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FACULTY OF ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCE
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A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION
OF ECOTOURISM IN KINABALU PARK, SABAH

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the residents' perceptions of ecotourism in Kinabalu Park in terms of the residents' awareness and understanding of ecotourism, its importance and benefits, as well as identifying the negative impacts of ecotourism to the surrounding area. Ecotourism provides one way to help educate the community to protect and conserve the environment through travel, and to also create and maintain a sustainable environment for both residents and tourists (Honey, 1999). Based on this perspective, the study outcome will provide the researcher whether ecotourism in Kinabalu Park has been well perceived by the locals and holds a harmonious relationship in order to enjoy the benefits of ecotourism. This integrity will be assessed through their awareness and understanding.

The procedures to obtain the information pertaining to the study will include a review of related literature on findings of similar research used to sample the residents' perception of ecotourism. An observation method is used in this research and a survey instrument which consists of self-administered questionnaire as well as in-person interview through questionnaire is designed to collect data from a selected community constituency. Observation as well as the survey administered to a sample of each community constituency. The survey area identified in this study is Kampung Bundu Tuhan and Kampung Kinasaraban that represent the residents of the overall study. Both villages are within the vicinity of Kinabalu Park. Hence, it provides the study a clear result as the local residents of both villages assume having the effect of ecotourism.

There is a high level of awareness and understanding towards ecotourism which leads the local people to be aware of its importance and at the same time gain various benefits from it. Nevertheless, ecotourism also brings several negative impacts on the surrounding area which affect the environment, social and cultures of the local people.

The establishment of ecotourism in Kinabalu Park however still in its early stage and the residents have not grasped the full potential of ecotourism. It is recommended that the relevant authority such as government, park management, and the local organization should aggressively conduct various activities that will create awareness and understanding of ecotourism. This can be done through conducting seminars, campaigns, road shows and so forth. A better perception towards ecotourism can be achieved through conducting more surveys in order to analyze the communities' understanding of ecotourism's importance and benefits. In other words, this will lead to identifying the area of low understanding and solutions can be done in that particular weakness area. The negative impact should be dealt by the relevant party such as government, and a constant inspection should be done to prevent more damage caused by ecotourism.

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