

 <p>INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH JOURNAL of BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY WWW.IARJOURNAL.COM</p> <p>IARJ - BT</p>	 <p>INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH JOURNAL</p> <p>ISSN :2289-8433</p> <p>International Academic Research Journal of Business and Technology</p> <p>Journal homepage : www.iarjournal.com</p>
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Agro Tourism Potential in Malaysia

Norudin Mansor, Kartini Mat Rashid, Zuraida Mohamad, Zalinawati Abdullah
Faculty of Business Management
Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu, MALAYSIA

Corresponding email: norudinm@tganu.uitm.edu.my

Article Information

Keywords

Agro tourism potential,
Environmental,
Social benefits,
Facilities,
Entrepreneurs

Abstract

Tourism is now well recognized as an engine of growth in the various economies of the world. Malaysia is one of several other countries that have transformed their economies by developing their tourism potential. Tourism has greater capacity to generate large-scale employment and additional income sources to the skilled and unskilled workforce. Today the concept of traditional tourism has been changed like the emergence of Agro-Tourism. Agro-tourism is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the visitor has the opportunity to get close awareness with agricultural areas, agricultural occupations, local products, traditional food and the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural elements and traditions of the local communities. This paper attempted to discuss the relationship between the environment, social benefits, and facilities as the relevant construct by observing their significant role in assessing Agro Tourism Potential. All the related information to address the objective of the study were extracted through the survey conducted at the potential site involving the residents, entrepreneurs and the farmers. Through correlation analysis the result revealed that all the three constructs found to be related in promoting the Agro tourism potential at Cameron Highland, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Agro Tourism is a direct expansion of ecotourism, which encourages visitors to experience the limelight of agricultural life at first hand. The success of Agro Tourism industry can be portrayed only if there is a strong support from rural communities. As rural people realized the benefits of sustainable development brought about by similar forms of nature travel then only agricultural tourism, farm tourism, and farm visits are able to accommodate Agro Tourism industry (Colton & Bissix, 2005). Agro Tourism, as it is defined, involves any agriculturally-based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. Agro tourism has different definitions in different parts of the world, and sometimes refers specifically to farm stays. Elsewhere, Agro Tourism includes activities such as buying a product direct from a farm stand, navigating a corn maze, picking fruit, feeding animals, or staying at a farm (Dennis and Richard, 2004). It also involves any income-generating activities conducted on a working farm or having fun for the enjoyment and education of visitors at the tourism sites. It includes the interpretation of the natural, cultural, historical and environmental assets of the land and people working on it (George, 2008).

A common characteristic of alternative and farm tourism, unlike most forms of conventional tourism, is that the visitors stay in or near the home of the host (Dernoi, 1981). Apart from that, rural tourism is based on a rural

environment in general terms, whereas farm tourism depends on the farm or the farmer (Nilsson, 2002). However, in the Malaysian context, agro tourism could be defined as an activity, which maximizes the use of farm settings and the environment, with hospitality in promoting tourism activities. In a more comprehensive approach Agro Tourism is also associated with cultural and heritage values that will further strengthen the uniqueness of the rural community. The Malaysian government, through the 8th Malaysian Plan, has opened opportunities for farmers to expand and diversify agricultural products and their related industries, with the expectation that it will enhance Agro Tourism sectors.

The importance of local participation in tourism was also stressed in the 7th Malaysian Plan 1996 to 2000. With all these supports, Cameron Highlands was gazetted to be an important place for Agro Tourism destination not only in Malaysia but within the South East Asian region. Gearing to be as one of the popular tourist destinations. It is located about 214 km north of Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. At the height of 1500 m above sea level, it enjoys a cool climate, with temperatures between 12°C and not higher than 25 °C. Originally the rivers and small streams of the Cameron Highlands can be categorized as fast flowing, cool, clean, and clear water with high oxygen content and supporting sensitive aquatic invertebrates. Cameron Highlands is characterized by undisturbed nature with virgin and original mountain forest streams of (ecological and chemical) outstanding quality, intensive agriculture and urbanization.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The concept of Agro Tourism encouraged visitors to experience agricultural life in a natural setting. The momentum of its activities strongly relies on rural communities that grasped the benefits of sustainable development brought about by similar forms of nature travel. Visitors have the opportunity to work in the fields alongside real farmers and wade knee-deep in the sea with fishermen hauling in their nets. But the issues are, will Agro Tourism cause pollution to the environment due to the unawareness about the physical development of the agriculture activities. Other than that, do the facilities provided in Cameron Highlands are adequate and convenient enough for the tourist to meet the needs and wants. In addition will the Agro Tourism activities be able to provide better employment opportunities among the society itself.

