

**VOLUNTEER TOURISM IMPACTS TOWARDS HOST
COMMUNITY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRY
A CASE STUDY OF BATU PUTEH COMMUNITY TOURISM
COOPERATIVE LTD (KOPEL BHD), KINABATANGAN, SABAH**

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
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To the King and Queen of my heart, beloved Abah and Mama,
Brothers and sisters (Abang Syidi, Kak Cuya, Kak Ju, Abang Aril and Ami),
and My Mighty Knight.

Thank you for the great and never ending love, continuous supports, tolerance,
encouragements and confidence in me. Your endless supports and tonnes
of prayers are really meaningful and deeply appreciated.

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ABSTRACT

Volunteer tourism impacts refer to the potential positive and negative impacts generated by volunteer tourist during and after volunteering in a specific host destination. As previous research merely focusing on the impacts gained by volunteer tourist and less research is done with respect to host destination perspective, this research is aimed to address the benefits gained by the host community in the context of developing country. In order to discover and understand what exactly gained by host community, this research is done by applying a case study research approach along with in-depth interview with the local representatives in one of the best volunteer tourism host destination in Kinabatangan, Sabah. Researcher has lined out several important inquiries of the research such as what are exactly gained by the host community through volunteer tourism? How much does the host community benefits from the volunteer activities? Were volunteer tourism activities creates more tangible or intangible benefits to the locals? And which of the benefits is preferred and valued more by the locals? The data collected have been analysed into three main themes which are social/ livelihood benefits, economic benefits and environmental benefits. The results of this study illustrate impacts experienced and valued by local community varied based on their acceptance of volunteer tourist, years of involvement in volunteer tourism and relationship or bonding generated with volunteer tourist. Based on the key findings, this study concludes that host community valued volunteer tourists most on the social/livelihood benefits generated by them compared to financial benefits as usually expected in other researches. Whilst, the potential negative impacts of volunteer tourism such as dependency as proven in less developed countries did not occurred in the study area due to KOPEL's proper planning and set up as tourism cooperative or as a community based tourism.

ABSTRAK

Impak pelancongan sukarela (*volunteer tourism*) yang dikaji di dalam kajian ini ialah merujuk kepada impak positif dan negatif yang dihasilkan oleh pelancong sukarela semasa dan selepas menjalani aktiviti sukarela di destinasi pelancongan sukarela tertentu. Kebanyakan penyelidikan terdahulu hanya memberi tumpuan kepada impak yang diperolehi oleh pelancong sukarela dan kajian yang melihat impak yang dijana dari perspektif penduduk setempat (*host community*) adalah sangat sedikit. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara mendalam faedah yang diperolehi oleh penduduk setempat dalam konteks negara membangun. Bagi mengetahui dan memahami apa sebenarnya yang diperolehi oleh penduduk setempat, kajian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan pendekatan kajian kes dan teknik temubual terperinci (*in-depth interview*) dengan wakil-wakil masyarakat tempatan di salah satu daripada destinasi pelancongan sukarela yang diiktiraf antara terbaik di Malaysia iaitu di Kinabatangan, Sabah. Beberapa persoalan utama telah digariskan di dalam kajian ini antaranya apakah sebenarnya yang diperolehi oleh masyarakat tuan rumah melalui pelancongan sukarela? Berapa banyakkah manfaat yang diterima oleh masyarakat setempat dari aktiviti sukarela? Adakah aktiviti pelancongan sukarela mewujudkan lebih banyak impak yang boleh diukur atau sebaliknya? Dan apakah faedah yang lebih penting dan lebih dihargai oleh penduduk tempatan? Data yang dikumpul telah dianalisa kepada tiga tema utama iaitu faedah sosial, faedah ekonomi dan faedah alam sekitar. Hasil analisa menunjukkan impak dan faedah yang berbeza diterima oleh penduduk setempat berdasarkan tahap penerimaan terhadap pelancong sukarela, tempoh penglibatan dalam pelancongan sukarela dan hubungan yang terjalin antara mereka dan pelancong sukarela. Berdasarkan semua penemuan utama kajian, dapat disimpulkan bahawa penduduk tempatan lebih menghargai pelancong sukarela kerana faedah sosial yang dijana oleh mereka berbanding dengan manfaat kewangan seperti yang biasanya dijangka dan dibuktikan dalam kajian-kajian lain. Sementara itu, kesan-kesan negatif pelancongan sukarela seperti kebergantungan penduduk setempat kepada pelancong sukarela yang berlaku di negara-negara yang kurang maju, tidak berlaku di kawasan kajian kerana KOPEL ditubuhkan melalui perancangan yang teliti dan matlamat yang jelas sebagai pelancongan koperasi atau sebagai pelancongan berasaskan komuniti.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

