

## Article

# Local Community Participation and Responsible Tourism Practices in Ecotourism Destination: A Case of Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah

Jennifer Kim Lian Chan <sup>1,\*</sup> , Kamarul Mizal Marzuki <sup>2</sup> and Tini Maizura Mohtar <sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Borneo Tourism Research Centre, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu 88400, Malaysia<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu 88400, Malaysia; cmarizal@ums.edu.my (K.M.M.); tmaizura@ums.edu.my (T.M.M.)

\* Correspondence: jenniferchan@ums.edu.my

**Abstract:** Recognizing the importance of local community participation in responsible tourism and its benefits, this case study explores and analyses the local community participation and responsible tourism practices at Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah, a premier ecotourism destination from the stakeholders' perspectives. It also describes the perception and attitudes towards tourism development including the key issues and challenges faced by the local communities. The case study adopted multiple methods involving focus-group interviews and survey questionnaires with the respective local communities residing in Lower Kinabatangan. Findings reveal that local communities recognized that Lower Kinabatangan has great potential to be developed as a sustainable ecotourism destination and to generate economic benefit. Despite this, there is limited participation of local communities in ecotourism development and responsible tourism practices among the local communities. The socio-economic demographic of the local community shows that only 42.4% of respondents have work related to tourism activities. Lack of capital and knowledge in tourism activities are the key barriers for local participation in ecotourism development. For Lower Kinabatangan to be a sustainable ecotourism destination, the participation and engagement of the local community and the practices of responsible tourism can no longer be ignored.

**Keywords:** responsible tourism; community participation; ecotourism destination; sustainability

**Citation:** Chan, J.K.L.; Marzuki, K.M.; Mohtar, T.M. Local Community Participation and Responsible Tourism Practices in Ecotourism Destination: A Case of Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 13302. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132313302>

Academic Editors: Alastair M. Morrison, Yoonjae Nam and Manfred Max Bergman

Received: 27 September 2021

Accepted: 23 November 2021

Published: 1 December 2021

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2021 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Ecotourism promotes the relationship between the development of ecotourism and the local community in its capacity for development and protection of the environment. Ecotourism and its practices encourage and promote the conservation of natural and cultural heritage with ecological integrity through low-impact activities and consumption of local resources [1]. Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah is a world premier ecotourism destination. However, like any other ecotourism destination, Lower Kinabatangan is confronted with a wide range of issues that affect the sustainability of the destination. The negative impacts of tourism on environment, social and economy factors as well as climate change are the universal issues affect the destination sustainability. The involvement of local communities at ecotourism development and activities and responsible tourism practices are seen as critical to mitigating these negative impacts. Tourism stakeholders are paying their attention to enhance destination sustainability through the concept of responsible tourism (RT). RT encompasses all the actions and collaborative efforts of stakeholders at the destination to achieve sustainable tourism [2], and researchers have acknowledged positive contribution of RT in destination sustainability [3,4]. RT is widely recognised as a way to create awareness and support for conservation and local culture while generating economic benefits and opportunities for stakeholders [5]. RT will prepare stakeholders to deal with crisis before it happens [2]. Accordingly, responsible tourism practices attribute

to destination sustainability and quality of life local community [6]. Local communities can take advantage of these opportunities economically and commit to conservation and sustainable development. Subsequently, it enhances the well-being of the local community in term of economic benefits in sustainable manner. It is deemed that responsible tourism practices and local community participation are crucial in ensuring the sustainability of the ecotourism destination. Indeed, the three pillars of sustainability, namely the environment, local community and economy, are part of RT [2]). Past studies pointed out that RT are beneficial to the local community in term of conserve their culture and habitats [6,7].

In recognising the importance of destination sustainability, RT has gained its prominence and is well-connected and prominent to the responsible consumption and production as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. It is considered a viable alternative approach to maintaining economic and social benefits while preserving the environmental conditions of tourism destinations [8]. At the micro level, the practice of RT brings benefits in successful management of tourism business, community well-being and destination sustainability [7]. Thus, there is a significant positive relationship with the sustainability of the destination and the satisfaction of the local community as far as areas of life are concerned [9]. Sustainable ecotourism development encompasses the responsible use of natural resources for recreation and experimentation. Thus, it is an alternative form of sustainable approach to reduce negative impacts on destination [10].

In addition, RT practices are closely connected to the three pillars of sustainability which are environment, socio-cultural and economy. This implies the similarity or interconnection of responsible tourism and sustainable tourism. Indeed, RT has been a powerful unifier among tourism stakeholders [8] and is regarded as one of the pathways for meeting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations. Responsible Tourism Practice contributions significant benefits to the local community and helps the local people to conserve their culture and habitats [6,7]. They play vital roles in conservation and preservation of natural resources through responsible consumption and practices, especially in the context of ecotourism destination. Indeed, cooperation among key tourism stakeholders (local community, tourism service providers and tourism destination/government involved) with respect to sustainable development practices through responsible tourism practices is essential. The importance of local community participation in RT have been documented in the past studies, but the empirical evidence of such study is relatively limited. The literature recorded very limited local community participate and engagement in ecotourism development and in National Parks [11]. The literature revealed several reasons such as religious beliefs, limited funds and government support, scarcity of knowledge in tourism, and lack of cooperation among community members as well as lack of potential benefits for local communities to participate and engage in ecotourism development [12]. RT literature emphasizes RT policies and guidelines, and also a lack of awareness of these suggested guidelines is revealed among policymakers, governments, and stakeholders.

In the same vein, significant studies on responsible tourism or sustainable tourism were conducted from the perspectives of tourists or the tourism providers such as tour operators' perspectives [13–17] or tourist or the tourism providers [18,19]. Further, a study by Chan and Saikim [13] shown that tour operators viewed that RT is a sound and relevant strategy to strengthen the sustainability of ecotourism destinations, especially Lower Kinabatangan. In the same manner, a study by Frey and George [20] found that business owners or tourism stakeholders are positive about the responsible tourism initiative. There are several barriers for not introducing and practicing RT by the tourism stakeholders. These include the time and cost associated with RT practices and the lack of government support [6] and lack of appropriate practices and guidelines [21].

Accordingly, the involvement in sustainable tourism requires participation by all the stakeholders in tourism industry [22]. The concept of RT has been extensively addressed in tourism research and practice in different strands. It is deemed an alternative method to overcome the negative impacts whilst supporting the three sustainability pillars—economy,

society and environment of the tourist destination. Chan and Saikim [13] emphasized that responsible tourism is viewed as an approach to sustainable tourism management, especially in the context of ecotourism. Simply ecotourism is an experiential product that attributed to its quality of environment aspect in terms of its natural attractions. Therefore, the practice of responsible ecotourism provides benefits of biological and cultural conservation and sustainable consumption of ecological resources. It also supports local economies, community empowerment, environmental and cultural awareness, and minimal impact on local resources [23].

Past studies indicated that responsible tourism initiatives have positive impacts on local communities; for example, Hanafiah, Azman, Raziff and Aminuddin [24] reported that RT practices enhance the quality of life of local community in Langkawi. However, it is unclear how similar such a finding is to the Lower Kinabatangan context. Indeed, studies analyzing the practices of RT by local community have been neglected in especially those residing at ecotourism destinations. Such understanding is vital because attitude and support of responsible tourism practices by the local community will strengthen the ecotourism destination sustainability aside from other tourism service providers and tourists. This is especially relevant at Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah where there is dearth of such research or empirical evidence. Hence, the current study aims to fill this gap by exploring the extent of local community participation and responsible tourism practices at ecotourism destination, as well as issues and challenges faced. The study is informed by stakeholder views and guided by the Butler Tourism Area Lifecycle for the ecotourism development phase.

