LOCAL COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AND DESTINATION SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

The tourism industry has relied on long-term planning and is anticipating growing availability and demand for socially, ecologically, and economically responsible tourism. As a novel idea, responsible tourism practices may boost efforts for sustainable tourism development, improving the image and competitiveness of tourism destinations, and averting overtourism. The purpose of this research is to examine at the link between responsible tourism and destination sustainability in Cameron Highlands communities. This study employed a descriptive research and a cross-sectional design. In order to complete the study, questionnaires were distributed to local communities in three (3) Cameron Highlands sub-districts: Ulu Telum, Tanah Rata, and Ringlet. According to correlation and regression tests, the study found a significant relationship between responsible tourism and destination sustainability. As a result, destination sustainability necessitates a greater emphasis on the development of environmental consciousness, sustainable livelihood, and community well-being. Because local communities are a component of the tourism experience, the study findings can help tourism stakeholders execute tourism development plans based on local community views and quality of life.

Keywords: Responsible tourism, destination sustainability, local community

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a global phenomenon with high ideals and sensitivity to natural and cultural settings. It has been a real human activity throughout history (Abbasi & Pajohanfar, 2014). Tourism is still the second greatest contributor to the national economy, and over the last few decades, it has not only increased substantially as a tool for regional economic growth, but it has also become a key socioeconomic strength in both developing and mature markets (Mohd Ariffin et al, 2016). Tourism is a major revenue generator in Malaysia; as a result, the Malaysian government has invested significantly in the industry (Aman et al., 2013), and the tourism industry is recognised as one of the primary sources of foreign exchange earnings and a catalyst for the nation's economic development, accounting for at least eight to ten percent of gross domestic product (GDP) (Mosbah and Abd Al Khuja, 2014).

Nonetheless, tourism has considerably contributed to environmental degradation, overtourism, negative social and cultural consequences, and habitat fragmentation, despite its economic advantages. These good and bad features are referred to as tourism impacts, and they have a significant impact on both the local community and tourists (Brida et al., 2011). Furthermore, due to the worldwide danger of climate change, limited natural resources, and severe socioeconomic inequities, businesses and individuals are being pushed to quantify the implications of tourism on the environmental, social, and economic surroundings (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006).

Although tourism promotes robust economic production, it constantly poses issues for practitioners and politicians since tourism is created at a high cost for the people in these locations, which are already under stress owing to the negative implications of tourist development (Buckley et al., 2003; Sari and Nazli, 2021). As a result, the world is presently seeking for a strategy to achieve sustainable development through greater availability and demand for socially, ecologically, and economically responsible products (Mathew and Nimmi, 2021).

In response to destructive and exploitative practises as international tourism expands into developing countries (Lee, Bonn, Reid, and Kim, 2017), responsible tourism engages in activities that promote growth while preserving the existing environment and protecting local communities' culture, history, heritage, and achievements (Debicka and Oniszczuk-Jastrzabek, 2014). To improve the existing sustainable tourist growth, responsible tourism was developed and established in tourism study and practice (Spenceley, 2010; Caruana et al., 2014).

Responsible tourism, according to Farmaki, Constanti, Yiasemi, and Karis (2014), is a component of sustainable tourism that is expanding internationally to benefit tourist firms and destinations. Responsible tourism is a tourist management strategy that seeks to maximise economic, social, and

environmental advantages while minimising negative consequences on tourism locations (Debicka & Oniszczuk-Jastrzabek, 2014; Xin & Chan, 2014).

Although responsible tourism has become an established area in tourism research and practice as a broad set of tourist interactions with engagement and benefits for local communities that minimises negative social and environmental impacts (Caruana et al., 2014), most studies on responsible tourism have only included the perceptions of tourists or service providers (e.g., Spenceley et al., 2002; Tearfund, 2002; van der Merwe and Wöcke, 2007) and limited studies have been conducted to critically examine the relationship between responsible tourism and destination sustainability from perspective of local communities. As a result, a research on responsible tourism and destination sustainability that connects with local populations is required, particularly in the Malaysian setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Responsible Tourism
According to some, mass tourism may cause a slew of social and environmental issues in a region. It turns out that the notion of responsible tourism arose in response to mass tourism (McCabe et al., 2012; Wheeller, 1994). Krippendorf (1987) was one of the first academics to coin the phrase "responsible tourism." According to Wheleer (1994), responsible tourism arose as a reaction to mass tourism becoming entangled in the green dilemma and has been championed as a suitable road forward. While there are various variances, responsible tourism may be roughly defined as a catch-all word for this type of tourism that should be more caring and attentive.