KOPEL	-	Batu Puteh Community Tourism Cooperative Limited
MESCOT	-	Model Ecologically Sustainable Community Conservation and Tourism
NGO	-	Non Government Organisation
GVI	-	Global Vision International

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the rise of demand for participating in voluntary projects such as community based activities or conservation activities has made volunteer tourism a potential niche market in tourism industry. Existing studies has discussed and verified that volunteer tourism has the capacity to bring about positive impacts to local communities in host destinations. As one of the alternative tourism, it is understood that volunteer tourism is a form of tourism that rebukes mass tourism and the consumptive mindset it engenders as evoked by Wearing (2001). Wearing (2001) also stated that volunteer tourism has the potential to induce change, specifically value change and changed consciousness among the local community. However, there are also debates on how volunteer tourism may also induced negative impacts to the local community in the host destinations particularly in less developed countries. This is in line with what addressed by Guttentag (2009) which that “even though volunteer tourist’s benevolence may seem refreshing, there appear to be numerous possible negative impacts of volunteer tourism that are receiving little attention”. Thus, volunteer tourism can be perceived as the new tourism with its own advantages and disadvantages and in depth understanding on how they are organised and operated may indicate a better picture in identifying its impacts to the host community.

1.1 Background of the Research

Alternative tourism is an emerging tourism sector around the world as well as in Malaysia. One of the established alternative tourism types is volunteer tourism or 'voluntourism'. Volunteer tourism is a potential niche market today due to a growing demand for participation in voluntary projects mostly in community-based and conservation activities.

Alternative tourism is defined by Wearing (2001) as a form of tourism that rebukes mass tourism and the consumptive mindset it engenders and instead offers alternative, more discriminating, socially and environmentally sustaining tourist experiences. On the other hand, volunteer tourists are defined as those who 'volunteer' in an organised way to undertake holidays that may involve the adding or alleviating the material poverty to some group in society, the restoration of certain environment, or research into aspect of society or environment (Wearing, 2002). All these elements or activities explained in the definition of volunteer tourism above will be done and happen in the recipient or host country or area, therefore it will definitely create impacts to the recipient as well as the volunteers.

However, there are less literatures focusing on the impacts of volunteer tourism to the host community. The current literatures were not sufficiently concentrated upon the experiences and attitudes of the recipients towards volunteering activities in their respective areas. There is also comment by Higgins-Desbiolles, and Russell-Mundine (2008) in Lyons and Wearing (2008); saying that literatures thus far is less focusing on the impacts of volunteer tourism activities to the host community or those who are excluded from the volunteer tourism opportunity yet merely concentrating on impacts upon the volunteer tourists. Though there are several researches tried to identify the impacts generated by volunteer tourism to the host community, most of the case studies were the scenario of host community in a less developed host country. There is also lacking in discussions and understanding on how the underprivileged community or host

community can receive extraordinary benefits of volunteer tourism experiences. Therefore, a study is needed to discover what exactly gained by host community particularly in developing country like Malaysia and the detail research questions will be explained in the following sub-topic.

1.2 Problem Statement

Benefits to the local community or host community could be one of the main important criteria in introducing and executing volunteer tourism activities in a specified area with high volunteer tourism potentials. This is because many researches has founded out that volunteer tourism activities will create positive impacts to the volunteer tourists and somehow or rather it will create a positive impact to the host community too. A study is needed to uncover what are exactly gained by the host community by having volunteer tourism in their village? How much does the host community benefits from the volunteer activities done? In what aspects do the positive impacts being in effect? As most studies conducted in this area are mainly on their overall success of the community based tourism, a detail study on impacts of volunteer tourism is required as it is one of their main tourism products.

In order to analyse and examine each and every benefits of volunteer tourism activities to the recipients, it may requires deep understanding in the theoretical background of volunteer tourism and the possible impacts generated as it is one of the new form of alternative tourism. The successfulness of a volunteer tourism activity in the context of local development may be seen if the tangible and intangible benefits of it are examined. Thus it is important to identify whether volunteer tourism activities is creating more tangible or intangible benefits as what will be explained in the literature reviews chapter and which of it is preferred and valued more by the locals? The findings in the end may be creating a new view of

how local development can be done through implementing volunteer tourism activities.