#### *1.1. Research Objectives:*

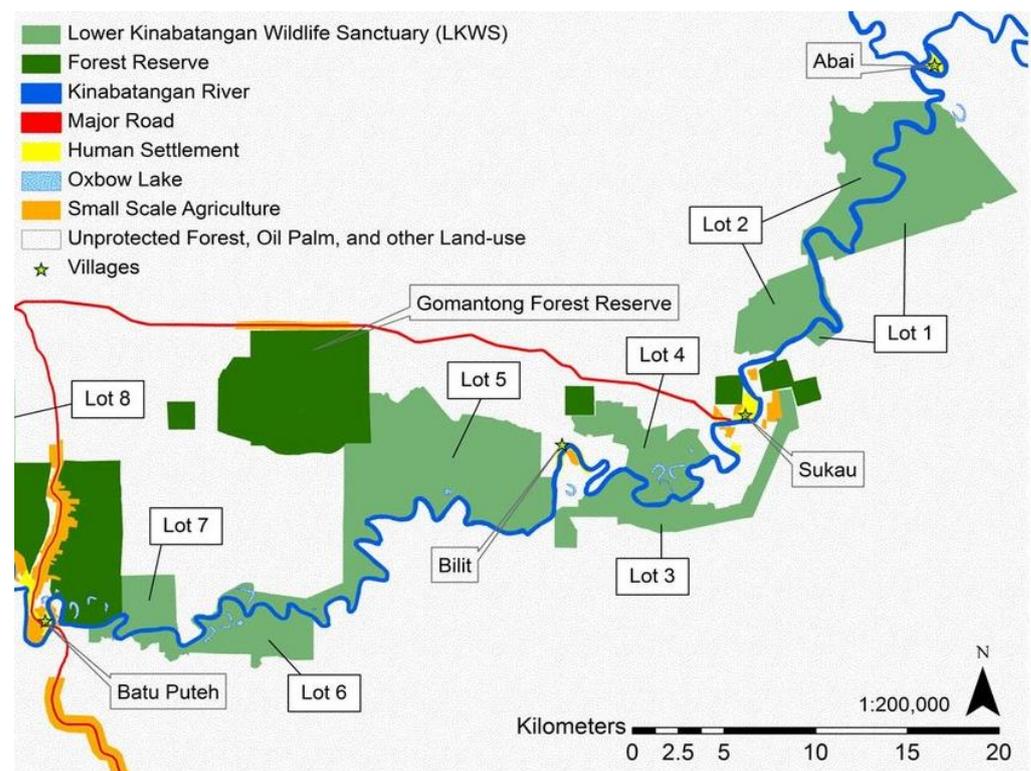
The objectives of this paper are as outlined below:

- (1) To explore the local community participation in Lower Kinabatangan
- (2) To describe responsible tourism practices by the local community
- (3) To identify the key issues faced in responsible tourism practices by local communities in Lower Kinabatangan
- (4) To propose strategies and guidelines on responsible tourism practices in local community

#### *1.2. The Study Site: Lower Kinabatangan as Premier Ecotourism Destination in Malaysia*

The Kinabatangan River is the longest river in Sabah (Malaysia) and has been recognised as the most exciting and easily accessible places to explore wildlife (refer Figure 1). The main functions and values of the floodplain include supporting a range of plants, wildlife species and habitat that in turn provide important tourist resources or products. The destination holds a tremendous variety of natural habitats that are vital for the local community and ecotourism. It offers many economic opportunities and is important to the local economy. The floodplain of the Lower Kinabatangan River is a key site for conservation of the natural environment in Sabah. The Lower Kinabatangan is a reputable ecotourism destination and one of the best wildlife viewing locations in Southeast Asia.

The floodplain is home to many rare and endangered species, including hornbills, crocodiles, elephants, proboscis monkeys and orangutans. A wide range of flora and fauna include 1500 species in the lowland forest, 600 in freshwater and riverine forests, 300 on limestone outcrops, 50 in mangroves and coastal forest, and 10 species in lakes and treeless wetlands. Its remarkable wildlife and fascinating habitats offer ecotourists with an incredible opportunity to experience the uniqueness of Lower Kinabatangan. Tourism stakeholders in the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary (LKWS) have raised several critical issues and concerns. These include wildlife conservation and landscape, quality tourist experiences, responsible practices among the stakeholders and the lack of education and practices in regard to sustainable and responsible tourism. All these issues are perceived as important components in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Kinabatangan as ecotourism destination.



**Figure 1.** Location of Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah.

The local community also can gain benefits from ecotourism development in the destination to increase their socio-economic condition. To ensure sustainability of the Lower Kinabatangan as an ecotourism destination, responsible tourism should become a critical agenda for all tourism stakeholders, including tourism businesses, ecotourists, local communities, NGOs, and resource managers. The local community needs to be as fully involved as possible in the development of tourism with opportunities for ownership, management, training and capacity building. Benefits for the community need to be maximized with ownership of and employment in businesses including tourism, agro-forestry and other ventures. Moreover, wildlife tourism can be an effective means of transitioning local economies from unsustainable consumptive use of resources to more sustainable nonconsumptive uses.

### 1.3. Local Community in Lower Kinabatangan

In Lower Kinabatangan, there are several villages located along Kinabatangan River include Abai, Sukau, Bilit, Batu Putih, Bukit Garam and Sungai Lokan. The local communities along the river are collectively known as Orang Sungai (River People). Orang Sungai have inhabited the shores of the Kinabatangan River for hundreds of years and their lifestyles dictated by the offering of the river and the forests. In year 2008, the total population of the villages is 4106 peoples (Abai = 326 peoples, Sukau = 1207 peoples, Bilit = 1206 peoples, Gomantong Jaya = 232 peoples, Sentosa Jaya = 359 peoples and Batu Putih = 776 peoples).

The major economic activities of Orang Sungai traditionally depend largely on the river resources as their source of income. The community also uses the forest resources as building materials, firewood, food and medicine. On a small scale, locals are involved in agriculture, planting rice, fruit trees and vegetables. However, the gazettement of Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary (LKWS) in 2005 was provided both challenges and opportunities as the government, local people and other organization work towards the wise use of Kinabatangan floodplain. Further, the establishment has limited local community activity in utilizing the resources of the forest.

Since 1991, several tour operators have set up lodges, and the local community is beginning to participate in tourism activities. Local community members are already involved in tourism through the homestays established in the villages of Batu Putih (Miso Walai Homestay), Sukau, Bilit and Abai. Miso Walai Homestay in Batu Putih itself serves as a successful model to other homestay programmes throughout Malaysia. Apart from offering accommodation, the homestay also includes a range of services (e.g., boat service, guides) as well as nature and cultural activities for tourists—from jungle trekking to cultural shows. It creates income-generating options for the local community that capitalize on the surrounding natural environment and local culture as resources. Villages also benefit from tourism through employment in lodges, supply fish to tourism facilities along Kinabatangan River and operate their own accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast (B&B) or guesthouse. The interest among the local community to participate in tourism continues to grow due to continuous tourism development in the area.

