UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM AT SUNGAI SEDIM
AMENITY FOREST, KEDAH, MALAYSIA FROM A TOURISM
STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE

ROSLIZAWATI BINTI CHE AZIZ

FEP 2016 7

DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM AT SUNGAI SEDIM AMENITY FOREST, KEDAH, MALAYSIA FROM A TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE

By

ROSLIZAWATI BINTI CHE AZIZ

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM AT SUNGAI SEDIM AMENITY FOREST, KEDAH, MALAYSIA FROM A TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE

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ROSLIZAWATI BINTI CHE AZIZ

January 2016

Chair   : Mohani Binti Abdul, PhD
Faculty : Economics and Management

The main focus of the study is to explore the development of sustainable rural tourism at Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest (SSAF), one of the most popular destinations in Malaysia. The forest is located in the north of Peninsular Malaysia, within Sedim's area and near Karangan, 30km from Kulim's town. The World's Longest Canopy Walk, the 925m long and 50m high Tree Top Walk (TTW), is among the best attractions at SSAF and offers great aerial views of the natural forest. The study is concerned with the past and current situations of tourism development at SSAF from a different perspective of stakeholders; local communities, authorities, operators as well as visitors. The data was collected from 59 participants who directly and indirectly involved with tourism activities at SSAF. The information was derived from two focus group discussions and semi-structured interviewed. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was applied as a new tool or approach for conducting the research while ATLAS.ti software was used as a tool for data interpretation and analysis. The findings show that there are four strengths of SSAF that need to be highlighted, which are nature resources, eco-tourism activities, TTW and historical/ cultural elements. In addition to that, the study also shows that there are few potentials of SSAF from the perspective of tourism stakeholders; niche products, home-stay, cultural and architectural value, entrepreneurship development, education and research center as well as infrastructures and facilities development. The social, economic and environment elements have been identified as the impact factors that contributed to the development of tourism activities at SSAF. In support of this finding, the results also showed that there are broadly similar views among the participants towards tourism development and their engagement in this industry, thus will put greater emphasis to see more tourism activities, and products will be developed at SSAF. The results also clearly indicate the significant contributions of rural tourism development and there are obvious direct and indirect potentials and contributions of rural tourism that have resulted from an increase in tourism development at SSAF. The partnership between the government, tourism operators, and the local communities in forest management plays an important part for SSAF, especially for the purpose of preserving and conserving the

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forest and nature. The study also strives to contribute to this growing area of research by bringing wider benefits of rural development to SSAF based on The 10th Malaysian Plan (RMK-10) with a holistic and coordinated approach that boosts the tourism industry. The implication of this is that it is a significant stress on economic, environmental, and socio-cultural roles that affects all the stakeholders. Hence, this study also provides much scope to expand the literature by considering methods to apply the Appreciative Inquiry approach to rural tourism development.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**MENEROKA PEMBANGUNAN LESTARI PELANCONGAN LUAR BANDAR DI
HUTAN LIPUR SUNGAI SEDIM, KEDAH, MALAYSIA DARIPADA
PERSPEKTIF PIHAK BERKEPENTINGAN PELANCONGAN**

Oleh

ROSLIZAWATI BINTI CHE AZIZ

Januari 2016

Pengerusi   : Mohani Binti Abdul, PhD
Fakulti   : Ekonomi dan Pengurusan

Fokus utama kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka pembangunan lestari
pelancongan luar bandar di Hutan Lipur Sungai Sedim (SSAF), salah satu
destinasi pelancongan terkenal di Malaysia. Lokasi ini terletak di bahagian
utara Semenanjung Malaysia, dalam kawasan Sedim dan berdekatan kawasan
Karangan, 30km daripada bandar Kulim, Kedah. *Tree Top Walk* (TTW) atau
Kanopi Berjalan Kaki terpanjang di dunia dengan ketinggian 50m dari aras
tanah serta 925m panjang, merupakan tarikan utama di SSAF yang
memberikan pemandangan alam semula jadi yang menarik. Kajian ini
menitikberatkan kepada pembangunan pelancongan semasa dan lampau di
SSAF daripada pelbagai perspektif pihak berkepentingan pelancongan iaitu
penduduk tempatan, pihak berkuasa, pengusaha serta pelancong. Data kajian
telah di kumpul daripada 59 peserta yang terlibat secara langsung dan tidak
langsung terhadap aktiviti pelancongan di SSAF. Hasil dapatan diperoleh
melalui kaedah temu bual tidak berstruktur dan perbincangan kumpulan
berfokus. Pendekatan *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI) telah diaplikasikan sebagai alat
ukur baharu untuk tujuan pengumpulan data manakala perisian ATLAS.ti pula
digunakan untuk tujuan interpretasi dan analisis data. Hasil kajian mendapati
terdapat empat kekuatan SSAF yang perlu diberi tumpuan iaitu sumber alam
semula jadi, aktiviti pelancongan eko, TTW selain elemen sejarah dan budaya.
Di samping itu, hasil kajian daripada pelbagai perspektif peserta menunjukkan
terdapat beberapa potensi SSAF iaitu produk khusus (*niche product*), inap
desa (*home-stay*), nilai budaya dan seni bina, pembangunan keusahawanan,
pusat kajian dan pendidikan serta pembangunan infrastruktur dan kemudahan.
Elemen sosial, ekonomi dan persekitaran pula telah dikenal pasti sebagai
faktor kesan terhadap pembangunan aktiviti pelancongan di SSAF. Dalam
menyokong hasil kajian, dapatan kajian juga mengesahkan bahawa terdapat
pandangan umum dan penglibatan yang sama di kalangan peserta kajian dan
akan memberikan penekanan yang lebih terhadap pembangunan pelancongan
untuk melihat lebih banyak aktiviti pelancongan dan produk dibangunkan di
SSAF. Hasil kajian turut menegaskan sumbangan yang besar pembangunan
luar bandar secara langsung dan tidak langsung yang terhasil daripada
peningkatan pembangunan pelancongan di SSAF. Kerjasama di antara pihak

