

Participation of the Bidayuh Community In Tourism Developmental Initiatives in Bau, Malaysia

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Abstract: This paper presents the cultural attributes owned by the Bidayuh community in Malaysia that could be utilized for tourism development. The Bidayuh community is also known as the 'people of land' and well equipped with their cultural products like 'Ogong' gong ensemble, gigantic drums and a unique bamboo percussion instrument known as the 'pratuakng'. Apart from that, this study also reveals the readiness of the native community to participate in tourism activities and obstacles faced by them to develop tourism in their area. The cultural uniqueness of the community is recognized by both the international tourists and the other Malaysian communities. However, the development of tourism to expose the culture of the community to outsiders is still questionable. Initial investigations done shows that the community is willing to involve in tourism to share their culture with outsiders although no effective developmental programs by the government. Thus this study is important to create awareness to outsiders about the untapped indigenous resources to enhance cultural commercialization in a sustainable manner.

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1. Introduction

The Bidayuh are a minority indigenous group in Sarawak. This community constitute 8.1 percent of Sarawak's population and less than 1 percent of Malaysia's population. According to Geddes (1954), Bidayuh means "people of the interior". This community is well known for their longhouses and unique culture. They include six main subgroups: Bau-Bidayuh, Biatah-Penrissen, Bukar-Sadung, Padawan-Sembaan, Rara and Salako. All the subgroups were collectively called Land Dayak before officially named Bidayuh by the government in the year 2002.

2. Past studies on Cultural resource

Cultural resource usually drives the whole tourism business in the rural areas which would contribute for positive socio-economic development (Butler and Hinch, 2007). One of the most established definitions of cultural resources can be seen in the work of Pedford, (1996). According to the scholar, the cultural resources are any living history attributes such as rural customs and folklore, local and family traditions, values, beliefs, and common heritage. Arguably, culture is the main resource that indigenous people possess. Their unique customs and traditions are developed as attractions to lure tourists to the rural areas (Brown and Cave, 2010; Cohen, 2007; Liu, 2009). Thus, it can be said that cultural resource is a must for any community as an identity to show their uniqueness to the outsiders.

Kunasekaran et al., (2013) mentioned that culture and the indigenous community are two components that are strongly attached and interdependent. The genuine ownership of culture makes the community to be respected and admired by outsiders as a unique attraction that needs to be highlighted (Liu, 2008). Thus, tourism used to enhance the economic and non-economic benefits of the local community (Kunasekaran et al., 2011).

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach. The data was collected by using naturalistic inquiry technique. This particular technique allowed the researcher to gather existing and emerging (unexpected) themes from the key informants.

4. Analysis and interpretations

Community Participation

According to the community, they are consistently involved in the development of tourism planning with government agencies, particularly the Ministry of Tourism but most decisions are only made by the ministry.

"As the head of my community, I will be called by the government officers to discuss Matters on tourism development planning and also for other issues like education and transportation. However, in the end the decision will be made regarding tourism only by the officers. Meaning I just sit in the meetings and discuss but my idea is not very important" (Dihoi

Anak Nyawen, 59 years old, male, Krokong-Tringus).

Another respondent said that he agree to engage in ecotourism development plan together with government agencies , but the overall result is only made by the government alone.

"I agree that's the Involvement with the government to Develop tourism is very important because they know what to do. They have developed tourism in many places. Look at Langkawi.. how government create tourism for the people there. But most of the times, when we discuss with the governmental agencies , the final decision will be made by them. Then why invite us for the discussion?" (Jesen Anak Laun, 45 years old, male, Kpg. Puak Krokong).

Therefore, the community suggest at times to come should have two-way communication to strengthen the tourism sector planning in their area.

"If can they (government) please listen to us also . I am not educated but this is our place . We know this place better than The Outsiders . I agree we still do not have knowledge on many things like the internet but about our own place , we know better" (Dihoi Anak Nyawen, 59 years old, male).

"Therefore, I suggest in the future, we must be given the opportunity to make a decision to strengthen the tourism sector planning in our area. (Abam Anak Asoi, 55 years old, male, Kpg. Pengkalan Tebang).

Resources

The community rely mainly on their culture to attract tourists. Their longhouses and dance with costumes are considered as their main cultural tourism products. According to them, they always want to show their culture to outsiders.

"We have the uniqueness that the city people do not have. They might have money, but we have our culture which can be converted to money" (Dihoi Anak Nyawen, 59 years old, male, Krokong-Tringus).

"Our longhouses, the costumes, the languages, the worships and the Gongs are so special that you can't find anywhere...Every time when the Mat Salleh (westerners) visit, they want to see our dance, they forget everything and dance with us...That is what I meant by culture." (Jesen Anak Laun, 45 years old, male, Kpg. Puak Krokong).

Apart from that, the natural resources available in their area is adequate. However, many of these resources have not been identified and have not been developed to make as tourism products. So he suggested there should be cooperation to attract tourists to the area from government agencies for infrastructure . He himself felt that they did in terms of financial constraints for tourism projects.

"There are lots of things (resources) here in this area. But we do not have the power (strength) to do it ourself. We must find out the important resources and convert it for tourism attraction. We have to promote our cave more. Many Tourists will come . In this matter we need the government and some funding "" (Jesen Anak Laun, 45 years old, male, Kpg. Puak Krokong).

"Resources available in our area is too many. But many of these resources have not been identified and unexplored like Budu Cave to be made as tourism attraction . So I suggest that there should be cooperation to attract tourists to the area from government agencies. I personally feel that there is a constraint in terms of finance for tourism projects." (Abam Anak Asoi, 55 years old, male, Kpg. Pengkalan Tebang).

Generally, the community believe that they are rich of resources especially their cultural resource. They agree that their culture is something that people could not see elsewhere in the world. Apart from that, they are rich natural resources. However, it must be explored and developed as tourism products. Thus, they suggested there should be cooperation to attract tourists to their area.

Tourism benefits

The community classified the benefits of tourism in the form of economic and no-economic impact. Surprisingly, they are not so interested about the income from tourism, but cultural sustainability is much more crucial for them.

"The tourism sector may indeed be generating income and employment for villagers, especially young people so that they will not migrate to cities. With the existence of tourism, they can amplify their culture by showing Bidayuh culture and ethnic heritage to tourists. This will make the culture not to become extinct" (Dihoi Anak Nyawen, 59 years old, male).

According to another respondent, tourism also creates environmental awareness for the community and tourists.

"Here, we show the visitors how important the trees are to us. We must protect them (the trees). The tourist will also teach us to maintain cleanliness in our village. Our youngsters must learn from this. Who will visit our village if it is dirty?" (Abam Anak Asoi, 55 years old, male, Kpg. Pengkalan Tebang).

Thus, it can be concluded that the conservation of the culture is the main benefit that the community receive from tourism. Apart from that, tourism creates job opportunities in the village. This makes the younger generation stay at the village with their family. Tourism also creates environmental awareness to the community and visitors.

Conclusion

The Bidayuh community is eager to be involved in tourism business. This happens because they realized that tourism will not only provide them financial support, but also helps to protect and sustain their culture. However, they are still not genuinely participating in any tourism developmental programs by the government. Although they are included in the planning process, the final decision only made by the governmental agencies. Thus, the community hopes that they are valued as equal partners by the government before taking any decision to develop tourism in their area.

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