

Development of Farmers' Perception Scale on Agro Tourism in Cameron Highlands, Malaysia

¹Puvaneswaran Kunasekaran, ²Sridar Ramachandran*, ³Mohd. Rusli Yacob and ⁴Ahmad Shuib

¹Postgraduate student at Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

²Department of Hospitality and Recreation, Faculty of Economics and Management and Institute of Tropical, Forestry and Forest Products (INTROP), Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

³Department of Hospitality and Recreation, Faculty of Economics and Management,
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

⁴Department of Economic, Faculty of Economics,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to develop a scale to determine the farmers' perception on agro tourism business. This paper presents the findings and development of key factors determining farmers' perception on the agro tourism industry in Cameron Highlands, Malaysia. Attributes from previous research of local communities' attitude were combined with newly found factors through an initial exploratory investigation to produce a new measurement scale. This combination of existing and new variables provided the platform to develop the scale. Factor analysis was used as the tool in the reduction method. The significant variables found were extracted and regrouped according to the appropriate factors in generating the new scale. As a result, 36 items were identified to have significant contribution in determining farmers' perception on agro tourism that was regrouped into 9 factors. This finding can be used in determining farmers' perception on agro tourism. The scale on farmers' perception on agro tourism also would be essential to conduct further studies in this particular area of research.

Key words: Agro tourism • Measurement • Attitude • Local community • Factor analysis

INTRODUCTION

Agro tourism is a type of rural tourism that allows the tourist to visit farms and experience a farmer's daily life [1]. Agro tourism is the focus of this study, because it is considered as an important tool in the development of the rural community, due to the significant positive impacts to farmers [2]. In addition, agro tourism not only allows farmers to enjoy greater economic benefits, but also helps maintain the next generation of the farming community in the rural areas, instead of migrating to towns [3]. Even though many studies have been conducted to identify the impacts of agro tourism, the outcomes were only focused on the perception of the host community and the tourists. Evidence shows that very few studies have attempted to understand the impact of agro tourism from the farmers'

point of view. Hence, this study emphasises in understanding the farmers' perception that would be considered as the key stakeholder's view from the supply side of the industry [4].

Rural Tourism and Agro Tourism: In the past few decades, there has been much research on hosts or residents attitudes to tourism [2], [5-10]. A recent study in the rural areas of Kedah shows that positive economic and social benefits to the rural residents become minimal because of their lack of involvement in tourism development, as well as their inability to respond to new employment opportunities, brought by tourism [11]. This scenario is also supported by few other scholars, saying that the existence of poverty in rural areas is caused by the ignorance of the local communities involvement in

Corresponding Author: Dr. Sridar Ramachandran, Department of Hospitality and Recreation,
Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia., 43400 UPM Serdang,
Selangor, Malaysia, Tel: +603-89467679, E-mail: sridar@econ.upm.edu.my.

tourism [6, 8, 12]. The failure of the host community to promote tourism activities in their area can be a constraint for local development [13].

In addition, some researches also attempted to measure the impact of tourism on the community [8, 14-16]. The Tourism Impact Attitude Scale (TIAS) was developed to specifically measure the direct and indirect impacts of tourism on the local community [36]. Although the positive and negative impacts of tourism are understood, the perceptions of the key players on tourism are not well discussed. Similarly, some studies on evaluation of tourism on community only focused on the impacts of the tourism events [7, 14]. It is evident that tourism can create sustainable community development, if the community is directly involved in tourism activities [17-21]. Additionally, it is generally agreed that a lack of involvement and participation from the rural community in tourism, reduces the utilization of the rural resources [2, 22-24]. Therefore, it is very important to understand any underlying problems relating to the factors, which influence participation of the rural community, in tourism development.

Apart from rural tourism, several studies have investigated specifically the perceptions and impacts of agro tourism [23, 25-27]. However, inadequate research on farmers' perception of tourism creates a gap in this research area. Moreover, there are very few studies on farmer's perception of agro tourism. It is also argued that tourism still lacks a comprehensive body of knowledge and a theoretical framework [28].