Currently, there are more than 20 lodges operating by the private sector and some of the operators become members of the Kinabatangan Corridor of Life Tour Operators Association (KiTA) which actively support and involve the local community in their activities. The development of Lower Kinabatangan as a premier ecotourism destination as a tourism initiative by private tourism sectors, especially Borneo Eco Tours and Sukau Rainforest Lodge as the pioneer tourism business operator in 1992. The company has successfully promoted and positioned Lower Kinabatangan as a premier ecotourism destination. It has attracted premier ecotourists from European and North America over the years. Then budget lodges and homestays were introduced by local communities along Lower Kinabatangan to target budget travelers from overseas and local.

## 2. Responsible Tourism and Local Involvement in Ecotourism Destinations

Responsible tourism (RT) is defined as follows: “tourism that promotes responsibility to the environment through its sustainable use; responsibility to involve local communities in the tourism industry; responsibility for the safety and security of visitors and responsible government, employees, employers, unions and local communities” [25]. The concept of RT has been widely recognised as strategy for sustainable destination management and as a sustainable marketing strategy. It offers implications for the successful management of tourism businesses as well as the community sustainability and their well-being [26].

Responsible tourism is well acknowledged as a tourism initiative to bring benefits to socio-economic tourism business opportunities, protection of natural resources as well as to enhance quality of life of the local community [15]. RT practices emphasize environmental integrity, social justice, and maximum benefits to communities, which is consistent with sustainable tourism. The importance of RT practices has been documented in the study of Chan dan Saikim [13] that it is pertinent to sustainable destination management and to ensure quality of experiences and quality of services [27]. Ecotourism is well recognised as an experiential consumption product and is extremely sensitive to the social and physical conditions of the destination micro- and macro-environment [28]. The quality of ecotourism experiences is attributed to the natural resources and authentic environment as well as the co-creation of tourism stakeholders at the destination. Hence, the destination faces a wide range of sustainability challenges which include resources manipulation, economic uncertainty, and changes in tourist demand. Hence, the practices of RT and consumption is essential in this context, especially by the local community or residence to safeguard the destination quality of experiences

Accordingly, the Department of Environment and Tourism, South Africa [25] defines RT as a way to allow the local community to enjoy quality of life via socio-economics benefits and responsible consumption of nature resources. Elsewhere, Mathew and Sreejesh [7] claim that the positive perception of responsible tourism by the local community is crucial and has affected the sustainability of the destination. It also affects people’s perception of quality of life. Thus, this seems to suggest that responsible tourism is a pathway to destination sustainability and to strengthen quality of life of local community which are

pivotal to destination management. Thus, they exhibit the importance of responsible behavior and consumption by tourism stakeholders, especially respect for the environment, destination and the local people [29]. Nevertheless, Van der Meerwe and Wocke [19] noted that tourism stakeholders do not see the real essence of RT and thus fail to practice.

The practice of RT is reflected in RT practices framework proposed by Chan and Saikim [13], consisting of two components, namely the three sustainability pillars—environment, economy and society and the stakeholders' responsible behavior. These components are deemed vital to support the practices of RT in the ecotourism destination. Simply, the sustainability pillars serve as parameters for RT whilst the responsible behavior from the tourism stakeholders is needed to implement RT.

Many researchers [30–32] claim that tourism development, especially the type of tourism development viewed as the more 'responsible' kinds such as rural tourism and nature tourism must consider inputs, collaboration and cooperation among related stakeholders. A stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of a corporation's purpose" [33]. Stakeholder theory by Freeman (1984) stresses the importance of examining individual interests and to satisfy as many of those interests as possible with the understanding that stakeholders have particular relationships with the firm, or in the context tourism, it can refer to destination [33]. This theory may also be used to explain the relationship between a stakeholder in tourism development, and it consists of social exchanges between the stakeholders and the party responsible for the development. In addition, the stakeholder approach has been used in tourism studies, particularly as it relates to their perceptions towards tourism impacts and development strategies.

The local community, as a primary stakeholder, plays an important role in tourism development. Their support is the key element in successful tourism development because tourism planners and other authorities engaged in the tourism industry must be concerned with the communities' views on development plans. The involvement of communities is particularly crucial to the success of tourism development and the implementation of responsible tourism, and the residents' attitude may directly affect the development of the tourism industry [34]. Often, the local community perceives the potential of positive impacts on local services through the improvement of roads and other public facilities [35] as tool for economic development strategy [36]. Indeed, local community perceptions of tourism development impacts have been studied extensively in the areas of how the tourism industry affects the economy, society and culture of the local community [37–40].

In relation to sustainable tourism, a perceived impact is one of the main predictors for the stakeholders' support for sustainable tourism development in their community [41]. Therefore, understanding the stakeholders' perception towards tourism impacts, their attitude, interests and overall willingness to support the tourism development is considered to be the key to the sustainable development in a tourism destination [42]. However, perceptions of sustainable tourism development must be considered on a case-by-case basis, given that what constitutes sustainable tourism development may well depend on the values of the stakeholders concerned [43].

However, those studies do not address the perception and support of RT and practices RT, and these are pivotal to the destination sustainability.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The study adopted an exploratory research design and multi-method approaches which consist of qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection was carried out from November 2017 to March 2018 and involved survey questionnaires with a total of 99 respondents (69 respondents from survey and 30 respondents or participants collected during focus group discussion sessions). The respondents and participants are purposely selected among the local communities who reside along Lower Kinabatangan and participating in tourism activity at the study area. There are two phases in the data collection process as described below.

### *Phase 1: Survey Questionnaire*

The first phase involved face-to-face survey, and the instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. A questionnaire for the survey was first drafted based on the theoretical framework arising from the literature. Later, it was reviewed to match with local community and ecotourism characteristics of Lower Kinabatangan. The questionnaire was then translated into the Malay language by the researcher. To test for reliability, a pilot study was conducted by distributing 10 questionnaires to a sample of the community under study. The first part of the questionnaire was on the sociodemographic of the respondents/local community, which included gender, age, race, marital status, levels of education and employment. The second part was related to local community perception on the tourism development stage and responsible tourism practices by the local community from the six main villages in Lower Kinabatangan. A total of 69 completed questionnaires were collected in this phase from November 2018 to June 2019. Data analysis employed the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. SPSS was used to analyze the survey data collected using descriptive statistical frequency test and percentages.

### *Phase 2: Focus Group Interview (FGI)*

The second phase of data collection involved focus group interview (FGI). There are three FGI sessions were conducted in March–June 2019 and participated by the local communities from Sukau, Bilit and Sungai Lokan villages, with a total of 30 respondents. These respondents were involved in the first phase of survey. The respondents were selected using the purposeful sampling technique and consent was obtained before interviews. The main purpose of the FGI session was to capture detailed information of the key issues faced and strategies and guidelines on responsible tourism at the village level obtained through focus-group discussion. Operationally, the FGI session was conducted to provide multiple meanings and collective responses through group processes. Focus group interview responses were analyzed using a qualitative–phenomenological approach through thematic analysis. Analysis was guided by the definition and concept of RT, RTP and sustainable tourism and involved searching for, reviewing, defining, and naming themes. Emerging themes were categorized based on research objectives. The qualitative findings were presented in Tables 7–9.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### *4.1. Respondents' Profiles*

The respondents' sociodemographic characteristics are presented in Table 1 below. In terms of gender, 65 (65.7%) of the total respondents are male, and 34 are female (34.3%). The majority of respondents are aged 20 to 34 years (39, or 39.4%), followed by 35 to 44 years (34, or 34.3%), whilst 45–54 years had 13 (13.1%), 55–64 years had 6 (6.1%), and those below 19 years had 3 (3%) and those above 65 years had 4 (4.0%), respectively.

