

## Resident Attitudes Towards Impacts from Tourism Development in Langkawi Islands, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** Tourism in general has become one of the major cultural and economic forces in the world today and is regarded as an important means to benefit local communities. Langkawi for example, has experienced tremendous development since declared a duty free island in 1987. Many construction projects are carried out on the islands with only one purpose: to accommodate tourism development. Rapid investments by the government and private sector had significantly turned Langkawi into a popular destination and a shopping haven for local and foreign tourists. However, despite the rapid development in this industry, the economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism were hardly discussed and explained in academic literature. Therefore, a study on Langkawi Islands, Malaysia was conducted to explore and identify impacts of tourism development to the islands and local residents. A household survey based on stratified random sampling was conducted in Langkawi for 8 weeks. 392 questionnaires were completed from 784 respondents approached; representing a 50% response rate for this study. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis was carried out to identify the respondents' perception of the impacts from tourism development to the Langkawi Islands. Findings from data analysis identified three factors representing 55.63% of the explained variance extracted from 21 variables, namely: 1. Costs from tourism development, 2. Benefits from tourism development and 3. Socio-economic effects from tourism development. Finally, findings from data analysis suggested that tourism development in Langkawi has provided more benefits than costs to the residents.

**Key words:** Tourism development • Impact • Benefit • Cost • Langkawi Island • Malaysia.

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### INTRODUCTION

The growth of the tourism industry has had significant impact on the economic development of related industries such as accommodation, transportation, leisure, services and hospitality. In many countries, tourism has been turned into an important tool for regional economic growth and development [1-3] although in reality, 'the desirable effects are not equitably distributed' [4].

Telfer [5] stated that many developing countries have tried to exploit the tourism industry for economic stimulation by getting foreign investment, capital and surplus from currency exchange. However, Hall [6] stressed that governments in developing countries only started to get involved in tourism planning and development by 1990s. Previously, their involvement was limited to certain stages of tourism planning and

development without any formal structures or procedures [7]. Even then, the benefit from tourism development to the citizens in developing countries is undeniable, but mostly through unskilled job and small businesses [8]. Other researchers [9,10] also claimed that most of the profitable businesses in the tourism industry in developing countries were owned by foreign investors or a small number of local elites.

Significantly, the rapid growth in the tourism industry will transform tourist destination areas, but with unplanned and uncontrolled tourism development, it could ultimately lead to environmental degradation [11,12] and socio-economic imbalance amongst local populations [13-18]. Thus, this article aims to identify local resident perceptions towards impacts from tourism development in the Langkawi Islands by analysing the costs and benefits brought by the growth of the tourism industry.

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### **Residents Perceptions Towards Tourism Impacts:**

Community support for tourism is necessary to ensure the economical sustainability of the industry'. [19]. Based on his study in Bali, Indonesia, Wall (20) found that local residents are more positive when they have benefited from the development. Interestingly, Wall [20] also discovered that sometimes the distance between the local resident's areas and tourist's destination could have an influence on the perception. People from the nearest areas have a positive perception compared to others who live far from tourist destinations. Therefore, 'when attempting to maximise the benefit for a specific community, a planner should gather information about individuals who stand to gain economically from the development, those who are currently using the resource to be developed, those who are attached to their community and those with strong environmental attitudes' [21].

Jackson [22] claims that tourism can bring both positive and negative impacts to local residents. Aref *et al.* [23] subsequently suggest that resident perceptions towards tourism impact can also be divided into similar categories of positive and negative impacts. For the positive impacts, residents' perceptions believed that tourism can give economic benefits to local people and small business, create employment opportunities, increase the standard of living, provide more parks and recreational areas and also can provide convenient transportation. On the negative side, resident perceptions believed that tourism can destroy the natural environment, cause traffic congestion, noise and air pollution, crowded public places, increased prices of goods and services and increase the value of real estate.

Osti *et al.* [24] describe that there is a high perception from residents' viewpoint that tourism can boost economic investment and spending, which will create greater benefits than costs. Tatoglu [25] points out further that local residents believe the tourism industries can act as an export industry and contribute to the nation's balance of payment and play a major role in getting income for the nation. Nevertheless, both Osti *et al.* [24] and Tatoglu [25] admit that there are also negative perceptions towards the impacts of tourism particularly on traditional moral values and community spirit among local residents as well as environmental issues and effects due to the development in the tourist region. As shown in Table 1, further review on tourism literature suggests that the positive and negative impacts of tourism development

existed from various perspectives that include economic, commercial, socio-cultural, physiological, political and administration, physical and natural environments [7,26-31].