Research Question and Objectives: Therefore, it can be concluded that, there has been limited studies, which attempt to focus on measurement scales and factors, which influence the perception of the farmer towards agro tourism. To bridge this knowledge gap, the present study will investigate and measure the farmers' perception of agro tourism. In other words, this study attempts to determine the factors that influence farmers' involvement in tourism activities. Realizing the potential of agro tourism and the existence of a clearer knowledge gap, this research outlines two specific objectives:

- To identify the factors affecting the farmers' perception of agro tourism.
- To develop a measurement scale that captures a farmer's perception of agro tourism.

Agro Tourism in Malaysia and Cameron Highlands:

A common characteristic of alternative and farm tourism, unlike most forms of conventional tourism, is that the client stays in or near the home of the host [3]. Apart from that, rural tourism is based on a rural environment in general terms, whereas farm tourism depends on the farm or the farmer [29]. It was also generally agreed that agro tourism is a subset of rural tourism, in a broader context [1, 3, 29]. However, in the Malaysian context, agro tourism could be defined as an activity, which maximizes the use of farm settings and the environment, with hospitality, which will be promoted [30]. Agro tourism is also associated with cultural and heritage tourism in order to promote the uniqueness of the rural community.

The Malaysian government, through the 9th Malaysian Plan, has opened opportunities for farmers to expand and diversify agricultural products and their related industries, such as agro tourism. The importance of local participation in tourism was also stressed in the 7th Malaysian Plan 1996 to 2000 [31]. Cameron Highlands was chosen as the study area, because it is a well-established Malaysian, agro tourism destination. Cameron Highlands is also regarded as a well known and principle tourism location, in Malaysia [32]. Thus, Cameron Highlands is considered as the most suitable agro tourism destination in the country, to conduct a study. Due to the cool environment and beautiful scenery, tourists arriving from other parts of Malaysia and other countries, have always been increasing.

With the rapid development of tourism businesses in recent years, it was initially developed purely for tea plantations. Since tea was one of the valuable trade items at that time, higher demand from western countries was received. Therefore, mass tea plantations were started. Gradually, other forms of farms, such as vegetables, flowers and fruits, developed as well. Historically, this highland was founded by a British surveyor,

Table 1: Arrival of tourists, Cameron Highlands, 2002-2019

	2002	2005 (expected)	2010 (expected)	2015 (expected)	2019 (expected)	Expected Growth Rate (%)
High	364,930	485,722	782,260	1,259,837	1,844,528	10.00
Average	364,930	437,720	592,708	802,575	1,022,825	6.25
Low	364,930	387,267	427,574	472,076	510,990	2.00

Source: District Council of Cameron Highlands, Pahang (2002)

(William Cameron) during a mapping expedition in the year 1885. Thus, the highland adopted his name [32-33]; Cameron Highlands that can be divided into three main subdivisions, namely Hulu Telum, Tanah Rata and Ringlet.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sampling design that was selected for this research was proportionate stratified random sampling. It involves a process of stratification or segregation followed by random selection of subjects from each stratum [34]. In this scenario the farmers of Cameron Highlands were stratified according to the particular villages. According to the District Council of Cameron Highlands, the total farmers' population of Cameron Highlands is 2115 in the year 2002. Thus the total sample size that must be collected is 325 with confidence level at 95%.

To get the desired proportion (15%) of each village according to the population, $(315/2115 \times 100)$ farmers of each village should be selected. Below are listed number of villages and farmers according to the villages.

Proportionate sampling enables the data to be collected according to various groups of farmers adequately and comparison among group of farmers is made possible. The instrument, which was used in this

study, was a survey questionnaire. The items in the factors are the combination of relevant questions used in previous studies (for existing factors) and newly developed questions (for newly found factors).

