

Conceptual perspective and potential of rural tourism in Tungku, Sabah, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The tourism sector has become one of the key drivers of economy in developed countries. Rural tourism has been widely recognized as an important factor in the development of rural areas since it creates new jobs and preserves the heritage and culture of the communities in an area. Rural tourism is diverse and is an alternative to mass tourism. Alternative tourism is described as a special tourism that usually emphasizes the relationship between people and nature and the understanding of the way people live with nature. In many countries, the diversity of cultures in the rural areas provides the opportunity to build and provide attractive and competitive tourism products. In Malaysia, the development of rural areas fully utilizes the existing resources including in producing tourism products. Malaysia has introduced policies such as the National Ecotourism Plan and the Rural Tourism Master Plan (RTMP) as part of its sustainable rural tourism development strategies. In an effort to understand rural tourism conceptually, this article will examine the dimensions, definitions, types, and related theoretical approaches of rural tourism. In the context of rural tourism's potential, Tungku district has a diverse range of attractive terrain that holds the largest potential to be a tourism hub on the East Coast of Sabah. Thus, this study aims to identify the diversity of potential tourism products in terms of physical, cultural, and other attractions as well as to present some of the challenges faced in developing rural tourism in Tungku, Sabah. Highlights on the concept, theory, and potential of rural tourism are expected to form the basis and useful reference for further assessments on numerous other rural tourism issues that occur in various countries