**Tourism Development in the Langkawi Islands:** Many Malaysians argued that Langkawi underwent rapid development ever since Dr Mahathir Mohamed assumed his position as Malaysian Prime Minister in 1981. It is salient to note that Langkawi is situated in one of the constituencies in Kedah, the former Prime Minister's home state (Figure 1). Prior to this, there were a few attempts to develop Langkawi. Firstly, after the inclusion of the Langkawi Islands as a prospective tourist destination in the 1975 Malaysian Tourism Master Plan, an international consultant (Marwick Mitchell and Company) was appointed to prepare a master plan for tourism development in Langkawi in 1977 [32]. However, the master plan was a failure since none of the proposals were implemented [33].

A second effort was made in 1984, when the State Government leased 405 hectares of land to Promet Berhad<sup>1</sup> to be developed as an international hotel. Nevertheless, economic recession at the end of 1980s had thrown Promet Berhad into financial problems and nothing was developed except for a small hotel in Tanjung Rhu. Finally, after the Federal Government declared the Langkawi Islands as a duty free island in 1987, tourism development posted drastic growth. For example, from 1988 to the end of 1992, about 106 tourism projects by private companies valued at more than MYR\$ 1 billion had been approved by authorities. The influx of domestic and international arrivals in Langkawi also increased the number of hotel rooms from 859 in 1988 to 7072 in 2005 [34].

The Federal Government also established the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) in 1990. LADA is responsible for expanding and supporting tourism development in Langkawi by providing infrastructure and basic amenities such as road networks, power supply and a telecommunication system. LADA is operated based on several objectives as follows:

- Encourage social, economic and physical development of Langkawi in line with the development policies of Malaysia, which will also benefit local residents.

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s, Promet Berhad was one of the biggest public listed companies in Malaysia.

Table 1: Impacts from Tourism development

	Positive Impact	Negative Impact
Economic	Increased expenditures Creation of employment Increased in labour supply Increased in standard of living Increased in investment Foreign exchange earnings A rise in gross national product Taxation revenue Regional export income	Localised inflation Real estate speculation Failure to attract tourists Better alternative investments Capital outflows Inadequate estimation of cost of tourism Undesirable opportunity cost including transfer of fund from health and education
Commercial	Increased awareness of the region as a tourism destination Increased knowledge about the potential for investment and commercial activity Creation of new facilities, attractions and infrastructure Increased in accessibility	Acquisition of a poor reputation as a result of inadequate facilities, improper practices or inflated prices Negative reactions from existing enterprises due to the possibility of new competition for local manpower and government assistance
Socio-Cultural	Increased in permanent level of local interest and participant in types of activities associated with event Strengthening traditional values and traditions An improvement in social services	Commercialisation of activities which may be of a personal or private nature Modification of nature of event or activity to accommodate tourist Potential increased in crime Potential increased in prostitution Change in community structure Social dislocation
Psychological	Increased local pride and community spirit Increased awareness of non-local perceptions	Tendency towards defensive attitudes concerning host region High possibility of misunderstandings leading to varying degrees of host/visitor hostility
Political / administration	Enhanced international recognition of region and values Development of skills among planners	Economic exploitation of local population to satisfy ambitions of political elite Distortion of true nature of event to reflect values of political system Inability to achieve aims & failure to cope Increased in administrative cost Use of tourism to legitimatise unpopular decisions Legitimizing of ideology of local elite
Physical environment	Development of new facilities Improvement of local infrastructure Conservation of heritage Visitor management strategies	Environmental damage Changes in natural process Architectural pollution Destruction of heritage Overcrowding Changed feeding and breeding habit of wild life
Natural Environment	The creation of parks areas The depletion and contamination of water resources	The loss of vegetation The general spread of garbage and litter Trampling of plant and reduction in local bio-diversity

Source: Getz [26], Mathiesen & Wall [27], Lea [7], Murphy [28], Pierce [29], Hall [30], Godfrey & Clark [31]