For the first factor (attitude), all 8 questions were newly developed in terms of awareness, motivation and experience, of agro tourism. The second factor (facilities), consist of 10 newly developed questions, i.e., questions addressing road and land. The third factor, consisting of 7 questions on benefits and the fifth factor, consisting of 5 questions on the environment, was developed from the existing literature [16]. The fourth factor on problems was the combination of questions taken from literature and newly developed items. For the reliability test, the questionnaire that was used consisted of 5 factors with 37 items. Approximately, 58 sets of questionnaires were used. After the reconstruction and based on the reliability test, the actual set of questions consisted of 5 factors and 35 items.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profiles: Approximately 342 sets of questionnaires were used and analyzed for the actual study, with a response rate of 108%. It is comprised of 268 male respondents (78.4%) and 74 female respondents

Table 2: Total Number of Farmers in Cameron Highlands According to Villages until 2002

Subdivision	Village	Farmers Population	Farmers sample size 15%
Hulu Telum	Sg. Menuku	190	28
	Tringkap	301	45
	Sg. Palas	53	8
	Green Cow	3	-
	Kea Farm	50	8
	Kuala Terla	88	13
	Batu 51	46	7
	Batu 52	20	3
	Batu 49	-	-
	Brinchang	-	-
	Ipoh Road	102	15
	Kg Raja	86	13
	Sg Ikan	220	33
	Blue Valley	70	10
Tanah Rata		21	3
Ringlet	Bharat Tea	6	-
	Batu 35	2	-
	Batu 33	46	7
	Tong Keat	66	10
	Boh Road	102	15
	Ulu Ringlet	71	10
	Ulu Merah	64	9
	Bertam Valley	500	75
TOTAL		2115	315

Source: District Council of Cameron Highlands, Pahang (2002)

Table 3: Actual Eigenvalue from PCA and criterion value from parallel analysis

Component	Actual Eigenvalue from PCA	Criterion value from parallel analysis	Decision
1	3.623	1.6607	Accept
2	3.155	1.5802	Accept
3	2.360	1.5160	Accept
4	1.955	1.4632	Accept
5	1.624	1.4117	Accept
6	1.519	1.3718	Accept
7	1.416	1.3287	Accept
8	1.384	1.2901	Accept
9	1.259	1.2523	Accept
10	1.169	1.2157	Reject
11	1.071	1.1836	Reject
12	1.020	1.1519	Reject

(21.6%). The huge gender imbalance of respondents is caused by the higher number of male farmers and the resistance of female farmers, to be interviewed. In terms of highest levels of education, nearly half (48.2%) of respondents obtained secondary school education, (42.7) were at the primary school stage and below, followed by (5.3%) at college or diploma level and finally (3.8%) at university level or degree holders.

Majority (48.5%) of respondents earned RM1000 to RM3000 per month, (22.8%) of them earned less than RM1000, (17.8%) earned RM3000 to RM5000 and finally approximately (10.8%) of the respondents earn RM5000 and above. 247 farmers (72.2%) own land with a Temporary Ownership of Land (TOL) status. Only 27.8% or 95 farmers are permanent owners of their land. This result shows directly that the majority of farmers are restricted from developing land. In terms of farm ownership, 262 respondents or 76.6% of the farmers are the owners of their farms and enjoy profit or loss from the business. However, approximately 80 respondents are workers on the farms and get monthly salaries. The majority of respondents (90.6%) are not involved in any other business other than agriculture production. Approximately 32 respondents or 9.4% of them are involved in other businesses, other than agriculture alone. This outcome shows that many farmers are fully concentrated in agriculture business and not interested in diversifying their core business.

Statistical Analysis: Factor analysis test was carried out to develop the scale for the farmers' perception on agro tourism. Items were rearranged according to the accurate groupings (factors). Before starting this factor analysis, the KMO and Bartlett's Test were conducted to assess the suitability of the data collected. It is agreed that a

sample size of more than 300 is preferable for a factor analysis [35]. Consequently, the total number of 342 samples is adequate for this technique to be employed.

Apart from that, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity should be significant ($p < .05$) for the factor analysis to be considered suitable. The results show that the significance level is .000. It was also suggested that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value should be more than 0.6 to be considered able to produce a good factor analysis [35]. Similarly, as shown in the table, the KMO value of 0.649 can be considered adequate to conduct the factor analysis.