The majority of respondents came from the Sungai people at 58 (58.6%), which reflect the overall composition of ethnicity in Lower Kinabatangan, followed by other ethnics. Meanwhile, the other ethnic compositions are less than 15%, including the Dusun people 12 (21.1%), Bajau 7 (7.1%), Tidung 3 (3.0%) and Bugis 4 (4.0%), respectively, while other ethnics represent 15.2% of the total respondents. In terms of education level, there was a concentration at the primary and secondary level (24.2% and 46.5%), respectively; 20.2% of the respondents were diploma and degree holders, while 4.0% attained a postgraduate level of education. Respondents who did not attend any formal education only account for 5.1%.

In terms of household income, many of the respondents earn between RM501.00 to RM1000.00 per month (36.4%), followed by more than RM2000.00 per month (27.3%), RM1001.00 to RM1500.00 (10.1%) and RM1501.00 to RM2000.00 (7.1%). Significantly, there are 19.2% of respondents who earn less than RM500.00 per month. Related to household size, almost half of the total respondents (51%) live in a less-than-five-member household, followed by in a five-to-ten-member household (45%), and only 4% live a in less-than-ten-member household. With respect to the length of stay in Lower Kinabatangan, the largest

number of respondents have stayed in their respective village for over ten years (60%), followed by those staying in their respective villages for less than five years (25%) and five-to-ten years (15%). Table 1 shows the local communities' main occupation.

**Table 1.** Respondent profile (Survey and Focus Group Interviews: N = 99).

Characteristics		Frequency (N = 99)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	65	65.7
	Female	34	34.3
Age Group	Less than 19 years old	3	3.0
	20–34 years old	39	39.4
	35–44 years old	34	34.3
	45–55 years old	13	13.1
	55–64 years old	6	6.1
	More than 65 years old	4	4.0
Ethnic Group	Sungai	58	58.6
	Tidung	3	3.0
	Bugis	4	4.0
	Dusun	12	12.1
	Bajau	7	7.1
	Others	15	15.2
Education Level	No Formal Education	5	5.1
	Primary School	24	24.2
	Secondary School	46	46.5
	Diploma/Degree Holders	20	20.2
	Master/PhD Holders	4	4.0
Household Income	Less than RM500.00	19	19.2
	RM501.00–RM1000.00	36	36.4
	RM1001.00–RM1500.00	10	10.1
	RM1501.00–RM2000.00	7	7.1
	RM2001.00 and above	27	27.3
Household Size	Less than 5 Households	50	50.5
	5–10 Households	43	43.4
	More than 10 Households	6	6.1
Duration of Residence	Less Than 5 Years	22	22.2
	5–10 Years	15	15.2
	More Than 10 Years	64	64.6

Note: RM1 (MYR) = USD0.23852 (as 23 September 2021).

#### 4.2. Local Communities' Involvement in Ecotourism Development

The finding revealed low participation of the community in ecotourism development and activities as reported in Table 2 below. Only 42.4% of respondents (42 respondents) have work related to the tourism activities in Lower Kinabatangan, and their involvement is as Homestay participants (16.7%), Tour Guides (19.0%), Boatmen (19.0%), operation staff as a Lodge Boy or Helper in the Resorts (11.9%) and only a small proportion was involved as Food and Beverage Staff (7.1%), Security Staff (7.1%), Housekeeping Staff (4%), Contractor Supply Material to Resorts (4.8%) and respondents who venture in tourism-related business (7.1%).

Table 3 shows that nearly half of respondents (52.4%) working in the tourism industry earned about RM501.00 to RM800.00 per month. About 23.8% earned less than RM500.00, whilst 14.3% earned between RM801.00 to RM1000.00, while only 9.5% earned more than RM1000.00 per month. This implies that tourism is not generating a high level of economic benefits in terms of income for the local community. Indeed, the income generated from ecotourism activity received by the local community is well below the poverty level in Malaysia.

**Table 2.** Respondent involvement in ecotourism activity in Lower Kinabatangan.

Tourism-Related Employment	Frequency (N = 42)	Percentage (%)
Tourism-related Business	3	7.1
Contractor (Supply Materials to Resorts)	2	4.8
Boatmen	8	19.0
Homestay Participants	7	16.7
Tour Guides	8	19.0
Food and Beverage Staff (Resort)	3	7.1
Housekeeping Staff	3	7.1
Security Staff	3	7.1
Operation Staff (Lodge Boy/Helper)	5	11.9

**Table 3.** Monthly income generated from ecotourism activity.

Monthly Income	Frequency (N = 42)	Percentage (%)
Less than RM500.00	10	23.8
RM501.00–RM800.00	22	52.4
RM801.00–RM1000.00	6	14.3
RM1801.00–RM1500.00	4	9.5

Note: RM1 (MYR) = USD0.23852 (as 23 September 2021).

In terms of length of involvement in the tourism industry in Lower Kinabatangan, the results show in Table 4 that more than half of the respondents (52.4%) with tourism-related jobs had been involved in the tourism industry for less than five years, while 35.7% indicated having worked in the tourism industry for five to ten years. Only a small proportion (11.9%) have been in the industry for over eleven years.

**Table 4.** The Number of Years Involvement with the Tourism Industry.

Years of Involvement	Frequency (N = 42)	Percentage (%)
Less than 5 Years	22	52.4
5–10 Years	15	35.7
11–20 Years	3	7.1
More than 20 Years	2	4.8

#### 4.3. Local Communities' Perceived Tourism Development Stage

To examine the perceived stage of tourism development in Lower Kinabatangan from the perspective of the local communities, Butler's tourists area life-cycle model is used for further explanation as it is appropriate to describe the evolution of the destination. According to Butler (Figure 2), the development of a tourist area takes the shape of an asymptotic curve that covers six stages of evolution of a tourism destination: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline or rejuvenation [44].

The findings from survey responses indicated 43% respondents stated that the Lower Kinabatangan development phase is at the exploration and involvement stage. About 20% of respondents considered the development phase to be in the development stage, whilst 32% of respondents perceived it to be at the consolidation stage. However, only 2% of the respondents perceived it as fully developed and started to stagnate, while 3% of the respondents perceived that Lower Kinabatangan experienced rejuvenation or decline, as shown in Table 5. The detail development phase of information is presented in Table 5 below.

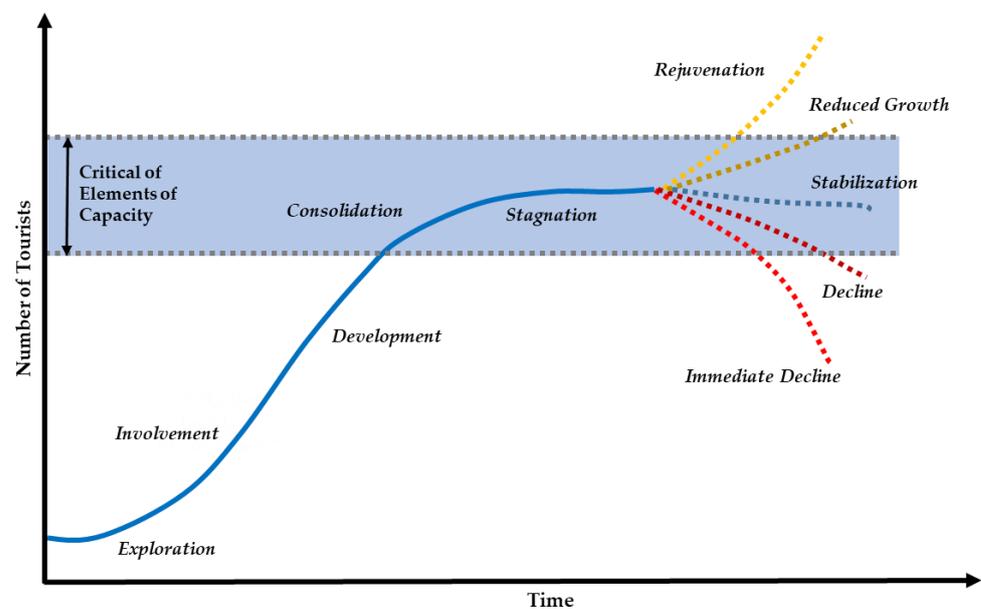


Figure 2. Butler's Model of the Destination Life Cycle.