- Establish a development scenario which would include unique features such as preservation of natural resources as well as respect for local culture, history and legends.
- Establish a development environment conducive to positioning Langkawi as an international tourist destination.
- Encourage and carry out the economic restructuring of lower-productivity sectors into higher-productivity sectors, for example, from farming to tourism.
- Create attractive opportunities for foreign investors using the existing available tourism products and resources

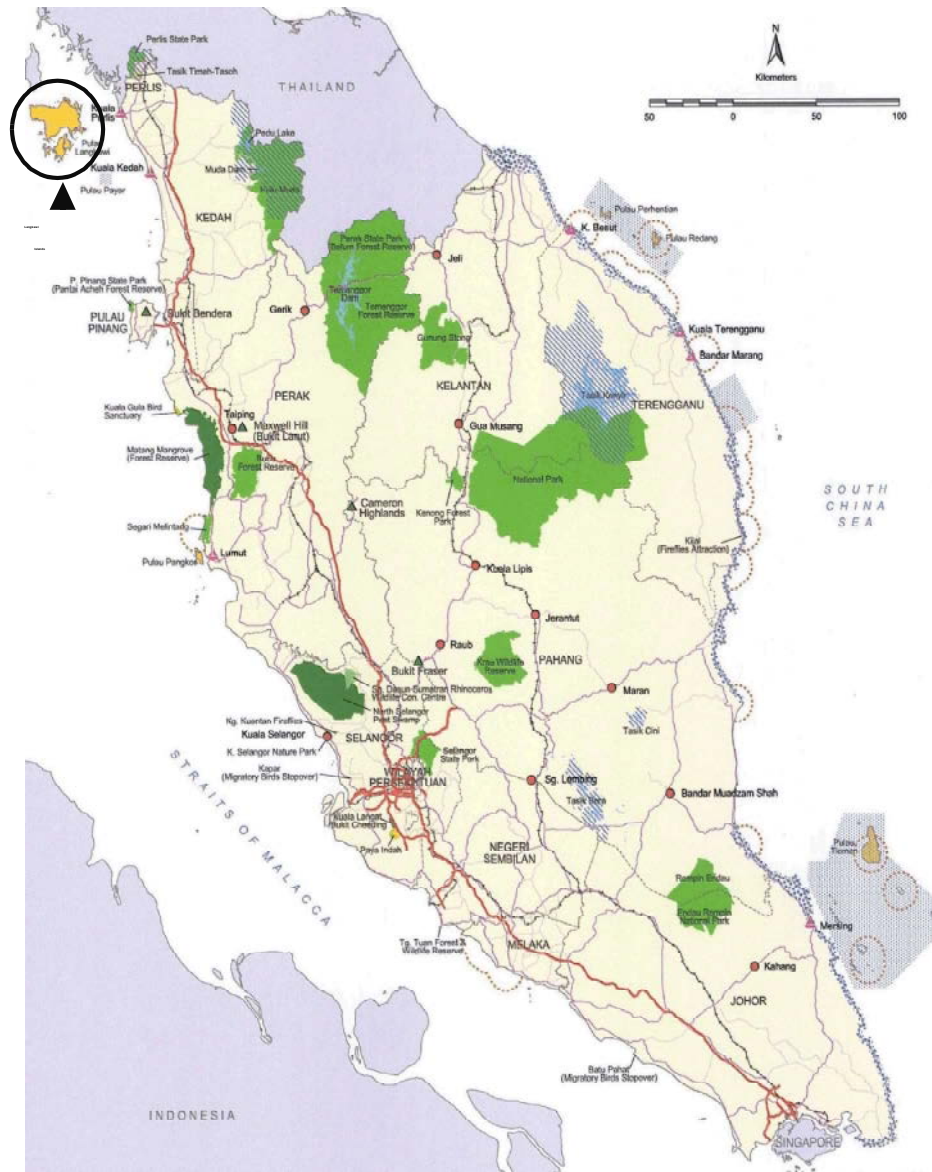


Fig. 1: Langkawi Islands, Malaysia

Furthermore, to ensure the success of tourism development in Langkawi, LADA functions are stipulated in accordance with the Langkawi Development Authority legislation (Act 423) as follows:

- To provide and maintain land banks for the future projects of LADA.
- To assist the private sector in development projects by providing land.
- To develop all land owned by LADA.
- To be the middleman between LADA and other agencies such as the District Land Office, involving land maintenance in Langkawi.

