

Tourism in Taman Negara Malaysia Its Contribution as Perceived by Residents of Ulu Tembeling

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ABSTRACT

The Taman Negara Malaysia (TNM) has become a valuable tourism resource because of its protected diversified flora and fauna. The protection and conservation of the resources in TNM, however, has caused the loss of opportunities for villagers living in the periphery of the park to get additional income. The development of the tourism sector in TNM is hoped to open up alternative avenues for locals to earn their living. This short study is aimed at identifying whether the locals are indeed taking part in this new opportunity, whether the benefits of the tourism development are equally felt by the communities of Ulu Tembeling, and some of their views of the impacts of development in TNM in general.

ABSTRAK

Taman Negara Malaysia (TNM) kini menjadi salah satu sumber daya tarikan pelancongan yang terpenting berasaskan kepelbagaian fauna dan flora yang terpelihara. Pemeliharaan dan perlindungan sumber di Taman Negara telah melenyapkan satu sumber rezeki bagi ramai penduduk yang tinggal bersempadan dengan taman ini. Pembangunan pelancongan di Taman Negara diharapkan akan membuka peluang pada penduduk untuk menjalankan kegiatan yang menguntungkan. Kajian ini dibuat untuk mengetahui secara ringkas sama ada peluang dari sektor pelancongan ini diperolehi oleh penduduk Ulu Tembeling, samada peluang ini diperolehi secara saksama dan juga pandangan penduduk terhadap pembangunan pelancongan di TNM secara keseluruhan.

INTRODUCTION

The Upper Tembeling region is located in the heartland of Peninsular Malaysia, in the state of Pahang. Two main physical features characterise the region the Tembeling river and the presence of the national park, Taman Negara Malaysia. The massive Gunung Tahan (2187 m) is

located within the national park. The Tembeling river is an important component in the socio-economic fabric of the people in the Upper Tembeling region. The river and forest are sources of food and transportation for the population.

The population of Upper Tembeling can be considered a *fringe society* or a population that is divorced from the process of development (Chamhuri 1983) This phenomenon is quite common for those areas that are not reachable by motorised vehicles. Because the main communication link is the river, limitations to this means of communication hinder further development. Accessibility to the region and its several major villages by the river is difficult and time consuming. The travel up river will lead to several villages, principally, Kampung Kuala Tahan, Kampung Pagi, Kampung Kuala Sat, Kampung Bantal and Kampung Mat Daling. The center of administration for the region is located in Kampung Bantal, about 80 km from Kuala Tembeling.

There has been a fluctuation of population size in the region. In 1978, the number of households was estimated at 559 for the five major villages, exclusive of Kampung Kuala Tahan. The 1980 estimate was about 583, an increase of about 4% (Jamaluddin and Chamhuri 1985). The current number of households is estimated at about 879 (inclusive of Kampung Kuala Tahan).

Beside the problem of overland access, the region lacks other basic infrastructure and social services. The population is dependent on agriculture as the main source of income. The main activities include growing of paddy, tapping of rubber and planting of fruit trees. Market activity is minimal because of the difficulty of transporting goods to major markets. A major part-time economic activity is the harvesting of forest produce, rattan and incense wood. However, this latter activity has become more difficult in recent years due to reduced supplies, and furthermore, illegal entry into the reserved areas has been made more difficult because of an increase in enforcement by the authorities concerned.

The main objectives of this study are to examine the socio-economic profile of the local population and the general perception of the villagers concerning the development of Taman Negara Malaysia as a tourist destination.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Past studies on the perception of local residents towards the impacts of tourism development suggest that the perception depends on the stage of development of the industry. In the initial stages of development,

generally, residents view the impacts of development more positively because of the increases in economic opportunities. This was shown by studies in Langkawi (Ahmad and Armishah 1988) and in Tioman (Ahmad and Faridah 1990). Although residents were quite aware of other cultural and environmental impacts, they believed that the economic impacts were more important than the latter impacts. As the industry becomes more established, residents begin to take stock of other non-economic effects of the development. For instance, in a study in Costa Rica, Place (1991) concluded that at the maturity stage of the development of tourism, people became more concern with the protection of resources and questioned any plan of expansion in the industry.