Table 5. Perceived Ecotourism Development Stage in Lower Kinabatangan.

Level of Development	Description (Modified from Butler, 1980)	Percentage (%) (Survey and Focus Group Interview: N = 99)
Exploration	The arrival of the ecotourists were caused by nature and culture. The number of ecotourists were limited and the facilities offered were also limited.	13
Involvement	The involvement of the locals is still limited in providing facilities to the tourists. Operators identify the tourism market and the seasons for the arrival of the ecotourists.	30
Development	The huge arrival of tourists and development is controlled by the foreigners. Conflicts arises between the tourists and the locals in the aspects of economy and social.	20
Consolidation	Tourism becomes a main industry or supportive of the economy in the local context. Tourists' saturation and dilapidated facilities.	32
Stagnation	Tourists' arrival reached its peak. Resorts are unable to cater to the tourists' requests due to development limitation and expanded businesses by the traders.	2
Rejuvenation/ Decline	Resorts are built with new features to attract tourists. Tourists' arrival declined due to the loss in uniqueness and shift to other destination.	3

For respondents who consider Lower Kinabatangan to be in the stages of consolidation (32%), they see that ecotourism activities have become an important economic sector where there are many economic benefits gained by locals such as employment opportunities and incomes from tourism activities or homestay businesses. These are attributed to the existence of many lodges and the high ecotourists arrivals. However, there is also a significant percentage where respondents feel that the development of ecotourism is still at the level of involvement (30%). Many respondents felt that tourism development opportunities still exist in Lower Kinabatangan. This provides great opportunities for the

local community to involve and engage in the ecotourism development and subsequently generate economic benefits to the local community.

#### 4.4. Local Communities' Perception towards the Prospect of Tourism Development in Lower Kinabatangan for the Next Five (5) Years

The survey findings show that the majority of the respondents believed that Lower Kinabatangan has good prospects as a competitive and sustainable tourism destination for the next five (5) years. They perceived that supply of resorts will increase, thus providing opportunity for the local community to be involved in the tourism. Subsequently, it will enhance the economics benefits of the local community. Likewise, the majority of the respondents agreed that community involvement in the tourism development in Lower Kinabatangan should be increased because the locals play vital roles and responsibilities in the ecotourism development and activities. Nevertheless, about 7% of the respondents felt that the level of involvement remained unchanged due to lack of knowledge and skills in tourism operations.

For the next five years, the majority of the respondents (88%) believed that tourism development in Lower Kinabatangan would bring more economic benefit to the local community. On the other hand, only about 12% of the respondents expect that economic benefit resulting from tourism development will increase in the next five years. As shown in Table 6, 78% of the respondents believed that environmental quality in Lower Kinabatangan for the next five years should increase significantly, and 12% respondents perceived the same level compared to the existing condition. However, only 7% of the respondents believed that the environmental quality would decrease in the future.

**Table 6.** The Prospect of Ecotourism Development in Lower Kinabatangan.

Ecotourism Development Characteristics	Greatly Decrease	Decrease	Same	Increase	Greatly Increase
Number of Resorts	0%	0%	7%	83%	10.0%
Community Involvement	0%	0%	7%	76%	17.0%
Economic Benefits	0%	0%	12%	61%	27.0%
Quality of Environment	0%	0%	12%	46%	32.%
Tourism Development Scale	0%	0%	53%	38%	0%
	(Too Small)	(Small)	(Small)	(Large)	(Very Large)

Note: Responses from survey and focus group interview (N = 99).

In relation to the tourism development scale in Lower Kinabatangan for the next five years, half of the respondents (53%) believed that the overall development scale will be maintained as the current situation, although the majority of them expect an increase in the number of resorts and hence the local communities' involvement in the destination. The results also show that 38% respondents expect that tourism development in this destination will be developed in a large scale. Interestingly, 9% of the respondents expect that tourism activity in Lower Kinabatangan would be developed in small scale.

#### 4.5. Local Communities' Attitudes and Support toward Ecotourism Development

The findings FGI of local communities' attitude and support is presented in Table 7 below. It has been proven that sustainability for the tourism development depends on the stakeholders' support in the destinations where the local actors play key roles throughout the process, from planning to implementation. More importantly, the local communities' attitudes on various relevant tourism impact items and assess their influence on future tourism development in the destination. These impact items covered are related to the physical infrastructure, sociocultural, economic, and environmental aspects. Indeed, the local community was positively inclined towards tourism and its development as the community possesses positive attitudes towards sociocultural and economic benefits. They are expecting that the tourism industry in the area would result in an overall better

quality of life and indirectly contribute to the sustainability and competitiveness of Lower Kinabatangan as an ecotourism destination.

**Table 7.** The Local Communities' Attitude and Support.

Element/Component	Attitude and Support (Focus Group Interview: N = 30 Participants)
Local Community Involvement in Tourism Development	Local communities are highly aware of the natural resources in Lower Kinabatangan and supported by their cultural heritage which are the key attractions for the tourists visiting the destination. Less involvement of the local community in the tourism industry in Lower Kinabatangan.
Tourism Impacts	The local community tends to agree that tourism has a positive impact on community development in Lower Kinabatangan. The local community values the fact that tourism helps to preserve natural resources in Lower Kinabatangan; Tourism development brought more economic benefits with an increase in employment and business opportunities.
Local Community Attitudes	As tourism was at such an early stage, the local community could not even be considered to be at euphoria stage, and they welcome more tourists visiting Lower Kinabatangan; Almost half of the respondents perceived that tourism development in Lower Kinabatangan is still developing in which tourism potential remains somewhat untapped in the destination. Most respondents wanted to participate in tourism, control the activities and be involved in specific tourism and conservation activities.
Local Community Support	The local community is generally favourable to tourism and demonstrate substantial support for the tourism development in their community due to its economic benefits

Based on the findings of this study, the development of ecotourism in Lower Kinabatangan indirectly increases the awareness of the population about the importance of natural resources such as forests and wildlife, which are the main assets that attract tourist arrivals. In order to diversify tourism products, Orang Sungai cultural heritage assets need to be preserved which can diversify the tourist experience and provide ancillary income to the local community. In addition, respondents expressed the view that the current direct involvement of residents in the development of ecotourism is still low, although there are various opportunities that can be ventured such as working in lodges, involved in conservation activities and provision of accommodation facilities. Problems such as lack of capital and knowledge in operating tourism activities and businesses are among the factors that hinder their active participation in ecotourism.

Majority of respondents involved in ecotourism in Lower Kinabatangan generally found that ecotourism has positive impacts on the population especially in adding and diversifying income sources, providing employment opportunities, reviving cultural heritage, improving facilities infrastructure and impart knowledge and skills of the population in the field of business and natural resource management. The involvement and contribution of stakeholders such as government agencies, NGOs, plantation companies as well as tourism operators in the development of ecotourism, conservation and socioeconomic of the people in Lower Kinabatangan have contributed in ensuring the negative impact of ecotourism can be minimized.