- To help the development of LADA and associated companies projects.

Within a short period, LADA has made its presence felt by the population of Langkawi through various projects such as socio-economic investments and infrastructure improvement to support the development of the tourism industry. Langley [35] however identifies several weaknesses with LADA's governance as its role in guiding development in Langkawi sometimes encounters difficulties because governance in Malaysia is based on a three-tier structure of Federal, State and Local governments. Since the regional development

Table 2: Tourist arrivals in the Langkawi Islands, 1986 - 2007

Year	Tourist arrivals (million)	Percentage change
1986	209,763	-
1987	310,004	47.79
1988	428,778	38.31
1989	658,993	53.69
1990	783,687	18.92
1991	879,292	12.20
1992	1,046,919	19.06
1993	1,321,301	26.21
1994	1,598,126	20.95
1995	1,795,406	12.34
1996	1,712,639	-4.61
1997	1,622,044	-5.29
1998	1,295,341	-20.14
1999	1,599,528	23.48
2000	1,810,460	13.19
2001	1,919,113	6.00
2002	1,916,451	-0.14
2003	1,981,946	3.42
2004	2,179,269	9.96
2005	1,835,245	-15.79
2006	2,112,026	15.08
2007	2,300,000	8.90

authorities like LADA are under the supervision of various ministries and the implementation of the three-tiered system is complex and involves several governance levels and numerous guidelines, policies and legislation.

**Tourism Life-cycle in the Langkawi Islands:** To examine the evolution of tourism development in Langkawi, Butler’s [36] tourist area life-cycle model is used for further explanation as it is appropriate to describe the evolution of tourist destinations [37]. For example, Ioannides [38] used this model to indicate the growth of tourism industry in Cyprus. Cooper and Jackson [39] also revealed that Butler’s model was descriptive and useful in analysing the tourism development of Isle of Man.

In the case of Langkawi, a study done in the 1990s by Sirat [40] on tourist destination life-cycle indicated that tourism growth at that time – seven years after the declaration of duty free status – Langkawi was at the stage of development. Tourism was rapidly developed by the government and private companies [41]. Table 2 shows visitor arrivals in Langkawi increased dramatically from 1987 to 1995, before declining for three years from 1996 to 1998.

The Langkawi Local Plan [42] recorded an increase of tourists’ arrivals from 209,763 in 1986 to 1,835,245 in 2005, with the highest figure of 2,179,269 visitors in 2004.

In 1996, a total of 130,178 visitors to Langkawi were foreign tourists. However, as shown in Figure 2, the effect of the Asian economic crisis in 1997 and 1998 has plunged the figure to 84,076 and 89,221. The drop of foreign tourists’ arrivals did not just affect the Langkawi Islands, but rather Malaysia as a whole and the Southeast Asian region generally.

However, quick recovery actions by the government raised back foreign visitors to Langkawi to 192,987 in 1999 and 427,908 in 2000 [43]. Another period of decline in 2002 was followed by increasing arrivals in 2003 and 2004 after the introduction of new attractions, such as the Langkawi Cable Car. However, in 2005, the number of visitor arrivals decreased sharply which indicated another downturn for tourism in the Langkawi Islands. Compared to the decline in 1996 to 1998, which was influenced by the regional economic recession, low arrivals in 2005 were attributed to high travel expenses, room rates and a less promising domestic tourism market. According to Marzuki [44], several issues such as residents’ hospitality, economic impact and inconsistencies in development policy also caused the progress of tourism development in Langkawi to slow down.

Nevertheless, the State Government as stated in the Langkawi Local Plan 2001-2015 put some efforts to overcome the stagnation issue by adopting a sustainable tourism approach. The State Government suggests that sustainable tourism is vital to rejuvenate the tourism industry in Langkawi and allows it to compete with other international destinations such as Phuket in Thailand and Bali in Indonesia. As a response to that matter, the declaration of the Langkawi Islands as the 52nd Global Network Geopark by UNESCO in 2007 was part of the government action to promote and introduce a new tourist attraction in Langkawi. As a result, tourist arrivals in Langkawi have increased in 2006 and 2007 as shown in Table 2.