1.3 Research Questions

From the background of the study and problem statement explained previously, there are 3 research questions derived. The research questions of this study are as follows:

- i. What are the impacts of volunteer tourism as an alternative tourism compared to mass tourism towards the host community?
- ii. What are the impacts generated by volunteer tourism in the context of economic, social or livelihood and natural environment in the study area?
- iii. What are the impacts that host community prefer and value more and why?

1.4 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to provide deep understanding and exploratory findings of the impacts of volunteer tourism to the host community particularly in developing country. This study is focusing on tangible and intangible benefits gained by the local people via volunteer tourism activities hosted in the study area. From the research questions above, there are several objectives set up for this study and the objectives are:

- i. To identify and compare the impacts created by volunteer tourism compared to mass tourism towards the host community.
- ii. To analyse the impacts generated by volunteer tourism in the study area in the context of economic, social or livelihood and natural environment.
- iii. To examine the most valued or preferred aspects of the benefits created by volunteer tourists to the host community and the reasons behind it.

1.5 Scope of the Research

This research focuses on the subjects as below:

1.5.1 Theoretical Framework

In order to have a strong base and clear understanding on alternative tourism and volunteer tourism, there are theories and ideas reviewed. These theories are really useful and important in guiding the whole process of this research. Concept of the analysis methods used for the purpose of this research is also reviewed. Theories and concept reviewed are volunteering, volunteer tourism, impacts of tourism and volunteer tourism and possible qualitative analysis. All these theories and concepts are explained in detail in Chapter 2. Besides theories, previous studies in both fields of studies were also reviewed.

1.5.2 Study Area

This research is done by taking a community cooperative of Batu Puteh Community Tourism Cooperative Limited (KOPEL) as the case study. Batu Puteh is a sub district of Kinabatangan District in the east of Sabah State, Malaysia or also known as Borneo. There are five villages in Mukim Batu Puteh involved in the cooperation which are; Kampung Batu Puteh, Kampung Menggaris, Kampung Perpaduan, Kampung Sentosa Jaya and Kampung Paris where most of the community is the *Orang Sungai* Tribe. It is located 600 metres from Kinabatangan River and 110 kilometres from southern part of Sandakan which takes about two hours travel. This area is chosen as there is a successful partnership has been build between the local community organisation (as a business entity) with several international tourism operators through various community-based projects and volunteer tourism activities.

1.5.3 Approaches to Data Collection

Case-based approach is selected to be use as the mean of data collecting for this research. This approach is use as it reflects the aim of this research towards examining the impacts of volunteer tourism activities in of Batu Puteh Community Tourism Cooperative Limited (KOPEL) which is one of the successful volunteer tourism hosts in Malaysia. In addition to that, as former researches shows a lack of highlights or focus in understanding the impacts of volunteer tourism to the host community, case study approach is therefore a suitable approach as this research can be considered as explanatory, exploratory and descriptive.

For the purpose of obtaining all required data, in-depth interview is used as the data collection technique. This is due to its appropriateness and more focus in

obtaining data for the case study topic. As qualitative interviews allow us to gain other person's perspective and provides us with deep understanding which may able to be made explicit. The in-depth interview will be done to the key persons of Batu Puteh Community Tourism Cooperative Limited (KOPEL) as they are the one in charge in the planning and management of the cooperative activities. Informal interviews are also done with local community to get a better picture from the ground handlers. The data collected and recorded are then used during data analysis. The detailed data collection technique and questions of the interview are discussed further in the Chapter 3, research methodology.

1.5.4 Data Required

1.5.4.1 KOPEL Representative Opinion on Volunteer Tourism Benefits Gained

KOPEL representative opinions will be obtained through in-depth interviews. All the responds will be recorded and transcribed. The data will be used in the analysis to finds out what is exactly gained by the local community and KOPEL as a business entity and which benefits is much appreciated.

1.5.4.2 List of Activities Done

Volunteer tourist itineraries and activities done will be collected through content analysis technique. These data are the supporting secondary data and will be used in data analysis and discussion stage.

1.5.4.3 Background Information of Volunteer Organisations Participated

Background information of volunteer organisations participated in volunteer tourism activities in the study area is important in understanding which benefits is generated by which type of volunteer tourist. Background information of volunteer tourist is also crucial as all responds from the respondents are based on types of volunteer tourist they experienced hosting.