In order to determine the number of factors that require extraction, components that have an eigenvalue of 1 or more are selected. From the analysis of 35 components, the first 12 show *Initial Eigenvalues* of 1 or more. Therefore, according to the *Initial Eigenvalues* demonstrated, all of the first 12 components are selected (3.623, 3.155, 2.360, 1.955, 1.624, 1.519, 1.416, 1.384, 1.259, 1.169, 1.0713 and 1.020). These 12 components explain 61.585 per cent of the variance.

From the table above, after comparison with the *Actual Eigenvalues* from Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Criterion values from parallel analysis, 9 factors are accepted and retained, because the eigenvalues from PCA were larger than the criterion values from parallel analysis. On the other hand, the components 10, 11 and 12 were rejected.

Table 4 demonstrates that 35 variables are distributed accordingly in 9 components. All the 9 components later named as particular factors (environmental impact, accessibility, economic benefit, entrepreneurial knowledge, socio cultural benefit, crowding, awareness, constraints, land issues) and the items are developed as questions in the particular factor.

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Air pollution	.794								
More pollution	.738								
Temperature	.716								
Mass development	.660								
Pesticide & fertilizer	.607								
Tourists visit	.415						.402		
Generates more income		.666							
Land value		.653							
Additional income		.602							
Local economy		.502							
Job opportunities		.440				.437			.305
Attractiveness		.393							
Slope of the road			.720						
Width of the road			.707						
Farm distance			.685						
Condition of the road			.643	.310					
Experience				.871					
Knowledge				.851					
Promotion				.394					.376
Road developed			.369	.373					
Learning					.782				
Interaction					.771				
Interactions are positive and useful					.589				
Crowding and congestion						.838			
Traffic jam						.789			
T.O.L status						.343			
Based on agriculture							.636		
Natural environment							.598		
Develop the land							.588		
Crime and vandalism rate							.332		
Destruction								.733	
Seasonality								.684	
Daily life schedule					.323			.492	
Limited land size									.732
Size of land									.638

Factor 1 - Environmental Impact:

- I think agro tourism will cause air pollution. (.794)
- Land development for agro tourism will cause more pollution. (.738)
- I think that mass development will increase temperatures and spoil the agriculture business. (.660)
- I think that agro tourism will increase the temperature of this place. (.716)
- I think agricultural pesticides and fertilizers will cause pollution of the environment. (.607)

All the variables loaded in are directly related to environmental problems. Since the variables clearly describe the effects of agro tourism to the environment, this factor is titled as environmental impact.

Factor 2-Accessibility:

- I think that the steep slope of the road will affect tourist's access to my farm. (.720)
- I think that the width of the road will affect tourist's access to my farm. (.707)

- I think my farm's location, far from the main road, will stop tourists from coming. (.685)
- I think the road is the biggest constraint that stops tourists coming to my farm. (.643)

Similar to the previous factor, all four variables loaded in this factor, have a direct relationship with the accessibility. The common characteristic, found amongst the variables, is the problem regarding road access to farms, that they are either inappropriate or far from the main road.

Factor 3-Economic Benefit:

- Agro tourism generates more income for my farm. (.666)
- Agro tourism increases my land value. (.653)
- I think the agro tourism business will bring additional income. (.602)
- Agro tourism strengthens the local economy. (.502)
- Agro tourism provides enough good jobs to the local community. (.440).

Factor 3 is titled economic benefit, because all the variables either directly or indirectly, are related to economic benefit. Variables like, more income, additional income, strengthening local economy and job opportunity, directly contribute to local economic development.

Factor 4 - Entrepreneurial Knowledge:

- I think I have enough experience to run an agro tourism business. (.871)
- I think I have enough knowledge to run an agro tourism business. (.851)

Both variables loaded into this factor measure the extent of experience and knowledge possessed by the respondents. These variables also test the willingness of the farmers to get involved in tourism business.

Factor 5 - Socio-cultural Benefits:

- I like learning about tourists' countries and cultures. (.782)
- I love interacting with tourists. (.771)
- My interactions with tourists are positive and useful. (.589)

The variables loaded explain that the benefits of the agro tourism to the community, are not only measured in terms of profit generated. In addition, the communication process of the farmers with the tourists provides positive socio-cultural impacts, when the local community learns new values, brought from outside environments to their community.