Responsible tourism has a long history as a proactive strategy to ensuring the destination's long-term viability (Tay et al, 2016). Despite the lack of official statistics, current trends indicate that a responsible tourist strategy is being established (Mody et al., 2017). Responsible tourism is an approach to tourism that seeks to enhance the cultural, economic, and environmental elements of tourism (Debicka & Oniszczuk Jastrzabek, 2014; Lee et al., 2017). Tourism is not a type of responsible tourism. Rather, it is a paradigm, a method of conducting business that promotes environmental, cultural, and societal responsibility (Mody et al., 2014). As shown in Figure 1, Mihalic (2016) provided an idea of responsible tourism activities based on three pillars: economic, environmental, and socio-cultural.
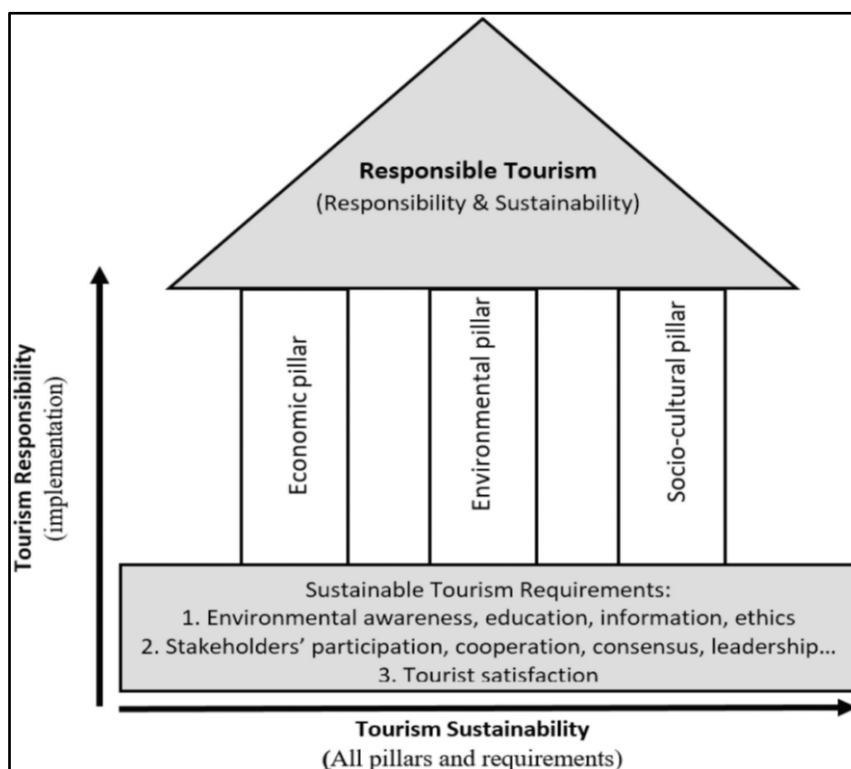
Figure 1: Proposed Understanding of Responsible Tourism Practices (based on the three pillares) (Mihalic, 2016)

According to Sariskumar and Bhavan (2018), responsible tourism covering socio-economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability of destinations that will also involve stakeholder engagement is crucial today to ensure the competitiveness, clean image, and quality of life of the community in the tourist destination. A triple bottom line strategy, including economic responsibility, social duty, and environmental responsibility, is what Mathew and Kumar (2014) define as responsible tourism. Responsible tourism can be broken down into four categories: economic responsibility, social responsibility, cultural responsibility, and environmental responsibility, according to Sariskumar and Bhavan (2018) and Mathew and Nimmi (2021). As a result, in the section that follows, the four components of responsible tourism—economic responsibility, environmental responsibility, cultural responsibility, and social responsibility—are addressed and evaluated.

Economic responsibility
According to Mathew and Nimmi (2021), economic responsibility felt by the community as a result of responsible tourism strengthens the community's perception that tourism activities are focused on fostering domestic procurement, bettering living standards, and generating greater employment opportunities. This sense of economic responsibility increases and improves the satisfaction with material well-being in their lives, which reflects their satisfaction with their own possessions and comforts (Kim et al., 2013).