**Methodology:** A household survey was used to identify local residents’ perceptions towards impacts from tourism development in the Langkawi Islands. The questionnaire explored the impacts of tourism development to local residents from economic, social and environmental perspectives and was divided into three sections of introduction, respondent background and statement of tourism impacts. Respondents were given 24 questions on tourism impacts based on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 represented “strongly disagree” and 5 represented “strongly agree”. The sample size for a household survey was decided using Rea and Parker’s [45] equation as follows:

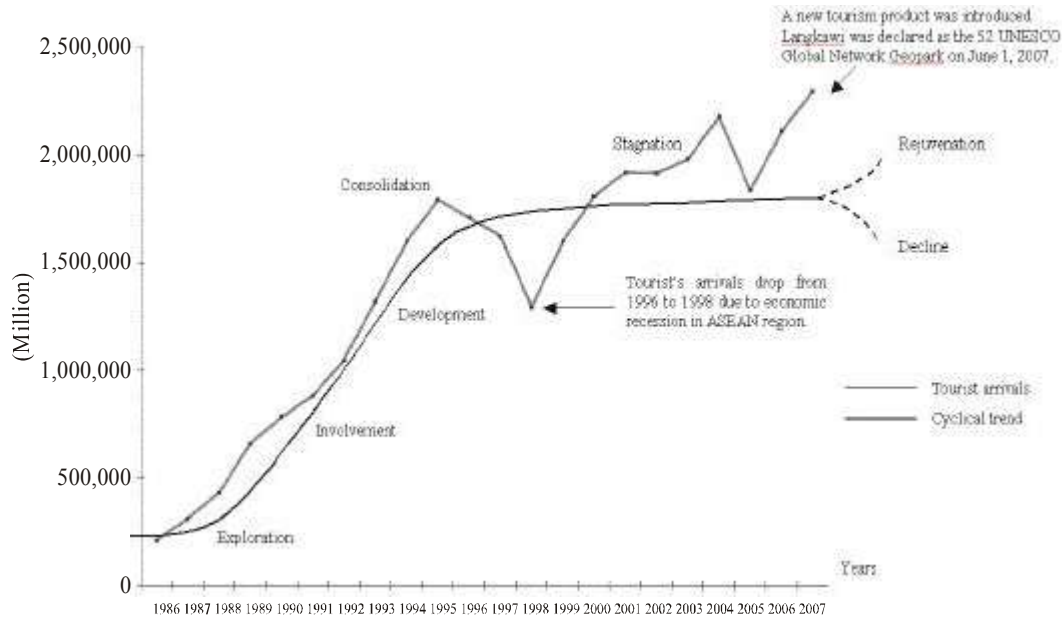


Fig. 2: Langkawi's Tourism Life Cycle, showing visitor arrivals

$$n = \frac{Z_a^2 [p(1-p)] N}{Z_a^2 [p(1-p)] + (N-1)ME_p^2}$$

**Where;**

- $ME_p$  = Margin of error in terms of proportion
- $Z_a$  = Z score for various level of confidence
- $p$  = The true proportion<sup>2</sup>
- $n$  = The sample size
- $N$  = The population size

The number of population in Langkawi (73,091) was then used as a basis for the calculation and the sample size obtained was 383 respondents.

During data collection, stratified random sampling was selected after considering the research aims of achieving representation from the whole group of islands for a broad range of attitudes. The divisions in the Langkawi Islands were used as the sampling frame of this study (Table 3).

Other options such as a telephone directory were not suitable since only 16.7 % of the population in the islands has fixed telephone lines [46]. Therefore, to ensure that the sample of this study represents the whole population of the study area, the population data from the Langkawi District Office was used. Sample fraction was divided based on the population of each division in the Langkawi Islands and the study population was selected randomly from the list of houses in every village and residential areas provided by the Langkawi District Office.

Two undergraduate students from a local university were appointed as research assistants during the fieldwork. Both were highly recommended by an officer at the Langkawi District Office based on their prior experience in doing surveys from their studies and part time jobs. A detailed briefing was given to ensure that research assistants understood the purpose of the survey and how to do it correctly. Two strategies were applied to confirm the validity of the survey. First, a spot check was done at the survey site while the assistants were conducting the survey. Second, selected respondents were approached and asked to confirm if they had actually filled out the form. Both strategies showed that the students had done their job precisely according to the instructions given.