Changes to the host community socio-economic and physical environments due to tourism development had been evaluated by various researchers (Piza1978; Allen et al. 1988; Milman and Pizam 1988; Thomason, Crompton and Kamp 1989; Perdue, Long and Allen 1990). The most reported elements that are perceived to be negatively impacted are noise, litter and traffic conditions, inadequate basic facilities, prices of goods and services, costs of land and housing, employment fluctuations, concerns for excessive disruption of community structure, deterioration of natural resources and appearance of the area. Pizam (1978) suggested that if the development of the industry was too concentrated at a particular area, it could lead to changes in attitudes of residents towards tourists and tourism in general from positive to negative.

Beside the economic benefits to local residents, other positively perceived impacts include public education, cultural exchange, image of the area, understanding of different people, preservation of socio-cultural, historic and natural environment and also attitudes toward work. Budowski (1982) concluded that the participation of local residents in tourism development provided opportunities to intergrate conservation and economic development. The involvement of local residents could help in ensuring the proper level and types of tourism products to be developed.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM SECTOR

The objectives of the establishment of Taman Negara National Park is spelt out in the provision under section 3 of the 1939 Enactment (Department of Wildlife and National Parks, 1939). The primary aim of the setting of the park is the preservation of the representative indigenous flora and fauna, and objects of geological, archaeological, historical and

ethnological and other scientific and scenic interests for posterity and through their conservation and utilization to promote education, aesthetic values and recreation of the people.

The conservation of the various plant and animal communities will help ensure the survival of genetic stocks of the species; however, conservation can also be made a resource base for the development of the tourism industry. Indeed, the idea of conservation of the national assets in TNM is now acknowledged as the drawing power for the tourist industry. The conservation of the scenic areas, together with their wildlife, helps to provide an increasingly necessary social amenity for the citizens of the country. Furthermore, it is good economics when the growing potential of the tourism industry is taken into account.

In the early stages of the development of the park, its remote location and the lack of adequate facilities made the park attractive to only selected groups of visitors. Visitors were then mostly made up of researchers, specific interest individuals, hard core outback enthusiasts and nature lovers.

The popularity of Taman Negara Malaysia (TNM) as a tourism destination is apparent in the increasing number of visitors from year to year. The government has realized this potential and drawn up plans to capture the benefits of TNM as a tourist destination in line with the present emphasis on tourism development in the country.

With the increasing number of visitors coming each year to the park (Table 1), the task of managing the park headquarters becomes demanding on the Department; such tasks can only be undertaken at

TABLE 1. Total number of visitors to TNM
(1984-1993)

Year	No. of Visitors
1984	8,177
1985	9,145
1986	12,517
1987	11,120
1988	12,010
1989	14,240
1990	17,347
1991	18,710
1992	22,400
1993	30,600

Source: Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Peninsular Malaysia (1994)

the expense of its scheduled duties of managing the park. Furthermore, with the government stand towards privatization of certain aspects of public organization, the privatization of the facilities at the park headquarters becomes more practical. The facilities and services that may be privatized include accommodation, restaurant, transportation and tour guiding/recreational services.

In January 1980 works on the re-development project of the park headquarters started and the project was fully completed in 1992. The re-development process encompasses the construction of a new administration building, new fully-equipped chalets, new restaurant buildings, refurbishment of the rest house, upgrading the jetties, construction of a recreational complex, modification of the hostel and camping area, and landscaping of the park headquarters.