The survey result (N = 69) revealed that the stage of ecotourism development is still in its early stages or growth. Hence, there are opportunities in terms of new product development, diversification of tourism and conservation activities as well as addition of tourism facilities and infrastructure. Such perceptions can be attributed to the level of 'euphoria' as expressed by Doxey's Irridex Model (1975). The positive perception of the population can be attributed to economic factors where tourism development is seen to be able to increase income and employment opportunities compared to traditional economic activities. Based on the availability of resources and the positive impact of ecotourism, the participants hope that the development of ecotourism in Lower Kinabatangan can be further enhanced which will provide opportunities for them to be actively involved in the development through the support of all stakeholders, giving residents the opportunity to

participate in managing and controlling tourism and natural assets as well as taking into account the views of the residents in any tourism development planning in their villages.

#### 4.6. Key Issues and Challenges in RT Practices by the Local Communities

The findings revealed seven (7) key issues faced by the respondents (local communities) in developing and implementing the responsible tourism (RT) or sustainable tourism development in Lower Kinabatangan. These key issues are presented in Table 8 below, including the environment, society/culture, economics, accessibility and infrastructure, as well as management including safety and security. Another issue is related to local participation in terms of financial and training support and space. All these issues are perceived as important components in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Kinabatangan as ecotourism destination.

**Table 8.** Key Issues and Challenges in RT Practices by the Local Communities.

Type of Issues	Issues and Challenges in RT Practices (Focus Group Interview: N = 30 Participants)
Environmental Issues	Lack of effective waste management at Kg. Sukau and dumping of waste along Kinabatangan River, Uncontrolled palm oil plantation—the government’s role to control the expansion of palm oil by companies, Decreased number of wildlife (pygmy elephants, orangutans, etc.), Wildlife conservation—injured animals untreated Deforestation which can cause environmental degradation (palm oil plantation).
Socio-Cultural Issues	Lack of effort to preserve and conserve cultural heritage resources (e.g., ancient coffins, unprotected; some of the coffins had been moved while the rest are still intact); The potential of cultural heritage as tourist attractions were not fully utilised in Lower Kinabatangan.
Local Community Participation Issues	Less participation of local community in the tourism industry; Tour guide license is expensive for the locals and they could not afford to get the license; Limited space to build new homestay; Untrained homestay participant—need training on homestay and hospitality; Lack of assistance (training, capital) to assist the local community venturing in the tourism business.
Local Community Support	The local community are generally favourable to tourism and demonstrate substantial support for the tourism development in their community due to its economic benefits.
Economic/ Financial Issues	Fund constraints to beautify villages in Sukau; Insufficient maintenance costs for homestay.
Management Issues	Lack of cooperation between the tour operators and the local community in handling any issues such as waste, tourists’ distribution and pollution; Competition between tour operators (Lodges/Resorts and Homestay) to get customers/tourists.
Safety and Security Issues	Frequent flood (safety), e.g., impact the number of tourists coming to adventure camp which located at remote area; Perceived safety and security issues due to Lower Kinabatangan located within the special security zone.

Environmental issues have been raised during the FGI, where it will have a long-term negative impact on tourism activities and community fisheries resources. The issue of river pollution caused by garbage dumping, the expansion of oil palm plantations to enter the riparian reserve and uncontrolled development are feared to affect the long-term prospects of ecotourism in Lower Kinabatangan. Natural resources such as forests and wildlife which are the main attractions are seen to be increasingly threatened by the effects of deforestation due to oil palm plantation activities.

Although cultural heritage assets were identified by participants as potential products to be highlighted to tourists, there is limited effort to develop and promote cultural heritage assets in Lower Kinabatangan. The development of cultural heritage assets can be a strategy in actively engaging local communities based on the existing resources at each village along Lower Kinabatangan.

With regard to the issue of local community involvement, respondents are of the view that community involvement is still low, which corresponds well with the study and the

main factors are attributed to the lack of capital and skills in starting a tourism business. These factors are deemed common issues across local communities that prevent them from participating and engaging in tourism activities. Such finding is consistent with the finding by Thomas, [12]. Therefore, the involvement of tourism stakeholders in providing financial support and skills is essential to encourage community involvement so that all parties can benefit from ecotourism development based on win-win-win situation, which are among the elements in the concept of sustainable tourism development and responsible tourism.

Another issue is related to the lack of funding from the government for the local community to beautify their village and also maintain the houses which participated in the homestay program in Abai, Sukau and Bilit village. The funds are needed in an effort to attract more tourists to visit the village and staying in homestays operated by the local community.

Empirical findings revealed that the level of cooperation between tour operators and the local community is still low, especially involving waste management which is a major issue faced by residents along the Kinabatangan River, affecting water quality and the village environment. In addition, the local community expects the cooperation of tour operators to involve tourists in tourism activities run by the local community such as homestays and visiting villages. This is important so that the benefits of tourism in Lower Kinabatangan also benefit the locals and are not just seen to benefit tour operators alone. Recognizing the need for cooperation between tour operators and the local community, the Kinabatangan Corridor of Life Tour Operators Association (KiTA) actively conducts activities or programs that involve locals such as in conservation activities, training and social contributions.

Safety and security issues were among the issues highlighted by the participants, especially the frequent floods in Lower Kinabatangan based on its low physical condition. The flood problem not only affects the local community but also affects tourism activities and facilities in Lower Kinabatangan, especially the damage to tourism infrastructure and the safety of tourists, especially in the upstream area. In addition, Lower Kinabatangan has been identified as one of the areas vulnerable to intruder threats where it is placed under a 'special security zone'. Strict regulations imposed by security authorities are seen to have restricted tourist activities especially at night. This situation has given a negative perception of the safety aspects of tourists which indirectly gives a sense of insecurity of tourists to visit Lower Kinabatangan.

#### *4.7. Proposed Strategies and Guidelines on Responsible Tourism Practices and Local Communities' Participation in Ecotourism Activity*

Based on the findings of FGI, several strategies and guidelines to increase or leverage local communities' participation and to encourage responsible practices in the ecotourism industry in Lower Kinabatangan were recommended, as presented in Table 9 below. The recommendations are focused on the tourism product development, resort and home-stay, infrastructure, marketing and promotion, human resource and capacity building, partnership and collaboration, cultural and environmental protection as well as tourism impacts. These strategies and guidelines are crucial in ensuring that Lower Kinabatangan is developed as a sustainable and competitive ecotourism destination.