After eight weeks, 392 questionnaires were completed from 784 respondents approached, representing a 50.0% response rate for this study. However, it was noticed that many respondents refused to participate in data collection for several reasons such as: being too busy; having no time to fill out the forms; or because they were not heads of the household. Nevertheless, the most obvious reason was that some respondents were not interested, as many tourism research projects had already been done in Langkawi over time.

**Research Findings:** The 24 items of the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism development were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using

<sup>2</sup>When the true proportion is unknown, p is assumed to be 0.5 for the highest sample size result (Rea & Parker, 1997: 150).

Table 3: Stratified sampling frame of the study area

Division	Population in Langkawi	Stratified Random Sampling	Sample size	Completed Questionnaires
Kuah	27,921	27,921 / 73,091 x 383	146	148
Ayer Hangat	9,867	9,867 / 73,091 x 383	52	54
Padang Mat Sirat	9,721	9,721 / 73,091 x 383	51	52
Ulu Melaka	10,964	10,964 / 73,091 x 383	58	60
Kedawang	8,844	8,844 / 73,091 x 383	46	48
Bohor	5774	5,774 / 73,091 x 383	30	30
Total	N= 73,091	-	n=383	n=392

Table 4: Factor analysis on impacts from tourism development (N=392)

Factor of impacts from tourism development	Factor Loading			Commonality
	1	2	3	
<b>Factor 1: Costs of tourism development</b>				
Tourism results in an increase in social problems	.775			.602
Tourism has caused traffic congestion, noise and pollution in the islands	.737			.580
Tourism development in natural areas has a negative impact on flora and fauna	.734			.568
Tourism development has decreased employment in other traditional sectors	.732			.568
Tourism infrastructure development has destroyed the natural environment in the islands	.725			.535
Tourism has restricted the privacy of local resident	.682			.480
Tourism causes changes in traditional cultures	.650			.503
Foreign companies have become a threat to local businesses	.620			.432
Tourism development has changed the islands landscape	.483			.446
<b>Factor 2: Benefits from tourism development</b>				
Tourism development has increased environmental awareness		.793		.687
Tourism development has resulted in increased environmental protection		.777		.640
Tourism has encouraged local government to restore historical buildings		.737		.579
Tourism has improved the quality of life of local residents		.657		.584
Local residents are happy to share public facilities with tourists		.652		.545
Interaction with foreign tourists is a positive experience for local residents		.571		.532
<b>Factor 3: Socio-economic effects of tourism development</b>				
Tourism has increased the property prices			.788	.669
Tourism brings investment to Langkawi Islands			.668	.645
Tourism has increased the prices of goods and services			.637	.507
Tourism development has improved the quality of tourism attractions			.629	.616
Tourism development has improved the quality of infrastructure in Langkawi Islands			.602	.538
Tourism development has increased migration from the mainland to Langkawi Islands			.519	.427
Eigenvalues	4.60	3.80	3.30	
% of variance	21.98	18.02	15.63	
Cumulative variance (%)	21.98	40.00	55.63	
Cronbach's alpha	.88	.85	.82	

principal component analysis. The factor analysis was carried out to identify the respondents' perception of impacts from tourism development to the Langkawi Islands. Before performing the principal component analysis, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed through reliability analysis. An inspection of correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above but 3 items were recommended to be removed from further analysis due to a very low coefficient. Therefore, only 21 items are usable for principal component analysis

In addition, the Barlett's Test of Sphericity shows statistical significance with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.89, exceeding the recommended value of 0.6 [47]. This means the items can be subjected for further exploration to identify underlying factors that may exist. Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was calculated to test the reliability and internal consistency of each factor and a cut-off point of 0.4 was used to include items in interpretation of a factor (Table 4).

From the Varimax-rotated factor matrix, three factors representing 55.63% of the explained variance were

Table 5: Summary results of household survey on impacts of tourism development

	Items Description	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Std. Deviation
Factor 1 Costs of tourism development	Tourism results in an increase in social problems	3.55	1.125
	Tourism has caused traffic congestion, noise and pollution in the islands	3.57	1.175
	Tourism development in natural areas has a negative impact on flora and fauna	3.72	1.089
	Tourism development has decreased employment in other traditional sectors	3.29	1.177
	Tourism infrastructure development has destroyed the natural environment in the islands	3.55	1.121
	Tourism has restricted the privacy of local resident	3.39	1.123
	Tourism causes changes in traditional cultures	3.78	1.056
	Foreign companies have become a threat to local businesses	3.56	1.145
	Tourism development has changed the islands landscape	3.95	1.019