Factor 6 - Crowding:

- Tourism causes crowding and congestion in this area. (.838)
- Tourism increases traffic jams. (.789)

This factor is titled crowding, because both of these negative impacts of tourism are directly related to the congestion and carrying capacity problem which can lead to the disturbance of the farmers' daily schedule.

Factor 7 - Awareness:

- I think that agro tourism is a business based on agriculture. (.636)
- I think agro tourism needs a natural environment. (.598)
- I think that if I develop the land, it will attract more tourists to my farm. (.588)
- I think that agro tourism is an activity where tourists visit farms. (.402)

'Awareness' is a suitable title for this factor, because the three variables are directly related to the understanding of agro tourism (based on agriculture, natural environment, tourist visits).

Factor 8 - Constraints:

- I think that the destruction, by the visitors to the plants in my farm, is one of the constraints that stop me being involved in agro tourism. (.733)
- Seasonality of tourist arrival stops me from being involved in agro tourism. (.684)
- I think that tourists visiting to my farm will disturb my daily life schedule. (.492)

All the variables loaded are directly related to the obstacles that may be faced by the farmers, if they are involved in agro tourism.

Factor 9 - Land Issues:

- I think that limited land size will stop tourists coming to my farm. (.732)
- I think the size of my land is too small to run an agro tourism business. (.638)

Both variables although directly related to constraints faced by farmers, are still separated into a different component, due to the nature of these variables. The variables specifically explain land issues as the main problem.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The initial motivation of this study was to identify problems of agro tourism in Cameron Highlands, Pahang, by using the naturalistic inquiry technique. Once the problems were identified, it was understood that a scale to measure the perception of farmers about agro tourism was unavailable. Therefore, a Factor Analysis was employed to develop a new scale. Through these findings, 9 factors that influence the farmers’ perception of agro tourism were found. This outcome presents a scale to measure the farmers’ perception of agro tourism. The development of this new scale consists of newly developed factors combined with factors that were obtained from existing literature. The Tourism Impact Attitude Scale instrument (TIAS), which was used to study cross cultural tourism impact, has got some similarities with the newly

developed agro tourism scale [37]. TIAS mainly focused on the positive impacts and negative impacts of tourism. The components of awareness, entrepreneurial knowledge and land issues are new factors that vary from the conventional TIAS instrument.

The findings of factors, like awareness and entrepreneurial knowledge, would be beneficial for an investigation of general perception, of the local community on tourism. These factors however, were not found in literature, because most studies concentrated only on the impacts of tourism. However, the factor of land issues has made a unique contribution, which examines the applicability of matters, such as ownership of land and farms, which directly influences the perception of the farmers.

The result of the study however, does not contradict the social exchange theory, which says that the people who get benefit from tourism, support tourism [15-16]. The farmers from tourism concentrated areas tended to have positive perceptions of agro tourism, because they were directly involved in tourism.

Table 5 above shows the contribution of this study to the literature. Some unique factors like land issues, entrepreneurial knowledge and awareness are newly found in the research in Cameron Highlands. The development of the scale and the newly found factors will be very essential in developing questionnaires for further studies. By understanding the critical success factors influencing the farmers’ perception, sound decision can be made to improve farmers’ participation in agro tourism.

Table 5: Comparison of Findings with Existing Literature

Factors	Current study	Previous researches
Socio-cultural impacts	Yes	Yes [2], [7-10], [14-16], [21-22]
Economic benefits	Yes	Yes [7-10], [14-16], [21-22], [37]
Environmental impacts	Yes	Yes [16], [21-22]
Gender	No	Yes [22]
Land issues	Yes	No
Crowding	Yes	Yes [7], [9], [14]
Entrepreneurial knowledge	Yes	No
Awareness	Yes	No
Policy implication	No	Yes [16], [22]
Development	Yes	Yes [2-3], [7-10], [14-16], [21-22], [37]

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