**Table 9.** Recommended strategies and guidelines for RT practices.

Strategies/Guidelines	Recommendations (Focus Group Interview: N = 30 Participants)
Product Development	Develop an “Ecotourism Visitors Centre”, in collaboration with the local communities, to centralize information on ecotourism activities in Lower Kinabatangan; Develop an “Art Gallery” to promote the local culture and nature of Lower Kinabatangan to the tourists; Promoting cultural programs and facilities which will benefit both the tourism industry and for the local’s social development; Leverage ecotourism as main economic driven by providing more tourism activity; Improve the quality of tourism destination by building more comfortable resorts or lodges for the tourists; Staging events (e.g., cultural, sports, adventure; as new tourism products); Improve the quality of ethnic dance performance during Cultural Night Show; Incentive for the local community to venture in tourism-related business (handicraft) including easy to get trading license.
Infrastructure Development	Provide better facilities in the future including jetty, water supply and electricity for the benefit of the local community, tourists, and the tourism industry; Consider applying for green concept in developing the infrastructure.
Marketing and Promotion	Promote Lower Kinabatangan through conservation tourism; Develop strong branding (as an ecotourism destination by highlighting the destinations’ Unique Selling Proposition (USP) and Unique Emotional Proposition (UEP)).
Resort and Homestay Development	Improve the quality of tourism destination by building more comfortable resorts for the tourists; Encourage more resorts/lodges to participate in green accreditation program (incentive); Development of resorts and lodges need to reflect the local context; Establish accommodation opportunities (not only for homestay program such as ‘villagestay’; Local people become suppliers (e.g., fish and food) to the resorts/lodges.
Human Resources and Capacity Building	Provide job opportunities to the local people and give them priority to work in resorts or lodges; Provide special training program to local community: foreign language and tourism business skills needed to sustain and success in the tourism industry; Instill awareness among the local community on the benefits of tourism development in Lower Kinabatangan.
Network, Partnership and Collaboration	Strengthening network, partnership and collaboration among tourism stakeholders including the local community in decision-making process; Knowledge sharing among tourism stakeholders including the local community.
Cultural and Environmental Protection and Managing Tourism Impacts	Control palm oil plantation activities through effective monitoring and enforcement; Introduce a systematic and effective waste management (encourage 3R concept—Resort/Lodges and Local Community); Continue effort in planting more of trees by active involvement of the local community; Develop “Animal Welfare Centre”— to treat animals especially injured animals; Educate the local community on the importance of environmental protection; Develop guidelines or code of conduct to ensure the sustainability of Lower Kinabatangan as a tourism destination (tour operators, tourists and local community); Engage local community in conservation activities mainly with the government agencies (Sabah Forest Department and Sabah Wildlife Department).

## 5. Conclusions

This case study concluded that the local community had little involvement and responsible tourism practices in Lower Kinabatangan. Lack of capital and knowledge of tourist activities are the main factors identified from the case. The local community believed that the development of ecotourism in Lower Kinabatangan had considerable potential and acknowledged that ecotourism could generate significant economic benefits for them. Local communities should be recognized as some of the main players in the decision-making process of the ecotourism destination and the future direction of tourism activities in Lower Kinabatangan. Understanding local community attitudes can help

Kinabatangan Corridor of Life Tourism Operators (KiTA) and decision makers better assess local community perceptions of tourism development. Just like any other ecotourism destination, the case pointed that the importance of local community participation and RT practices at Lower Kinabatangan warrant long-term sustainable ecotourism development. Further, it recommended that relevant strategies to enhance the participation of local community in ecotourism and related knowledge or guidelines to practice responsible tourism must be in place to be implemented at Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah.

Based on the Butler Tourist Area of the Life Cycle for the Ecotourism Development Phase in Lower Kinabatangan, most local communities have postulated that it is at the participation and consolidation stage. It means that responsible tourism practices are critical in these stages. For this reason, it strongly suggested that RT practices are essential for local communities. The findings showed that the scope of RT practices by the local community tends to be centred on physical infrastructure and product development, environmental protection, marketing and promotion, partnership and collaboration. The main problems encountered by local communities in RT practices are not only related to environmental, social and infrastructure management problems, but also to local involvement. Hence, it exhibited different problems and issues faced in ecotourism sustainable development. The study proposed appropriate strategies and guidance on RT practices for the local community which are deemed universal requirements for ecotourism development.

This case study made several contributions. Firstly, it added to the existing literature of RTPs from local communities' perspectives. Secondly, the findings served as useful baseline data and issues faced in RT for local community. Thus, these issues are beneficial to destination management organization in order to better understand the hinderance of RT at Lower Kinabatangan. Thirdly, the proposed strategies and guidelines provide useful guidance for tourism stakeholders to implement RT in a collaborative manner. This corresponds well with the calling of the achievement of RT must consider the coexistences of the three pillars and responsible attitudes of tourism stakeholders, which correspond well with past studies. Above all, the case study presented a unique context where local community involvement and RT practices in a prominent eco-tourism destination are very limited. It seemed that financial support from the government and the delivery of essential training to improve the knowledge and skills of local communities is very limited.

Like any study, this study displayed several limitations. The respondents were limited to local communities along Lower Kinabatangan and excluded other tourism providers who are considered as local community. The finding did not show evidence of the RT practices at each tourism development stage. Although the study was carried out at an ecotourism site, we are not sure if the RT practices by local community are similar to other tourism destinations. Furthermore, it is not certain to what extent these RT practices enhance the destination sustainability and well-being of local community. Hence, it suggests that future research should address those limitations in order to achieve more sound RT practices at ecotourism destination.

**Author Contributions:** The authors contributed equally to the idea and development of this study: conceptualization, data collection and investigation, literature search, methodology and writing the draft paper. J.K.L.C. prepared paper outlined, main proposal, discussion, prepare and revised draft. K.M.M. wrote methodology, study context, preparing final draft. T.M.M. wrote approach analysis and conclusion. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded under the matching research grant between Kinabatangan-Corridor of Life Tourism Operators Association (KiTA) and Borneo Tourism Research Centre (BTRC), Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed in 2017.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted according to the guidelines of medical research ethic, and approved by the Medical Research Ethic Committee of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (protocol code: JKEtika 3/21 (1); date of approval: 8 October 2017).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Written informed consent was obtained from all respondents involved in the study including the permission to publish this paper.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not Applicable.

**Acknowledgments:** The paper is part of the research output from the research project titled: Sustainable Ecotourism Development and Operations at Lower Kinabatangan as Premier Competitive Ecotourism Destination (Project Code: GKP0006-22-2016).