In line with the privatization of facilities at the park headquarters, other services like transportation from Kuala Tembeling to Kuala Tahan and tour guiding are opened to small entrepreneurs. Local residents are given priority in undertaking these small enterprises. Avenues are opened for other private operators to be involved in the provision of services for the growing number of visitors. Accommodation and restaurant facilities catering specially for the budget travellers are already opened up by enterprising residents of the area.

LOCAL PEOPLE AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF TOURISM

THE SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILES

The study surveyed heads of households ($n = 218$) from six major villages along the Tembeling river. The villages were Kampung Kuala Tahan, Kampung pagi, Kampung Kuala Sat, Kampung Bukit Mat Daling, Kampung Gusal and Kampung Bantal. These villages formed the principal population base for the Upper Tembeling region. Since the six villages are located along the Tembeling river, and quite a distance from one another, the team of interviewers had to spend several days at each village to ensure a good response rate. The household heads were selected randomly and an average of 16% of the households from each village were included in the sample.

To achieve the objectives of the study, an interview-administered questionnaire was used to collect the required data. This was considered the best procedure in order to obtain data from a population that might experience difficulties in answering several questions especially those related to evaluating impacts of development. The questionnaire sought several types of information, namely: the respondent's personal profile,

data on family members and other dependents, sources of work and income, property ownership, standard of living (including health and diet) and general perceptions on how the development of Taman Negara Malaysia had affected their livelihood.

In general the socio-cultural and economic characteristics of the inhabitants reflect the rural characterization of the area, The father as the bread-winner is the head of household, while the wife and children are the dependents. The wives are entrusted wholly with the responsibilities of home-making; this is shown by the small proportion of the wives (11%) who are gainfully employed outside the home.

In the rural setting as prevalent in this area, it is not unusual that the inhabitants of a village (or even in several villages) are related to each other, and thus, the extended family concept is still common. The average number of children in a household is four, though larger sized family of up to ten is not uncommon. The dependents of the head of households may also include his father and mother, brothers and sisters and his in-laws.

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Although the intellectual maturity of an individual may not always be dependent on the level of educational achievement, however, there are correlations between the ability to achieve better livelihood and the capacity to change with educational achievement. Even though the location of this region cannot be regarded as remote, the level of education attained by the villagers is generally low. The majority of the household heads and their wives managed to finish only the primary level education. Furthermore, about 33% of the husbands (who, in the majority, are between the ages of 25 to 44 years) and 32% of the housewives (the majority of whom are between 25 to 44 years old) in fact do not have any formal education. Among the children only 16% have managed to complete 10 years of compulsory formal schooling, only 13% the 8 year and 17% the 6 year formal schooling.

The children who have left schooling form ready hands to help the heads of households to earn income for the family. Although only 27% of the children are gainfully employed, it is not uncommon that children provide labour to help the fathers in their daily work, whatever the work may be. This indirectly provides additional income to the family.

EMPLOYMENT

The agricultural sector is the most important sector in providing employment for the majority of the population; more so for those

living in the up-stream villages. However, many residents living closer to the tourist zone have left agriculture for the more stable wage earning employment. In the up-stream villages, close to 70% of the residents are employed in the agricultural activities either on full time or part time basis.

The major crops produced in the area are rubber, oil palm and paddy; the latter is mainly produced for home consumption. Several agricultural agencies like the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA), the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Agency (RISDA), and the Department of Agriculture are involved in helping to increase incomes from the production of agricultural goods. This is a formidable task, especially because a great obstacle to the producers in this region is the lack of better means of transportation facilities. The residents in this region depend entirely on the Tembeling river to transport their goods in and out of the region. Insufficient and inefficient mode of transportation has further depressed prices of goods marketed by the producers. Thus, even though agriculture is the main source of income for the residents, the level of income from agriculture is low (average monthly income is RM147). Table 2 shows the distribution of the residents in various employment activities and average income in each village.

The percentage of residents who are involved in the harvesting of forest products are relatively higher in the up-stream village. Although they realise that this activity is illegal, they are willing to take their chances in order to supplement their meagre incomes from the agricultural activities to support their family needs.