Social responsibility
To make social responsibility a reality, the local community must actively participate in planning and decision-making, as well as providing capacity building. According to Mathew and Kumar (2014), the Cape Town Declaration (2002) advocated that social responsibility be defined as evaluating social consequences based on the operation's life cycle, which includes the planning and design phases, in order to minimise negative impacts and maximise good ones. In order to secure access for all, especially for marginalised and at-risk groups of people and communities, social responsibility works to make travel a socially inclusive experience.

Cultural responsibility
According to Mathew and Nimmi (2021), responsible tourism is also concerned with preserving local customs and culture. Promotion of local arts and culture, marketing of regional mementos, cultural interchange, preservation of the local environment, etc. are all ways that local culture, rituals, and customs are supported and made easier to practise. Activities promoting cultural responsibility may also have unintended consequences that have an impact on how the community perceives its members' emotional wellbeing.

Environmental responsibility
Environmental responsibility is concerned with the planet's natural resources and how society, communities, and corporations use them (Costa, 2019). Environmental sustainability is seen to be a natural ecosystem that needs to be preserved for both the present and future generations (Sutawa, 2012; Ciraci, Turgut and Kerimoglu, 2008; Chahal and Devi, 2016). Nair, Mohamed, and Chiun (2015) claim that responsible tourism and environmental management can be integrated at any stage of a project's life cycle, from inception through decommissioning. In short, for responsible tourism, the environment must be taken into account at every stage of planning and development.

Destination Sustainability

A destination is a geographical location that provides the necessary services and infrastructure for visitors and provides tourists with an experience (Buhalis, 1999). One of the key factors that can guarantee the long-term sustainability of tourism is the constancy of a destination's competitiveness and attractiveness, according to Nadalipour et al. (2019). Equity across and across generations is a key component of sustainable development, which emphasises both the needs of the current generation and the necessity of protecting resources for future generations. In the same way, it is envisioned that sustainable tourism development will be able to meet the demands of both present and future visitors as well as host communities (Nadalipour et al., 2019).

However, because diverse needs exist in various locations, it is challenging to adopt sustainable tourism that focuses on the industry as a whole (Risteski et al., 2012). As a result, the idea of sustainable tourism can serve as a guide for creating a list of particular indicators to determine the sustainability level (Jaini et al., 2012). The ability of a place to remain competitive and attractive throughout time is one of the primary variables that can ensure the sustainability of tourism in that location (Nadalipour, 2019). In general, the destinations of today ought to continue to be popular and competitive. By doing this, the destination considers the economic and social prosperity of society while using the resources and potential of its environment in a sustainable and effective manner.

According to Fyall and Garrod (2020), destinations are focal points for tourism activities and therefore for tourism studies. However, in recent years, destination managers have faced a significant challenge in achieving balanced economic growth that improves the tourist experience while also maintaining the natural environment and increasing the well-being of the host resident population. According to Chan (2010), achieving sustainable tourism growth while maintaining competitiveness is a common aim for each tourism destination in both developed and developing nations. In the development of sustainable tourism, it is critical to define the indicators used to assess the level of destination sustainability, as well as the primary contributing factors.

According to Ritchie and Crouch (2000), in order to be competitive, a tourism destination's growth must be sustainable not just economically and environmentally, but also socially, culturally, and politically. The necessity to establish sustainable tourism in destinations gave rise to the notion of sustainable tourism destination (Lee, 2001). There is no widely recognised definition of a sustainable tourist destination since each destination has distinct qualities (Yüzba, Topsakal, and Celik, 2014), and sustainable development varies by location (Lee, 2001). According to Tavares (2011) and Lee (2013), community participation and attachment are significant components of community quality of life that

positively lead to sustainable development, as evidenced by Stylidis, Biran, Sit, and Szivas (2014) and Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2012).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design using a cross-sectional approach. Researchers were able to acquire quantitative data using the survey technique, which they were able to analyse using descriptive and inferential statistics. As a result, the primary data collection approach for this study was a structured questionnaire disseminated to the local population. A total of 322 respondents in this research were members of the Cameron Highlands community. Cameron Highlands boasts the largest and most comprehensive network of townships among Malaysia's highland attractions.