1.5.5 Respondents

As there are arguments by some authors saying that case study research for example Yin (2003:10) in Ismail. H.N (2006:120) argued that a case study is a research that not representing 'sample' but intended to 'expand and generalised theories (analytic generalisation) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation)'. Thus, in order to provide the answer of this research, it is important for the researcher to address the right individuals or person in charge of volunteer activities conducted in of Batu Puteh Community Tourism Cooperative Limited (KOPEL). The individual or person in charge is the perspective respondents as they are who responsible with the planning process since the beginning of KOPEL and

they are the one who run the volunteer tourism programme in that particular area. Thus, as the volunteer tourism activities is planned and run by KOPEL, all 15 KOPEL representatives are the perspective respondents to ensure the better quality information is provided for this research. However, the exact respondents are determined through snowballing techniques that will be explained thoroughly in research methodology chapter.

1.6 Expected Contribution

At the end of the study, it is expected that the impacts of volunteer tourism towards the host community in Batu Puteh Community Tourism Cooperative Limited (KOPEL) area can be determined. From the impacts generated, a better idea and understanding on what actually induced by volunteer tourists towards the host community can be set up. On the other hand, the findings on social or livelihood, economic and environmental impacts generated may helps tourism planners toward having better and more responsive planning for destinations with volunteer tourism potentials particularly in developing country.

On the other hand, it is expected that this study may contributing as a preliminary guide for future volunteer projects with specific aim. This is possible as this research will provide information on the most valued benefits by the locals that will lead to the selection of suitable volunteer tourist to be engaged with in order to achieve certain aims. However, in determining detail tangible and intangible impacts of volunteer, more questions need to be asked and more respondent should be interviewed. Thus, it is expected that further research will be done in order to answer all the raised questions.

1.7 Significance of Research

As mentioned earlier, benefits of volunteer tourism to the host community can be considered as one of the important criteria in introducing and executing volunteer tourism activities in an area with high volunteer tourism potential. Moreover, many researches has founded out that volunteer tourism activities will create positive impacts to volunteer tourists and may positively affect the host community too. However, there is less exposure or research done in understanding what is exactly gained by the local community? How much does the host community benefits from the volunteer activities done? In what aspects do the positive impacts being in effective? And what benefits are actually appreciated and valued more by the local community? Thus, this research will try to explore and explain this phenomenon in order to provide researchers with the real phenomenon of volunteer tourism in developing country or Malaysia particularly. It should be noted in that the notion of ‘developed country’ in this research is perceived as the first world country and the ‘less developed country’ is the third world country. At the end of this research, it is hope that a better understanding is provided to the readers towards the knowledge on impacts of volunteer tourism to the host community.

1.8 Research Design

This research is done in five different stages which are preliminary stage, literature review, data collection stage, data analysis, discussion and lastly recommendation and conclusion. All stages are described as below and sequences of the processes are shown in Figure 1.1.