TABLE 2. Employment activities and average income level

Village	Agricultural			Own business			Harvest of FP			Wage earning		
	%F	%P	Y	%F	%P	Y	%F	%P	Y	%F	%F	Y
Bantal	68	5	139	17	0	247	5	33	200	10	3	308
Gusal	37	9	133	4	0	500	9	52	120	0	0	0
Mat Daling	57	19	137	12	7	347	12	33	156	15	0	346
Kuala Sat	31	10	207	3	10	210	13	19	177	3	1	275
Pagi	74	6	192	6	9	342	11	18	178	9	3	178
K. Tahan	14	21	152	5	6	247	0	0	0	60	0	331

Note: %F – percent of full time employment
 %P – percent of part time employment
 Y – average gross monthly income

Most residents, especially of the villages in the upper region, admit that they have to venture into the national park because forest produce in other reserves surrounding the national park are depleted due to over-exploitation. And the national park contains highly valuable products such as rattan, jasmine, sandal woods, traditional herbs and fruits and wildlife which tempt residents to harvest illegally.

Continued depredation of the park resources will have undesired consequences to conservation and tourism; however, control is difficult to enforce (Abdullah 1988). Only if alternative sectors in the region can be sufficiently developed, in this case the agricultural sector, to help increase the incomes of residents will such illegal activities be lessened. As indicated by many residents, there is an immediate need to build roads, as a better alternative to the river to transport their produce. With a better transportation alternative, marketing of their farm products can be made easier and more profitable. Further, roads that connect this region to other parts of the state provide alternative access for visitors to Taman Negara Malaysia.

STANDARD OF LIVING

Although the assessment of the standard of living is by no means definitive, one has to take into account the level of development of the region in making such assessment. With the exception of Kuala Tahan, other villages in the region can be considered as less developed. Even though many modern household items are available to most residents, some basic facilities are still inadequate. For instance, for power supply many residents have to rely on their own generators, while others use more traditional methods of lighting. With the availability of natural gas in tanks, many residents (77%) use gas stoves for their cooking purposes.

Close to 50% of the villagers in the upper stream areas depend on the Tembeling river and other streams for their water supply; although 40% of the population indicated having piped water supply, the majority are those living in or near the park complex. A more disturbing condition existing in this region is the lack of proper disposal and waste treatment facilities. With the influx of tourists and the expected increase in the population of the region, the present method of waste disposal can create an unhealthy environment for residents and visitors alike (Wan Sabri et al. 1991).

As the region is accessible only by the Tembeling river, boat is the only mode of transportation of the region. Ownership of motorized boats, particularly, is often viewed as a measure of wealth and prosperity. Many motorized boat owners convert their boats into long boats to ferry

residents and visitors; it is a lucrative enterprise especially during the holiday season when there is an influx of visitors to the park. Yet only 40% of the residents own motorized boats. Rowing boats are more common and are used mainly for short distance movement and for fishing. Motorcycles and bicycles are being used more especially in the Kuala Tahan area. The lack of other means of transportation is a great disadvantage for the local residents because boat transportation is expensive both in terms of money and time. In addition, other communication facilities are also inadequate.

PERCEPTIONS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF TNM

As a natural resource reserve, Taman Negara Malaysia has complied with the objectives of preservation and conservation. However, Taman Negara Malaysia does not exist in isolation; its development affects the livelihood of the local population. The nature of the relationship between the park and the local population varies through time and the type and pace of development.

A large proportion of the population (55%) has stated that TNM has not contributed much to improve their standard of living (Wan Sabri et al. 1991). This is especially true for those living in Kampung Mat Daling, Kampung Gusal, Kampung Kuala Sat and Kampung Bantal. These villages are situated quite far from the focus of development which is at Kuala Tahan. Therefore, it is not by coincidence that most of the benefits due to the development are believed to be retained by villagers of Kuala Tahan (Table 3).

