

## **Impacts Of Sabah's Tourism on The Stateless Pala'u in Semporna, Sabah**

### **ABSTRACT**

Semporna, located in Sabah, Malaysia, is renowned for its eco-tourism attractions. It is also the dwelling place of a significant population of stateless sea gypsies, locally referred to as the Pala'u. The Pala'u are a nomadic seafaring community that has resided for generations on their traditional houseboats, known as Lepa, while navigating the southeastern coastline of Borneo. Despite prevailing legal restrictions against the involvement of the stateless Pala'u in tourism activities, their mere presence in Semporna has captivated numerous tourists, attracting them to visit Semporna. This engagement has opened up employment opportunities and income sources for the Pala'u. As tourism continues to grow in Semporna, Sabah, the participation of the Pala'u in Sabah's tourism has exerted significant influences on the well-being of this minority indigenous group. This study adopted a qualitative approach and, drawing on data gathered from key informant interviews and secondary sources, explored the participation of the Pala'u in Sabah's tourism. The research posits that Malaysia should formulate a specific policy to regulate the involvement of the Pala'u in tourism, as they persist as an unofficial tourist attraction in Semporna despite the prevailing prohibition. Given their historical and cultural significance, the Pala'u warrant distinctive consideration within the legal framework to govern their participation in tourism so as to grant them essential access, means of sustenance, and protection from exploitation and criminal activities.