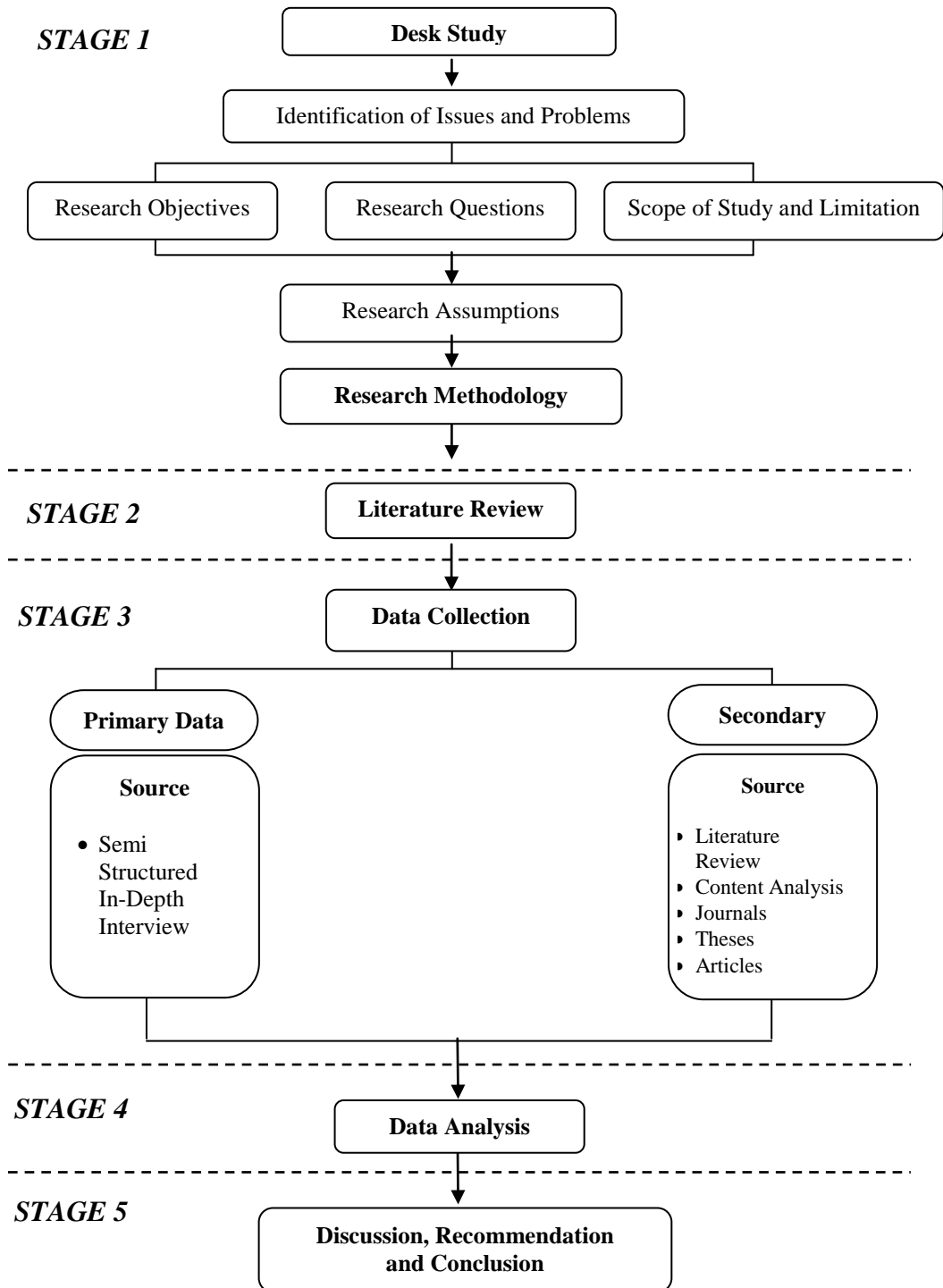


Figure 1.1: Research Design Process

1.8.1 Stage 1-Preliminary Stage

This research is done based on issues that have been identified at the very first place. At this stage, determination of the study goal and objectives is also derived based on the scope and limitation of the research. Moreover, this stage will also comprise research questions and research assumptions. In order to have a strong base for understanding of the background of the problems and issues, preliminary literature review and reading are done during this stage.

1.8.2 Stage 2-Literature Review

Literature reviews are done to give a better picture and deep understanding of the whole research. This stage will engage in information collection which includes readings, referencing and detailed understanding in the theories and principles in order to help the researcher in carrying out this research. The main aim of the literature review is to identify the exact meaning of volunteer tourism as an alternative tourism while at the same time grasp deeper understanding on diverse type of volunteer tourism activities conducted in Malaysia and outside Malaysia. This stage will also dig deeply in creating clear and solid understanding of impacts of volunteer tourism in all related sectors such as environmental development, economics, social and rural developments. The main sources of information were from books, journals, publications and discussion notes. A study design or research methodology will also be developed in this stage but the detailed methodology will further explained in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

1.8.3 Stage 3-Data Collection

Required data for the study can be divided into two major categories which are primary data and secondary data. Primary data will be obtained through semi structured in-depth interview with KOPEL representative and informal interview with local people. For secondary data and information, they will be gathered from record tracking or documentation analysis of volunteer activities programme itineraries and KOPEL financial record as well as volunteer tourism organisation official websites. Previous researches and journals were also reviewed as secondary sources of information.

1.8.4 Stage 4-Data Analysis

All data gained during desk study and field work is analysed in this stage. Documentation analysis data will be explained and presented in a suitable way of answering the research questions as well as aiding the findings generated through in-depth interviews conducted. On the other hand, data collected from the interviews will be analysed in narrative way and interpreted with detail descriptions.

1.8.5 Stage 5- Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

The final stage of this research is the formulation of recommendations and conclusion from the details discussion of each finding. All findings and analyses will then conclude to provide recommendation for the study area. The recommendation can be either proposing improvements in KOPEL management especially regarding

volunteer tourism activities or recommendation of guidelines or lessons to be learnt by other parties or business entity before undertaking volunteer tourism in other areas identified with such potentials.

1.9 Chapter Summary

Through out this chapter, basic information on the overall aim of the research has been outlined. This chapter is an important chapter as it provides the researcher and readers with general understanding and specific objectives of the research. There are also other important things explained such as the research questions, the scope of the study and the overall research design. As this chapter described briefly on the objectives and expected output of the study, a strong theoretical background of the research is needed to provide a clear direction of the whole process in completing this research. Thus, the next chapter will be explaining on the theoretical framework related to this research.

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