With the potential opportunities that can be captured through Agro Tourism activities such as improving the income of small agricultural households and other economic growth (Dorra, 2006), not much attention has been given to agricultural runoff (pesticides and fertilizers) and treatment of urban area sewage entering the river system; causing severe water pollution. The issues of polluted drinking water supply, the severity of several chemicals effects like fecal bacteria, organic pollution, erosion and runoff, solid waste, remained questionable due to lack of management supervision.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the level of perception on facilities, environmental, social benefit and Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands.
2. To examine the predictors which are facilities, environmental, and social benefit that are able to influence Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands.
3. To analyze the relationship between environmental, facilities, Social benefits with Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

This research focuses on the impact on Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands. It further attempted to evaluate the opportunities for the farmers and business operators to increase their income, besides observing the economic, social/cultural and environmental impact on tourism development. Using questionnaires as the research instruments, the samples were selected at the favourite destinations which are Tanah Rata, Brinchang and Ringlet.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Overview of Cameron Highlands

Cameron Highlands was named after William Cameron, a British surveyor who stumbled across high plains in 1885 during a mapping expedition on the Titiwangsa Range (Well, 1982). The location of the plateau was finally confirmed by subsequent expeditions after Sir Hugh Low suggested that this would be the perfect

location for a move back during attack by enemy and farmland (Allen, 2005). After a long silence, then in the year 1925, Sir George Maxwell visited the highlands and decided to develop it as a hill station. A development committee was formed to function until 1931. Cameron Highlands was set to be a destination for relieving stress and workload among the British Malaya. Once road was constructed, wealthy residents and British government officials started building shelters on the slopes of the highlands. Then some settled here permanently and a few others advanced as business community. Agriculture is the main activity here at that time (Leong, 1992).

Highlands developed successfully until the outbreak of World War II where the Japanese invasion in 1941 forced the British troops and civilians out of the highlands. Japan continued to administer the area since they see upland farms as an important food source for their team. When the Japanese move back during the attack by enemies from Malaya in 1945, the British gradually return to the highlands to Malaya's independence from the British in 1957.

One of the most popular hill resorts in the country, this highland paradise still maintains much of the English village charm. It also remains as a popular destination for those who want to avoid hot weather lowlands. As a primarily agricultural domain, Cameron Highlands is the leading producer of flowers and tea in Malaysia.

Cameron Highlands is made up of 4 main townships followed by smaller settlements at different elevations. The first town from the south is Ringlet, followed by Tanah Rata, Brinchang, Kea Farm, Tringkap, Kuala Terla and Kampung Raja. Ringlet is located at an elevation of 1,200 metres above sea-level, is one of the main agricultural hubs for the highlands. There is nothing much to do here for the typical tourist besides stopping for fuel as this is one of the towns with petrol stations. Bertam Valley which is located about 5km away is one of the main flower and vegetable producers in Cameron Highlands. Further up is Tanah Rata which is about 12 km's (20 minute drive) from Ringlet. This is the administrative capital of Cameron Highlands where all the government offices, hospital and the district police station are located. The main bus station is also located here and this is where the transportation needs can be sort. Most of the chalets and guest houses are located here in and around Tanah Rata. Almost all the jungle trekking and waterfall trails starts around Tanah Rata. Brinchang is about 4 km's (10 minute drive) from Tanah Rata, caters most of the tourist hotels and restaurants. The night market which is open every Saturday night and on holidays features all kinds of vegetables, flowers, fruits and other products of the highlands. Kea Farm, Tringkap, Kuala Terla & Ka-mpung Raja is the vicinity route where tourist will find the markets, vegetable farms, flower gardens, and bee gardens and also parks butterflies. This road also branches out to the Sungai Palas tea plantation and factories serving a cup of tea while enjoying the breath taking view of the plantation. Tringkap is a small farming community where you can find stalls along the street selling local products.

Environmental

Environment can be included in the physical, cultural, demographic, economic, political, regulatory, or technological environment that affects the survival, operations, and growth of an organization. Any Argo tourism venture must consider the environmental impact tourists will have on the area. Minor environmental problems can be triggered, leading to a major conflict. Environmental of tourism aims for serenity, although environment and tourism can be fragile (Ghimire and Upreti, 2011). According to Satani, (2004) asserts that it is exposed to any significant changes in internal and external circumstances can affect them. Sustainable environment is essential for sustainable tourism and environmental security is important to maintain the peace of society. On one hand, tourists will consider to travel within that environment is considered as an accomplishment. It should be treated delicately and with care to encourage tourist visits.