<sup>a</sup> Scale: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

Table 6: Summary results of household survey on impacts of tourism development

	Items Description	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Std. Deviation
Factor 2 Benefits from tourism development	Tourism development has increased environmental awareness	3.97	0.993
	Tourism development has resulted in increased environmental protection	3.89	1.001
	Tourism has encouraged local government to restore historical buildings	3.98	0.932
	Tourism has improved the quality of life of local residents	4.27	0.774
	Local residents are happy to share public facilities with tourists	3.66	0.980
	Interaction with foreign tourists is a positive experience for local residents	4.13	0.844

<sup>a</sup> Scale: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

Table 7: Summary results of household survey on impacts of tourism development

	Items Description	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Std. Deviation
Factor 3 Socio-economic effects of tourism development	Tourism has increased the property prices	4.16	0.946
	Tourism brings investment to Langkawi Islands	4.25	0.788
	Tourism has increased the prices of goods and services	4.15	0.920
	Tourism development has improved the quality of tourism attractions	4.21	0.831
	Tourism development has improved the quality of infrastructure in Langkawi Islands	4.24	0.867
	Tourism development has increased migration from the mainland to Langkawi Islands	3.98	0.943

<sup>a</sup> Scale: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

extracted from 21 variables. The results showed the alpha coefficient for all three factors ranged from 0.82 to 0.88. The value is acceptable as it is above the minimum value of 0.50 indicated for reliability for basic research [48]. Three factors related to impacts from tourism development in the Langkawi Islands are discussed further as follows:

**Costs Of Tourism Development:** As shown in Table 5, the first factor of *costs of tourism development* suggested that tourism results in an increase in social problems (mean=3.55), tourism has caused traffic congestion, noise and pollution in the islands (mean=3.57), tourism development in natural areas has a negative impact on flora and fauna (mean=3.72), tourism development has decreased employment in other traditional sectors (mean=3.29), tourism infrastructure development has destroyed the natural environment in the islands (mean=3.55), tourism has restricted the privacy of local residents (mean=3.39), tourism causes changes in traditional cultures (mean=3.78), foreign companies have become a threat to local businesses (mean=3.56) and tourism development has changed the islands landscape (mean=3.95).

**Benefits From Tourism Development:** The second factor of *benefits from tourism development* shown in Table 6 suggested that tourism development has increased environmental awareness (mean=3.97), tourism development has resulted in increased environmental protection (mean=3.89), tourism has encouraged local government to restore historical buildings (mean=3.98), tourism has improved the quality of life of local residents (mean=4.27), local residents are happy to share public facilities with tourists (mean=3.66) and interaction with foreign tourists is a positive experience for local residents (mean=4.13).

**Socio-economic Effects Of Tourism Development:** Table 7 shows the third factor of *socio-economic effects of tourism development* suggested that tourism has increased the property prices (mean=4.16), tourism brings investment to Langkawi Islands (mean=4.25), tourism has increased the prices of goods and services (mean=4.15), tourism development has improved the quality of tourism attractions (mean=4.21), tourism development has improved the quality of infrastructure in Langkawi Islands



(mean=4.24) and tourism development has increased migration from the mainland to Langkawi Islands (mean=3.98).

### CONCLUSION

Findings from household surveys suggested that tourism development in the Langkawi Islands has contributed both costs and benefits of tourism to local residents. Despite that, findings from principal component analysis suggested that local residents in Langkawi received more benefits than costs of tourism development especially in terms of socio-economic perspectives. Tourism development brought more economic benefits with an increase in employment and business opportunities and improved local infrastructure. This study also found that the tourism industry had provided opportunities for local residents to be involved in entrepreneurial opportunities.

However, greater social and environmental costs were major concerns as they were evidence of cultural deterioration and negative impacts on physical development. Although the tourism industry had become the mainstay of economic growth in the Langkawi Islands, local residents remained cautious about tourism development. Such concerns derived, for example, were from the monopoly over local businesses by mainland Malaysians and the negative effects from that monopoly to the traditional sector. Nevertheless, the majority of local residents believed that tourism development in Langkawi has significantly improved their quality of life.

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