

## **A Multi-dimensional Responsible Rural Tourism and Capacity Framework for Sustainable Tourism in Malaysia**



Developing a responsible rural tourism and capacity framework is a tedious task for any destination due to the multi-dimensional nature of the sector that includes the economics, socio-cultural and the environmental dimensions. Malaysia is regarded as a haven for rural tourism. In 2012, the Malaysia Homestay Experience programme won the UNWTO Ulysses Award for Innovation in Public Policy and Governance. Nonetheless, the very concept of pristine rural tourism is confused with massive “green washing” that is destroying many of the unspoiled destinations with little emphasis is put on monitoring the responsibilities of all the stakeholders and the capacity of the destination to accommodate the rising number of tourist. Rural tourism in Malaysia encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Nonetheless, in the last decade, the concept of rural tourism has melded with mainstream tourism and resulting in it losing its distinctness.

With this challenge in mind, this extensive study aims to understand and propose a responsible rural tourism and capacity framework that is able to balance the natural and economic environment in line with Malaysia’s Economic Transformation Programme where rural tourism is expected to alleviate from low yield to high yield economy. This will be achieved by developing suitable indicators to make the rural tourism business model sustainable and healthy.

The first three years of the 5-year research (2011-2016) are in developing the fundamental aspects of the study, with emphasis on the establishment of baseline data and carrying out a situational analysis at the fifteen selected study areas across West and East Malaysia for developing the indicators. The final two years will be in evaluation of the performance of these sites using the developed indicators. Hence, this fundamental study is required to understand the various multi-dimensions that are essential in investigating the relationships between different tourism models and how they are closely linked to the local economies and environment in key “natural” destinations in Malaysia.

The rural tourism prototype called “Rural Tourism 3.0” is developed to assess, advice and monitor the economic, socio-cultural and environmental responsible impact of rural tourism destinations using an integrated real-time decision support system. It is envisaged that only with the help of these state of the art technologies can all stakeholders benefit and be able to manage the fragile eco-systems in rural tourism destinations efficiently and effectively. By having a pro-active systematic management of all rural tourism destinations in the country, the quality and management of these sites will be exceptional.

Keywords: rural tourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism, environment management, multi-dimensional

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