Environment in Cameron Highlands is spectacular and became the main reason for the tourists to come and visit. Attractiveness is subjective and it may be different to everyone. That includes gender, cultural and ethnic background, socio-economic status, level of education, family background; age and etc. Tourist attractions are the basic elements on which tourism is developed. Tourist attractions can be nature-based attractions such as rivers, waterfalls, flora and fauna. Historic sites are cultural attractions (Buckley et.al, 2003).

Facilities

Infrastructure is also a vital component to agro tourism. There are some issues relating to the development of facilities that can provide convenience to the tourists to visit. Facilities include travelling agent, buses, and phone line. Several past researchers also relates facilities with other factors such as accommodation, shopping centres, and choice of foods and beverages (Norudin Mansor and Azman Che Mat, 2010). Accommodation is an important element in tourism products. Not only it is the largest sub-sector and most comprehensive in tourism economy typically account for about one-third of the total travel expenses, it is also an important tourism experience. The choice of accommodation reflect the needs and expectations of tourists and, as a result, these two characteristics of quantitative and qualitative supply of accommodation services directly affect the types of tourism or tourists are attracted to. (Sharpley, 2000)

There are several components in the tourism industry, for example, food and beverages, lodging, place of attractions, and transportation. All these components are related to facilities as well as to each other. So, in order to ensure a feeling of satisfaction towards tourism services, each of the components should match the needs and wants of the clients. We also need to provide facilities for transportation so that customers or passengers will feel comfortable during their journey.

Social Benefit

Agro-Tourism is very important for rural and urban communities. It may have some positive effects to rural communities. For example, increase new skills, experience and career, learning a foreign language, gaining entrepreneurial skills, the actualization of the rural communities, the creation of new positions in tourism, expand one's knowledge of the local area or learn more about the person, history and attractions, promoting social initiatives or new opportunities for the citizens of rural women. (Paresh and Milind, 2012)

Meet new people, the possibility of getting new contacts and social relations, exchanges of experience or attitude. On the part of farmers and their guests, increase tolerance in relation to different attitudes, behaviours or opinions, the knowledge about the different cultures individuals bring with them, farm owners will feel encourage to develop new hobbies and interests. (Paresh and Milind, 2012)

Possibility of reviving the rural tradition fosters respect and revival of folk traditions and culture, cultural development in rural areas, the use of full and revival of certain objects in villages such as community centres, sports facilities, etc, would lengthen to a great chance. The educational function of agro-tourism related to learning about the real world as nature, culture heritage, which change certain attitudes in relation to aspects of reality as the host and the guest, the tourists, families; agro-tourism is also a medium to express one's feelings as learning more on the farmers well-being and at the same time have a new found respect. (Paresh and Milind, 2012)

Agro Tourism Potential

Agro Tourism is considered to have both negative and positive economic impacts. Critics mentioned that tourism often generates low-paying, seasonal job opportunities; however, if tourism can attract high numbers of seasonal and permanent residents, then it is usually considered to have positive impacts on a community. The tourism industry is one of the industry's largest and most profitable over the past decade. The industry is able to generate hundreds of dollars compared to other industries that depend either directly or indirectly with it and create millions of jobs and income distribution. The tourism industry are also involved in construction, hospitality, transportation, manufacturing industry, food industry and various industry related services. Economic development measures in line with the process of globalization have prompted many countries to develop the tourism sector to enhance the entry of foreigners (Jamaluddin, 2009)

Now the tourism authorities are actively developing several aspects related to the tourism industry, such as enhancing the ability of the workforce. In this sector through training, development of tourism products such as promoting Malaysia as a hill resort and island destinations, destination shopping (Norudin Mansor et al., 2011) and themed ceremonies will be implemented. In fact, the government and the private sector are also taking steps to enhance the country's ability as destination exhibitions, meetings and conferences through various incentives under Malaysia Plan in 2001. In addition to the encouragement and support given by the government, tourism development relies heavily on the private sector especially in creating facilities for the industry. Private sectors are also actively driven on enhancing the tourism industry in the country through investments for hotel construction projects related to tourism (Jamaluddin, 2009)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The investigation of this study is descriptive in nature, focusing Agro tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands, one of Malaysia's popular tourist destinations in the central region of Peninsular Malaysia.

