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Dive tourism, communities and small islands: lessons from Malaysia and Indonesia

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Abstract

Coastal tourism is growing rapidly across South-East Asia, especially in small islands. Islands and coastal areas face significant issues of how to manage the rapid growth of tourism whilst retaining economic benefits for the local host community. First, the paper sets the context and charts the scale and significance of international dive tourism, especially in less developed countries. The paper draws upon extensive fieldwork in small island destinations in Malaysia and Indonesia and explores how to research this area and the particular practicalities of fieldwork. Next the paper analyses the main socio-economic impacts of dive tourism drawing upon findings published in Haddock-Fraser and Hampton (2012); Daldeniz and Hampton (2013) and Hamzah and Hampton (2013) before introducing new analysis that is 'work in progress.' Finally, the paper concludes by considering lessons for other destinations in South-East Asia learning from success, and helping avoid mistakes being repeated.

Outline of Presentation

- Introduction and Context
- Researching Dive Tourism
- Socio-economic impacts
- Lessons to be learnt
- Final Thoughts

Introduction and Context

- International tourism: **1.087 billion. International arrivals in 2013** (UNWTO 2014)
- Asia Pacific **248 million international arrivals** spent **\$359 billion in 2013** (UN

WTO, 2014)

- Coasts/islands major attraction ('pull factor') → tourism spatially concentrated
- Global trend to *experiential* holidays
- Scuba diving: booming sector. PADI estimates 3-6 million divers globally. PADI alone certified 940,000 divers in 2012
- *What is dive tourism?* No agreed international definition.
- Tourism Queensland (2003) "*dive tourism is travel where at least one scuba diving expedition is included.*"
- With mass coastal tourism - parallel boom in small-scale tourism (Hampton & Hampton, 2009)
- Fragmented markets: wealthy independent travellers, upmarket packages (diving) & backpackers

Why dive tourism?

- Scuba fast growing: over 13% year-on-year (PADI)
- Many Less Developed Countries (LDCs) have/want dive tourism
- Research (marine biology) mainly on physical impacts of diving. Virtually no research on economic & social effects on local communities

Researching Dive Tourism

Two Research Questions

Is this form of tourism sustainable & useful for local economic development?

And:

Who wins, who loses from hosting tourism?

Key tourism data (2013) for Malaysia and Indonesia

Malaysia

- 25.7 million arrivals
- US\$21 billion expenditure
- 7% of GNP (2012)
- 6.5% of employment (2012)

Indonesia

- 8.8 million arrivals
- US\$49.3 billion expenditure
- 3.1% of GDP
- 2.7% of employment

Research Methodology

- Techniques (semi-structured interviews, participant observation, site mapping).
- Interview transcripts analysed with Nvivo software.
- Participants included:
Local & National service providers & owners accommodation, dive shop, restaurant, dive instructors).
- Foreign co-owners, managers, speculators, NGOs, dive instructors & dive masters.
- Local people and tourists.

Project Overview

- **'Developmental impacts of dive tourism in Malaysia'** British Council funded 2008-10.
- Worked with Prof Amran Hamzah at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)
- Malaysia selected because:
 - Range of dive sites (including world class Sipadan)
 - Ministry of Tourism – like many LDCs- starting to target specialist tourism e.g. dive tourism
 - Track record with UTM, previous joint projects (backpackers, cross-border tourism)

Three Research Sites:

- **Perhentian islands:** backpacker tourism – mostly dive training & some 'fun dives'
- **Redang island:** mostly domestic tourism – some hardcore / serious diving, some dive training
- **Sipadan island:** mostly int. tourism, up market packages - world class dive sites, mostly experienced divers

Project Overview

- **'Dive tourism and Island Communities: the case of Gili Trawangan'** British Academy funded.
- Longitudinal study of small island tourism and community. Visits undertaken 1995, 1996, 1997, 2011.

- Java – political core Bali – tourism core in 1970s.
- National tourism plan emphasised large-scale resorts (Nusa Dua, Bintan)
- BUT parallel bottom-up unplanned development.
- “*people outside the plans*” (Wall, 1996) e.g. Gili Trawangan

The Research Site

- **Gili Trawangan:** one of three islands (Gili Air, Gili Meno).
- Uninhabited until 1970s. Sasak and Bugis people invited by Suharto.
- Backpackers began arriving in 1980s – ‘rest place’ and party island.
- Local people set up ‘homestays’ and dive shops (first established in 1985/6)
- Other stakeholders on the island during this time were: Suharto family, army, NGOs, local government & increasing number of tourists and ‘outsiders’.
- By 2000s, fewer backpackers; upmarket hotels; outside investors and land speculators.

Socio- Economic Impacts

Operational aspects:

Malaysia

- **Perhentian** – independent dive operators & local tourism businesses.
Unplanned & unregulated
- **Sipadan** – upmarket, all-inclusive resorts.
Planned & regulated.

Indonesia

- **Gili T** – independent dive operators & more recently, resort owned businesses.
Unplanned & unregulated BUT this is changing.

Economic Impacts:

Malaysia

- Perhentian:
Locally owned businesses & direct employment = higher economic linkages.
More money stays in the destination.
- Sipadan:
Resorts & all-inclusives – higher economic leakages.
Less money stays in the destination.

Indonesia

- Gili Trawangan:
Locally owned businesses & direct employment == higher linkages BUT rise in resort

businesses & 'outsiders'.

Social Impacts:

Malaysia

- Perhentian:
Direct employment
Local SMEs and entrepreneurs.
Alternative income to traditional livelihoods.
- Sipadan:
Limited employment and opportunities for locals.
'Stateless' people

Indonesia

- Gili Trawangan:
Local employment & local businesses.
Locals vs 'outsiders'
Who is 'local'?

Lessons to be learnt

- More nuanced reading of island suggests layers/complexity
- Dive tourism operating within complex & fast-changing local political economy
- Has implications for operations & future development (path dependency?)
- Also implications for island environment (basis of dive tourism)
- Islands under environmental pressure (garbage, sewage, water) from uncontrolled tourism
- Ongoing land disputes (& role of army & local government)
- Dive business depends on marine environment especially corals. (If mainly PADI Open Water trainees – less so as less aware customers?)
- Political economy: if big businesses arrive, dive shops squeezed out?
- Relationship dive shops & other sectors e.g. accommodation - symbiotic (resilient) or a niche (vulnerable)?
- Conflicts of interest and power issues.

Final Thoughts

Dive tourism is (probably) not the goose that lays the golden egg for coastal & island tourism, but it has a role within a mixed regime.

Key Outputs:

- Papers in *Tourism Analysis* (Haddock-Fraser & Hampton, 2012); *Tourism Geographies* (Hamzah & Hampton, 2013); *International Journal of Tourism Research* (Daldeniz & Hampton, 2013)
- Plus earlier outputs e.g. Hampton (1998); Hampton & Hampton (2009).
- Papers currently under review with 2 other international journals (Hampton & Jeyacheya)

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