Cluster sampling was utilised to approach the sample in this study since it is more accurate in representing subgroups in samples and purposeful in terms of generalizability. Clusters are formed through this sort of sampling and can be based on any naturally occurring grouping. Data sets, for example, are divided into geographical regions. When clusters reflect geographical subdivisions, the sampling method is known as area sampling. In this study, the region was separated into three clusters based on Cameron Highlands sub-districts (*mukim*), which are Ulu Telum, Tanah Rata, and Ringlet. Then, a subsample was drawn at random from each sub-district.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive statistical analysis was carried out in order to characterise and summarise the key characteristics of the data set on each component of responsible tourism, namely Economic Responsibility, Environmental Responsibility, Social Responsibility, and Cultural Responsibility.

Table 1 displays the maximum mean value for each component. The highest scoring in mean values are cultural responsibility (mean=4.193, standard deviation=0.523), social responsibility (mean=4.287, standard deviation=0.491), economic responsibility (mean=4.366, standard deviation=0.478), and environmental responsibility (mean=4.469, standard deviation=0.469). Environmental responsibility receives the greatest mean score than any other criteria. It suggests that respondents believe environmental stewardship is important to their overall well-being. According to Costa (2019), the environment is concerned with the planet's natural resources and how society, communities, and companies use them. Because the Cameron Highlands had so many environmental challenges, environmental stewardship may be considered a necessary component of responsible tourism.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Responsible Tourism

Variables	No of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Economic Responsibility	8	4.3661	.47807
Environmental Responsibility	8	4.4686	.46940
Social Responsibility	8	4.2873	.49083
Cultural Responsibility	7	4.1925	.52341

Note: N=331
Measurement scale: 1- Strongly Disagree to 5- Strongly Agree
Measurement level: 1.00 – 2.49: Low; 2.50 – 3.49: Moderate; 3.50- 5.00: High

Table 2 summarises the degree of economic responsibility's items. It stated that the item "employment opportunities" received the highest score, with a mean score of 4.45. It is significant that all respondents believed that economic responsibility must increase employment possibilities for the local population in Cameron Highlands. The item "benefits are acquired by local people" receives the lowest rating, 4.27, when compared to the other items. The means of the remaining elements, however, ranged from 4.34 to 4.44.

Table 2: *Mean Value of Economic Responsibility Attributes*

No	Items	Mean
1	employment opportunities	4.45
2	developing high quality products	4.44
3	purchasing local product	4.39
4	support to local enterprise	4.36
5	skill development	4.34
6	local people involve in entrepreneurial	4.34
7	economic benefits of local people	4.34
8	benefits are gained by local people	4.27

Table 3 lists the mean level for each item under environmental responsibility. The item "environmental conservation" received the highest score. This indicates that respondents mostly concurred that environmental responsibility must enhance environmental conservation at their destination. The item that receives the lowest mean score, 4.38, is "promote education and awareness about sustainable." The mean score for the remaining items ranged from 4.39 to 4.55.

Table 3*: Mean Value of Environmental Responsibility Attributes*

No	Items	Mean
1	environmental conservation	4.63
	respect the existing ecosystems and protected areas	4.55
2	effective waste management	4.50
3	assess environmental impacts	4.44
4	ensure that sensitive areas are managed in a way	4.43
5	natural diversity sustainability	4.43
6	use resources sustainably	4.39
7	promote education and awareness about sustainable	4.38

The item "increase local communities' knowledge" received the highest mean score for social responsibility (mean=4.37), as shown in Table 4. It implies respondents' unanimous agreement that social responsibility must raise local communities' awareness of sustainable tourism development. The item "inclusive social experience" receives the lowest rating, 4.20, when compared to the other items. The mean range for the other items, on the other hand, was 4.24 to 4.31.

Table 4: *Mean Value of Social Responsibility Attributes*

No	Items	Mean
1	increase local communities' knowledge	4.37
2	engagement in planning and decision making	4.31
3	local community participates and promotes RT	4.31
4	local community responsible and alert towards the development changes	4.31
5	contributes to improvements in education	4.28
6	contributes to improvements in health	4.27
7	assess social impacts	4.24
8	as an inclusive social experience	4.20

Table 5 lists the level for each item under cultural responsibility qualities. The item "improve the preservation of cultural, history, and tradition" received the highest score overall, with a mean of 4.30, according to the data. It indicates that respondents genuinely believe that cultural responsibility must increase the preservation of the destination's culture, legacy, and traditions. The item "increase residents' pride in the local culture through their participation" had the lowest mean score, 4.12, in contrast. The average score on other items ranged from 4.13 to 4.23.