Theoretical Framework

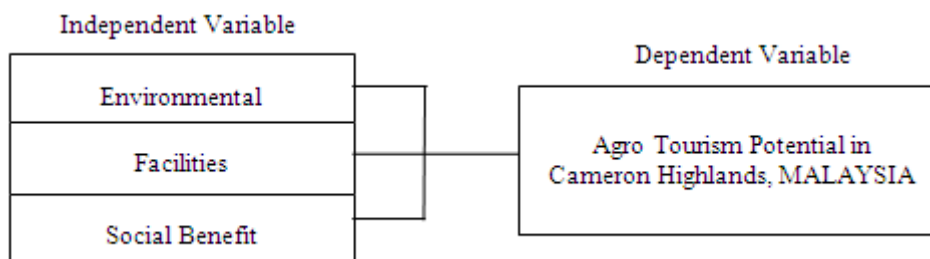


Figure 1: Research Framework on Agro Tourism potential in Malaysia

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the output of numerous fields and discipline that we had found during the period of studying for literature with the main theme of the investigation centers on observing the Agro Tourism Potential. For this research, environmental, facilities and social benefit being the selected constructs to explain its relationship with the Agro Tourism Potential.

Hypothesis Development

H1: There is a significant relationship between environmental towards Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands.

H2: There is a significant relationship between facilities provided towards Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands, Pahang. By using correlation.

H3: There is a significant relationship between social benefits towards Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands, Pahang. By using correlation.

H4: All the predictors such as facilities, environmental, and social benefit are able to influence the Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands. By using regression.

Sampling Procedures

The process of selecting a sufficient number of the right elements from the population includes defining the population, determining the sample frame and sampling design, choosing the appropriate sample size and executing the sampling process.

Target population for this study refers to the three groups which are residents, entrepreneurs and farmers. Following the proposed sample size figure by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), 300 questionnaires were distributed to the target population from variation of ages, races, genders and income statuses. In order to get the desired proportion, the sample size of the residents, entrepreneurs and farmers were proportionately selected on quota sampling approach, ensuring that a subset of the population is adequately represented.

Research Instrumentation and Data Collection

The instrument, which was used in this study, was a survey questionnaire. The items in the factors are the combination of relevant studies of existing factors and newly found factors. The question on the environment was developed from the existing literature. The second factor (facilities) consists of 7 newly developed questions. Among items measuring facilities include services availability, accommodation, transportation, road accessibility and space, and phone coverage. The items measuring construct on social benefit was formulated based on the combination of questions taken from literature and newly developed items such as awareness, opportunity and experience, of Agro Tourism Potential. All items were measured using five-level Likert scale.

The personally administered questionnaires have been used as the mean of data collection method. This approach is more appropriate for obtaining information to keep on record, to make decisions about important issues, to pass information on to others, and to provide the information regarding relationship between the three constructs with the Agro Tourism Potentials.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Reliability Analysis

The reliability of a measure is established by testing for both consistency and stability. Consistency indicates how well the items measuring a concept hang together as a set. Our earlier analysis indicated that the items used to measure the concept of environmental and facilities needed serious assessment of its reliability. The observation of the alpha value for measuring environmental and facilities variable 0.284 and 0.560. After

deleting 4 items from environmental variable and 3 items from the facilities, the Cronbach’s value become more consistent and stable whereby the result indicates that the alphas were all above 0.60. Thus, the Cronbach’s alpha value of all variables which are environmental, facilities, social benefit and Agro Tourism Potential can be considered to be acceptable for further analysis.

Frequency Distribution

Frequency analysis is used to analyze the overall information of the respondents based on the profile information. From the data collected, 300 respondents were involved in this analysis, of which 58.5% were female and 41.7% represented by male respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of the respondents

Items	Freq	%	Items	Freq	%
Residential			Marital status		
Resident	222	74.0	Single	164	54.7
Farmer	25	8.3	Married	132	44.0
Entrepreneur	53	17.7	Others	4	1.3
Race			Religion		
Malay	201	67.0	Islam	204	68.0
Chinese	38	12.7	Hinduism	39	13.0
Indian	40	13.3	Buddhism	40	13.3
Aborigine	21	7.0	Christian	17	5.7
Age			Income		
13-17	19	6.3	< RM 1000	141	47
18-25	144	48.0	RM1001 – RM 3000	95	31.7
26-35	45	15.0	RM3001 – RM 5000	49	16.3
36-45	54	18.0	RM5001 – RM 7000	10	3.3
46-56	35	11.7	RM 7001 & >	5	1.7
57 & >	3	1.0			

As for the age group, 60.7% of them were between the age of 18-25 years old, 18% of those aged between 36-45 years old, while for the age group between 13-17, 46-56 and 26-35 years old, the percentage displayed 6.3%, 11.7% and 15% respectively. The tabulated results on marital status show that the highest representation of 54.7% are those with single status, followed by married 132 respondents (44.0%) and others status which is 4 respondents (1.3%). Reviewing on the race group, Malays made up 67%, Indian with a total of 13.3%, Chinese occupied 12.7%, and the Aborigine group made up the 7% of the remainder. In terms of religion, the largest group were those respondents from Islam (68%) and followed by Buddhism (13.3%), Hinduism (13%), and Christian with 5.7%. Observation on the residential status, most of the respondents were the residents at Cameron Highlands which is at 74%, followed by entrepreneurs representing 17.7% and the remaining were farmers that made up a total of 8.3%. The observation of income level revealed most of the respondents earned an income of RM 3000 and below.

