solar) • Surrounding areas; • Access • Lodging available • Tourist Information Counters	• Distance; • Some settlements are far and remote • Difficult to reach in times of emergency • Public Facilities; • Lack of tourist support services ie public transport • Will incur cost to develop attractions facilities for tourist • No signage/website etc • Winding roads	• Growth in international tourist due to cheaper and better air transport • Development of cottage industry especially in making cultural handicrafts	• Competition between agricultural (vegetables and tea plantation) activities for land • Limited coverage of internet and telecommunication servicers

Typology	• Rich in flora and fauna , • Beautiful landscape formed by tea plantations • Fresh air • Cool weather conducive mountain climate	• Difficult and costly to build facilities for tourist due to the treacherous terrain.	• Preservation of flora and fauna	• Landslide especially in rainy season • Environmental degradation due to unplanned development
National policies	• Already a tourist destination area	• Awareness; • Lack of information dissemination regarding benefits provided for the community	• New tourism product that can increase demand for Malaysia tourism	• Land ownership of the indigenous community

Table 2. TOWS Matrix Strategic Planning for the Development
of Indigenous; Tourism in Cameron Highland

TOWS		External Opportunities (O)	External Threats (T)
Internal Strength (S)	Product (P)	**S-O (Max- Max Strategy)** P1. Capture domestic and international market by branding strategies P2. Develop networking between local and international agencies especially tour agencies. P3. Develop innovation on products	**S-T (Max-Min Strategy)** P3. Capture product uniqueness to have an edge in the competition against imitation products . P4. Promote awareness on forest preservation practices.
	Workforce (W)	W1. Human resource development via training in relevant areas including soft skills. W2. Development of entrepreneurial skills amongst individuals in the community.	W3. Develop link with Labor Ministry in setting up a Bureau Complaints Board handle by JHEOA in Cameron Highlands to cater labor issues.
	Community (C)	C1. Positive attitudes should be manipulated to	C4. Setting up a panel consisting of the elders and head of settlements to oversee and form guidelines to avoid over commercialisation.

		maximize tourism positive impacts especially in terms of economic gains.	I3. Development of tourist attraction areas should be chosen away from areas with intense agricultural activities
		C2. Development of products should include effort from majority	
		C3. Partnership to restore history/museum	I4. Public telephone lines should be provided for communications in the settlement areas
	Infrastructure (I)	I1. Provide comprehensive tourism package that includes transports and accommodation facilities I2. Develop cottage industries zones where economies of scale can reduce operating cost.	
	Typology (T)	T1. Development of Reserved Forest for flora and fauna attractions and cultural huts	T2. Sustainable development practices must be emphasized to preserve the natural beauty of the landscape in Cameron Highlands
	National Policies (NP)	NP1: Incorporate indigenous tourism as part of tourism attraction in Cameron Highlands	NP2. Lobby land rights to the community before launching this project
Internal Weaknesses (W)	Product (P)	**W-O (Min-Max Strategy)** P5. Link with professional agencies that would be able to advise on strategies especially on marketing aspects	**W-T (Min-Min Strategy)** P6. Focus on indigenous products by taking into consideration the community's specialization.
	Workforce (W)	W4. Develop relevant training programs to provide skill and knowledge including entrepreneurship	P7. Innovation on mixing new raw materials in production of cultural products (eg. Handicrafts and huts) to preserve the forest.
	Community (C)	C4. Systematic and well-planned waste disposal to preserve the flora and fauna attractions.	W5. Form labor organization to have a stronger and united front in matters pertaining to labor exploitation issues.
	Infrastructure (I)	l5.Link with international and domestic tour operators where transportation will be included in the package I6. Trained tourist guides amongst the indigenous community	C5. Implement phase by phase development to keep visitation at manageable level. Estimate level of optimum success in each phase considering issue of over commercialization. I7. Develop settlements that have good basic infrastructure facilities and optimal size land area reserved for future expansion
	Typology (T)	T3. Adaption of cultural huts that can be less costly and able to be built on rough mountainous areas	
	National Policies (NP)	NP3. Hold briefings to deepen understanding and awareness of the project to community members	T4. Probable location for development must be

		(stakeholders) and the important role of each individual member. This generates pride and further expedite the process of making indigenous tourism a part of Malaysia tourism parcel	assessed by relevant authorities and supported by the Environmental Investigation Agency. NP4. The government of Malaysia must detail areas that belongs to the community to avoid intrusion of agricultural activities

Conclusion

Indigenous tourism has great potential to be developed in Cameron Highlands. Tourist either from within the country or abroad will be able to learn and understand the indigenous community's culture and heritage. It also provides opportunity for tourist to interact with this community and experience their lifestyles. Through this, indigenous tourism product in Malaysia will have an avenue for international recognition and consequently bring positive impacts to the indigenous community especially in terms of economic benefits.

The proposed tourism product relies heavily on the strength of its uniqueness as it is a product develops within the confine of their culture and tradition. Hence, measures should be taken to ensure commercialization of this product is kept within an acceptable limit. The relevant authorities should play a major role to ensure that indigenous tourism development will first benefit the community.

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