Table 5: *Mean Value of Culture Responsibility Attributes*

No	Items	Mean
1	improve the preservation of cultural, heritage and tradition	4.30
2	preservation of traditional rural landscapes	4.23
3	encourage a variety of cultural activities for local residents through community involvement	4.21
4	development is appropriate to local tradition	4.18
5	keep local culture alive and maintain cultural identity	4.17
6	tourism activities are maintained with the local tradition, local cultural and local heritage	4.13
7	increase residents' pride in the local culture through their participation	4.12

Table 6 displays the degree of dependent variable, destination sustainability, with the item 'raise the standard of living' received the highest mean score of 4.20. This indicates that the majority of respondents thought tourism improved the quality of life in local areas. Meanwhile, the item 'increased environmental protection' earned the lowest mean score of 3.90. The means of other items ranged between 3.93 and 4.16.

Table 6: *Mean Value of Destination Sustainability*

No	Items	Mean
1	improve the standard of living	4.20
2	improved the development of infrastructure	4.16
3	improved empowerment of local communities	4.12
4	brought consistent and reliable income	4.11
5	improved the social program and schemes	4.07
6	increased the quality of landscapes and environment	4.06
7	improved the management and conservation of heritage sites	4.04
8	increased the conservation of natural areas	3.93
9	increased environmental protection	3.90

Table 7 shows the Pearson correlation analysis between the independent variable (Responsible Tourism) and the dependent variable (Destination Sustainability). According to the data, there is a positive relationship between responsible tourism and destination sustainability (r=0.204). The strength of this association, however, is low because the value falls between 0.21 and 0.40. Konting (2000) Responsible tourism and destination sustainability have

a beneficial link. According to the results of Sariskumar and Bhavan (2018), there is a strong positive relationship between local citizens' positive attitudes toward responsible tourism activities and destination's sustainability.

Table 7: Correlation between Responsible Tourism and Destination Sustainability

		TRT	TDS
TRT	Pearson Correlation	1	.204**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	322	322
TDS	Pearson Correlation	.204**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	322	322

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to Table 8, regression coefficient of responsible tourism is 0.33, and this indicates that the level of destination sustainability will increase 0.33 units when responsible tourism increased one unit while others remain. Meanwhile, its standardized beta coefficient is equal to 0.204.

Table 8: Coefficients for Responsible Tourism Predicting Destination Sustainability

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	2.628	.385		6.831	.000
TRT	.330	.088	.204	3.730	.000

a. Dependent Variable: TDS

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The result of this study is consistent with result from Sariskumar and Bhavan's (2018) who asserted that, local residents' positive opinion about responsible tourism practices have a significant positive relation with the destination sustainability perceived by the local community. It is also supported by Mathew and Sreejesh (2017) who found that, individual's perceptions regarding responsible tourism has a significant impact on their perception of sustainability of the tourism destination.

In terms of long-term sustainability, tourism development is anticipated to be able to meet the demands of both current and future guests, as well as host communities (Nadalipour, 2019). A destination utilises its natural resources and potentials in a sustainable and effective manner, while also taking into account society's economic and social well-being. The findings reveal a link between responsible tourism and destination sustainability; the item with the greatest mean value for destination sustainability was "I believe tourist activities have enhanced my level of life". It is critical to balance economic growth that incorporates visitor experiences while also safeguarding the environment and improving the well-being of local populations.

According to the findings of this study, destination developers and marketers should be aware of how communities perceive responsible tourism activities and how they might improve their quality of life through destination sustainability. For example, while there is no association between responsible tourism and quality of life, there is a significant relationship between responsible tourism and the quality of life of local communities when destination sustainability works as a complete mediator. From the results, tourism developers should devise ways to guarantee that the destination is maintained sustainably, as it is critical to provide a high quality of life for the Cameron Highlands people.

To contribute significantly to long-term destination management, a stronger emphasis on the development of sustainable livelihoods, community engagement, and environmental awareness is required. While tourism destinations strive to find a balance between sustainability and development, responsible tourism practices may assist them in accomplishing their objectives. This is pertinent as Cameron Highlands has already exhibited several attributes of overtourism that may jeopardise the tourism industry in the long term. Thus, the tourist sector should concentrate on increasing its destination sustainability to continuously improve the well-being and quality of life of the local populations.

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Following international publication policy and our ethical obligation as a researcher, we report that we have no conflict of interest.

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