Mean Analysis

Table 3 shows the ranking for Agro Tourism Potential. The mean value of these items shows that it’s ranging from 3.8558 to 4.1850 with standard deviation of 0.48005 to 0.63995. This indicates that all the respondents in this study indicated that most of them agreed regarding the statement for each question of about factor that influenced Agro Tourism Potential. The value of standard deviation for environmental, facilities, social benefits and Agro Tourism showed that respondent’s answer not much vary or similar to another.

Table 2: Analysis of importance for the constructs of the study

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Environmental	1.75	5.00	4.1850	.49910
Facilities	2.00	5.00	3.8558	.63995
Social benefit	2.57	5.00	3.9214	.48005
Agro Tourism Potential	2.17	5.00	4.0978	.50863

Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation in table 3 below measures the relationship between the environment, facilities and social benefit with the Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands.

Table 3: Correlation

	Environmental	Facilities	Social benefits
Agro Tourism Potential Correlation	.413	.252	.464
Significant value	.000	.000	.000

Table 3 shows that all the constructs related to environmental, facilities and social benefit are significantly correlated with Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highland at sig. value of .000. In terms of the strength of the relationship, both construct on environmental and social benefits found to be low moderate (.413 and .464), while facilities indicated that the relationship is on the low spectrum (0.252). The result thus confirmed that H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

Multiple Regressions

Multiple regression analysis is used as a subsequent analysis after the Pearson Correlation coefficient measure. As regression and correlation are closely related, regression assumes the dependant is predictively linked to the independent. As shown in table 4, it is indicated that only 28.4% of the Agro tourism Potential in Cameron Highland can be explained by the 3 constructs in the study. The other 71.6% are other factors that had not been included in the study. The factor could be such as government support and women entrepreneur as well.

Table 4: Regression analysis between all the constructs with Agro Tourism Potential

Model	Std Coefficient Beta	t	Sig value	Adj. R square	Sig F. Change
(constant)		4.823	.00		
Environment	.291	5.575	.000	.284	.000
Facilities	.069	1.243	.215		
Social benefit	.332	5.676	.000		

Observing the combination of all the three constructs, table 4 shows that only two of the predictors significantly influenced Agro Tourism Potential; which are environmental and social benefit with the significant values of 0.000 respectively, while facilities is no more significant factors that contribute to Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The focus of the research is to establish whether there is an impact of selected construct such as facilities, environmental and social benefit on to Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands. The finding of the study revealed that the relationship between social benefits and environmental towards Agro Tourism Potential in Cameron Highlands is moderate and acceptable to substantial. Although all the three constructs indicated that all of them are significant, however the findings indicated that the tourism potential have the least relationship with the facility. Further analysis through multiple regressions confirmed the role of facilities that failed to show its contribution towards promoting Agro Tourism Potential. Thus a lot of effort needs to be done not only by the local communities, but also even the private institutions, as well as the government authorities to address the issues of facilities if Malaysia geared to be one of the popular Agro Tourism destination resorts. Otherwise, what had been strategically plan and executed failed to be realized.

The validation on the above findings was further explored through our qualitative investigation. From the personal interview that has been made, we were informed that most of the respondents were not really happy with the facilities that have been provided at Cameron Highlands. Among the highlights of the facilities involved broken toilet doors, uncomfortable buses, and unstable roads and so on. As overall conclusion, facility, social benefit and environmental are very much associate with Agro Tourism potential in Cameron Highlands.

Regardless of gender it seems that the relevant authorities should undertake certain measures to address the issue of gender and income in relation to tourism activities at Cameron Highland. The female (4.0752) seems to be less cautious to be involved while the male (4.1293) respondents seem to participate more in tourism activities. Similarly, those with lower income (146.90 mean rank) group believed that there are not many opportunities that they can earn as compared to those with higher income group (233.50 mean rank).

Although earlier literature had mentioned certain issues related to environment protection is not that critical, but as to the local communities all the related environmental issues can still be tolerated. But in years to come if

little attention and efforts were to be invested, this unhealthy practices will obviously impact the potential growth of Agro Tourism in Cameron Highlands.

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