The development of the tourism sector in TNM has produced unevenly distributed impacts in the region. Residents living in the upper stream villages generally feel that the impacts of the development are less positive for them. They feel that with the proclamation of TNM as a totally protected forest area, they have lost an important source to supplement their income. What more, with the arrival of more tourists, they are receiving negative impacts like pollution, congestion of the river way, and cultural shocks. Meanwhile opportunities to get involved in tourism related activities for them are limited. True as they point out, the majority of the recipients of the benefits of tourism development are those residing closer to the TNM complex, especially those living in Kampung Kuala Tahan.

TABLE 3. Perception on Impacts of Development on Standard of Living

Village	Yes(%)	No(%)
Bantal	22.5 ^a	77.5
Gusal	4.0	96.0
Mat Daling	18.5	81.5
Kuala Sat	29.0	71.0
Pagi	53.0	47.0
Kuala Tahan	90.5	9.5

Note: a: percentage of sample in each village
b: percentage of total sample

For those living in Kuala Tahan, business opportunities are abound, and employment in tourism related activities offers a more stable and better income. About 60% of the residents in Kuala Tahan are employed full time in tourism related businesses.

Questions on the type of development are asked to obtain some indications as to the preference of the residents on future development. The majority of the respondents are in doubt as to the kind of development that is best for them (Table 4). This outcome is not unusual because in most cases the types of development to be introduced in a certain area are determined by the authorities concerned. The respondents have, however, indicated certain kinds of development that they are concerned with.

They want more infrastructure and facilities to be developed especially with reference to the development at Kuala Tahan. The

TABLE 4. Types of Development Favoured

Types of development	% of respondents in favour
that can be operated and managed by villagers	5
that improve infrastructure of the area that provide more employment opportunities	44
that maintain or preserve natural landscape that reflect the traditional environment of the area	18
that avoid or prevent cultural shock	15
that can attract more tourists	11
that use local resources	13

villagers in Ulu Tembeling seem to accept the importance of tourism development in the vicinity of their villages. Some of them are disappointed that certain infrastructural development have destroyed the naturalness of Taman Negara Malaysia and they have cautioned that any construction and siting of buildings should be done with full consideration of its environmental consequences.

CONCLUSION

Taman Negara Malaysia as the oldest rainforest in the world, is an attraction for foreign and local tourists. There is, however, a price for conserving the flora and fauna of Taman Negara Malaysia that has to be borne by local residents. The locals faced difficulties in extracting forest produce from the national park as a means to supplement their income. This is partly due to the intensified border patrols and an increase in the number of tourists that frequent the area. On the other hand, the increase in number of visitors to the area has caused increases in demand for certain goods that are limited in supply; this, in turns, has resulted in increases in prices of such goods. The local residents have indicated that it is now more expensive to purchase some basic items.

Above all, development is seen as something unsettling, and, if not well planned and coordinated could result in negative cultural effects, particularly to the younger generation. The local residents, however, do not reject further development, but would rather see a more active involvement in the development process and want their interest and well-beings to be a primary feature and concern.

For a sustainable development of tourism and outdoor recreation in Taman Negara Malaysia the process must not be carried out in isolation. The development of the villages, in terms of infrastructural and human resources must not lag so that the benefits of the development can be felt more evenly. Development of the upper-stream villages should be focused on sectors indirectly related to tourism. For instance, the development of the agricultural sector, especially certain marketable cash crops that can supply the needs of the tourism sector, could help increase the income of the residents. The development of infrastructures, especially transportation and communication amenities that provide better accessibility to markets can lead to reduced dependence of the residents on poaching of forest produce to supplement their income.

The conservation of the resources and the development of tourism in Taman Negara Malaysia can only be accepted by residents if the majority feel that the impacts of conservation and tourism are equally shared by all.

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