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Stem, C.J.; Lassoie, J.P.; Lee, D.R.; Deshler, D.D.; Schelhas, J.W. Community participation in ecotourism benefits: The link to conservation practices and perspectives. *J. Soc. Nat. Resour.* **2003**, *16*, 387–413. [CrossRef]
2. Monda, S.; Samaddar, K. Responsible tourism towards sustainable development: Literature review and research agenda. *Asia Pac. Bus. Rev.* **2021**, *27*, 229–266. [CrossRef]
3. Mody, M.; Day, J.; Sydnor, S.; Jaffe, W.; Lehto, X. The different shades of responsibility: Examining domestic and international travelers' motivations for responsible tourism in India. *Tour. Manag. Perspect.* **2014**, *12*, 113–124. [CrossRef]
4. Stanford, D. 'Exceptional visitors': Dimensions of tourist responsibility in the context of New Zealand. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2008**, *16*, 258–275. [CrossRef]
5. Chiu, Y.T.H.; Lee, W.I.; Chen, T.H. Environmentally responsible behavior in ecotourism: Antecedents and implications. *Tour. Manag.* **2014**, *40*, 321–329. [CrossRef]
6. Caruana, R.; Glozer, S.; Crane, A.; McCabe, S. Tourists' accounts of responsible tourism. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2014**, *46*, 115–129. [CrossRef]
7. Mathew, P.V.; Sreejesh, S. Impact of responsible tourism on destination sustainability and quality of life of community in tourism destinations. *J. Hosp. Tour. Res.* **2017**, *31*, 83–89. [CrossRef]
8. Burrai, E.; Buda, D.-M.; Stanford, D. Rethinking the ideology of responsible tourism. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2019**, *27*, 992–1007. [CrossRef]
9. Sariskumar, N.; Bhavan, T. The impact of responsible tourism on tourism destination sustainability and quality of life in Passikudah Tourism Destination. *Int. J. Soc. Sci. Econ. Res.* **2018**, *3*, 5933–5959.
10. Gong, J.; Detchkhajornjaroensri, P.; Knight, D.W. Responsible tourism in Bangkok, Thailand: Resident perceptions of Chinese tourist behaviour. *Int. J. Tour. Res.* **2019**, *21*, 221–233. [CrossRef]
11. Daim, M.S.; Bakri, A.F.; Kamarudin, H.; Zakaria, S.A. Being neighbour to a national park: Are we ready for community participation? *Procedia-Soc. Behav. Sci.* **2012**, *36*, 211–220. [CrossRef]
12. Thomas, Y. Assessing Community Participation in Selected Ecotourism Projects in the Brong-Ahafo Region, Ghana. *J. Ecol. Nat. Environ.* **2013**, *5*, 133–143. [CrossRef]
13. Chan, J.K.L.; Fiffy, H.S. Exploring tour operators' perspectives on responsible tourism at ecotourism destination: Meaning, motivation, and practices. *Asia-Pac. J. Innov. Hosp. Tour.* **2021**, *10*, 23–40.
14. Abd Hamid, M.; Mohd Isa, S. Exploring the sustainable tourism practices among tour operators in Malaysia. *J. Sustain. Sci. Manag.* **2020**, *15*, 68–80.
15. Spenceley, A.; Relly, P.; Keyser, H.; Warmeant, P.; McKenzie, M.; Mataboge, A.; Norton, P.; Mahlangu, S.; Seif, J. *Responsible Tourism Manual for South Africa*; Department for Environmental Affairs and Tourism: Pretoria, South Africa, 2002.
16. Tay, K.X.; Chan, J.K.L. Tour operator perspectives on responsible tourism indicators of Kinabalu National Park, Sabah. *Procedia-Soc. Behav. Sci.* **2014**, *144*, 25–34.
17. TEATA. Sustainable Thai Tour Operator Standards. 2011. Available online: <https://www.gaiadiscovery.com> (accessed on 10 September 2021).
18. Tearfund. *Worlds Apart: A Call to Responsible Global Tourism*; Tearfund: London, UK, 2002.
19. Van der Merwe, M.; Wocke, A. An investigation into responsible tourism practices in the South African hotel industry. *S. Afr. J. Bus. Manag.* **2007**, *38*, 1–5. [CrossRef]
20. Frey, N.; George, R. Responsible tourism management: The missing link between business owners' attitudes and behaviour in the Cape Town tourism industry. *Tour. Manag. Perspect.* **2010**, *31*, 621–628. [CrossRef]
21. Hamid, M.A.; Isa, S.M.; Kiumarsi, S. Sustainable tourism practices and business performance from the tour operators' perspectives. *Anatolia* **2020**, *32*, 23–32. [CrossRef]
22. UNEP; UNWTO. *Making Tourism More Sustainable*; United Nations Environment Programme, World Tourism Organization: Paris, France, 2005.
23. Clifton, J.; Benson, A. Planning for Sustainable Ecotourism: The Case for Research Ecotourism in Developing Country Destinations. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2006**, *14*, 238–254. [CrossRef]
24. Hanafiah, M.H.; Azman, I.; Jamaluddin, M.R.; Aminuddin, N. Responsible Tourism Practices and Quality of Life: Perspective of Langkawi Island communities. *Procedia-Soc. Behav. Sci.* **2016**, *222*, 406–413. [CrossRef]
25. DEAT. *A White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism*; Department of Environment and Tourism: Pretoria, South Africa, 1996.
26. Mathiew, P. *Responsible Tourism as a Precursor to Sustainable Tourism Development and Quality of Life of Communities—A Study of Tourism Destinations in Kerala. Doctoral Dissertation*; Cochin University of Science and Technology: Cochin, India, 2017.

27. Budeanu, A. Sustainable tourist behaviour? A discussion of opportunities for change. *Int. J. Consum. Stud.* **2007**, *31*, 499–508. [[CrossRef](#)]
28. Hanafiah, M.H.M.; Harun, M.F.M. Tourism demand in Malaysia: A cross-sectional pool time-series analysis. *Int. J. Trade Econ. Financ.* **2010**, *1*, 80–83. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Leslie, D. *Responsible Tourism: Concepts, Theory and Practice*; CABI: Wallington, UK, 2012.
30. Ritchie, J.R.B. Crafting a destination vision. Putting the concept of resident-responsive tourism into practice. *Tour. Manag.* **1993**, *14*, 379–389. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Jamal, T.B.; Getz, D. 'Visioning' for sustainable tourism development: Community-based collaborations. In *Quality Management in Urban Tourism*; Murphy, P.E., Ed.; Wiley: Chichester, UK, 1997; pp. 199–220.
32. Hall, C.M.; Lew, A.A. *Sustainable Tourism: A Geographical Perspective*; Hall, C.M., Lew, A.A., Eds.; Addison Wesley Longman: London, UK, 1998.
33. Freeman, R.E. *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*; Pitman Publishing Inc.: Boston, MA, USA, 1984.
34. Ling, L.P.; Jakpar, S.; Johari, A.; Myint, K.T.; Rani, N.S.A. An evaluation on the attitudes of residents in Georgetown towards the impacts of tourism development. *Int. J. Bus. Soc. Sci.* **2011**, *2*, 264–277.
35. Xue, L.; Kerstetter, D.; Buzinde, C.N. Residents' experiences with tourism development and resettlement in Luoyang, China. *Tour. Manag.* **2015**, *46*, 444–453. [[CrossRef](#)]
36. García, F.A.; Vázquez, A.B.; Macías, R.C. Resident's attitudes towards the impacts of tourism. *Tour. Manag. Perspect.* **2015**, *13*, 33–40. [[CrossRef](#)]
37. Deery, M.; Jago, L.; Fredline, L. Rethinking social impacts of tourism research: A new research agenda. *Tour. Manag.* **2012**, *33*, 64–73. [[CrossRef](#)]
38. Hanafiah, M.H.; Hemdi, M.A. Community behaviour and support towards island tourism development. *Int. J. Soc. Edu. Econ. Manag. Eng.* **2014**, *8*, 787–791.
39. Hanafiah, M.H.; Abas, S.; Jamaluddin, M.; Zulkifly, M. Local community outlook on tourism development in Tioman Island. In *Hospitality and Tourism. Synergizing Creativity and Innovation in Research*; CRC: Boca Raton, FL, USA, 2013; p. 117.
40. Lee, T.H. Influence analysis of community resident support for sustainable tourism development. *Tour. Manag.* **2013**, *34*, 37–46. [[CrossRef](#)]
41. Byrd, E.T.; Gustke, L.D. Identifying tourism stakeholder groups based on support for sustainable tourism development and participation in tourism activities. In *Sustainable Tourism: The Sustainable World*; Pineda, F.D., Brebbia, C.A., Eds.; WIT Press: London, UK, 2004; pp. 97–108.
42. Byrd, E.T.; Bosley, H.E.; Dronberger, M.G. Comparisons of Stakeholder Perceptions of Tourism Impacts in Rural Eastern North Carolina. *Tour. Manag.* **2009**, *30*, 693–703. [[CrossRef](#)]
43. Robson, J.; Robson, I. From shareholders to stakeholders: Critical issues for tourism marketers. *Tour. Manag.* **1996**, *17*, 533–540. [[CrossRef](#)]
44. Butler, R. The concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution: Implications for management of resources. *Can. Geogr.* **1980**, *24*, 5–12. [[CrossRef](#)]