Critical Success Factors of Community Based Ecotourism: Case Study of Miso Walai Homestay, Kinabatangan, Sabah

Amran Hamzah 1 and Nor Haniza Mohamad 2

1 Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 Skudai, Johor, Malaysia.
2 Tourism and Hospitality Department, Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan, 81750 Pasir Gudang, Johor, Malaysia.
*Corresponding author: merang@utm.my

Abstract: Community Based Tourism or Community Based Ecotourism (CBT/CBET) is often regarded as a panacea by creating an alternative source of livelihood once protected areas are gazetted around or close to local communities who used to be dependent on the forest resources. Previous studies have shown that CBT projects are easy to start but difficult to sustain, especially those that were initiated by international donors. Without proper planning, management and monitoring, CBT initiatives are often not commercially viable and its initial promise as an alternative source of livelihood seldom fully materialise. Based on a longitudinal study from 2005 to 2010, the authors analysed the performance of Miso Walai Homestay in the Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah in relation to 3 other CBT projects in the same area. The researchers used the qualitative approach combining semi-structured interviews and participant observation etc. to model the critical success factors that ensured the success and sustainability of Miso Walai Homestay as it moves up the value chain. Dynamic leadership and organisation, the setting up of a tourism cooperative, partnerships with government agencies and tourism industry players and a strong commitment to biodiversity conservation have made Miso Walai Homestay into a model Community Based Ecotourism initiative.

Key words: Community based tourism; Community based ecotourism, critical success factors, Miso Walai Homestay

Introduction

The philosophy of protected area management has shifted from a biocentric approach that was based on the pristine/wilderness nature of Parks in the United States, where local people are excluded except for tourists (e.g. Yellowstone), to a more anthropocentric approach that tried to link protected areas with overall socio-economic development while acknowledging the key role of local and indigenous groups (Phillips 2003). This transformation was triggered by the 3rd World Parks Congress, held in Bali in 1982, which is now considered as a watershed event. In the effort to include local communities in the planning and management of protected areas, alternative sources of livelihood had to be created to compensate for their loss of income from extracting and selling forest resources. More often than not, Community Based Tourism (CBT) or Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) is regarded as a panacea given that CBT/CBET is often perceived as being small scale, low density, low impact, controlled by the local community and generates direct economic benefits to the community - hence compatible with the conservation agenda. What is becoming standard practice especially in developing countries is the almost uncritical acceptance of CBT as the source of livelihood for local