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kerajaan, pengusaha pelancongan dan penduduk tempatan memainkan peranan penting di dalam pengurusan hutan di SSAF, terutamanya untuk tujuan pemeliharaan dan pemuliharaan hutan dan alam semula jadi. Kajian ini juga berusaha untuk menyumbang kepada bidang pelancongan yang semakin meningkat penyelidikan dengan membawa manfaat yang lebih luas kepada pembangunan luar bandar di SSAF berdasarkan Rancangan Malaysia Ke-10 (RMK -10) melalui pendekatan holistik dan bersepadu untuk meningkatkan lagi industri pelancongan negara. Implikasi kajian ini juga adalah untuk memberi tekanan yang besar ke atas peranan ekonomi, alam sekitar dan sosio- budaya dan memberi kesan kepada semua pihak yang berkepentingan. Selain itu, kajian ini juga menyediakan banyak skop untuk mengembangkan sorotan literatur dalam kaedah *Appreciative Inquiry* untuk kajian pembangunan pelancongan luar bandar.

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Sincere,

Roslizawati Che Aziz
Januari 2016
UPM, Malaysia

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 7 January 2016 to conduct the final examination of Roslizawati Che Aziz on her thesis entitled "Development of Sustainable Rural Tourism at Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest, Kedah, Malaysia from a Tourism Stakeholders' Perspective" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:

- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
- supervision responsibilities as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 (Revision 2012-2013)are adhered to.

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AI	- Appreciative Inquiry
CED	- Community Economic Development
EPPs	- Entry Point Projects
ETP	- Economic Transformation Programme
FGD	- Focus Group Discussion
GDP	- Gross Domestic Product
GNI	- Gross National Income
HU	- Hermeneutic Unit
LA	- Local Authorities
LC	- Local Communities
MMBH	- Malaysia Mega Biodiversity Hub
MTTP	- Malaysian Tourism Transformation Programme
NCER	- Northern Region Economic Corridor
NGOs	- Non-Governmental Organizations
NKEAs	- National Key Economic Areas
PEMANDU	- Performance Management and Delivery Unit
SEM	- Structured Equation Modelling
SET	- Social Exchange Theory
SME	- Small Medium Enterprise
SOAR	- Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results
SSAF	- Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest
STD	- Sustainable Tourism Development
SWOT	- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TO	- Tourism Operators
TIC	- Tourist Information Centres
TTW	- Tree Top Walk
UPEN	- Economic Planning Unit
UNWTO	- United Nation for World Tourism Organization (Formerly known as WTO)
VS	- Visitors
VISE	- Visualization, Integration, Serendipity, and Exploration
WTO	- World Tourism Organization
WWF	- Malaysia World Wide Fund for Nature
WTTC	- World Travel and Tourism Council
YG	- Youth Group

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Overview

Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries and is a major source of income for developing countries. Over the past six decades, the tourism industry has experienced continued expansion and diversification, becoming one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world (UNWTO, 2014). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in their report of *"Tourism Towards 2030"*, the number of international tourist arrivals worldwide is expected to increase by an average of 3.3 per cent a year over the period of 2010 to 2030. Indeed, Asia and the Pacific are identified as having the strongest growth (by region), where arrivals are forecast to increase from 331 million in 2010, reaching up to 535 million in 2030. In addition, the tourism industry also benefits from the continuing globalization process in which travel has been driven by the rising purchasing power of the growing middle class in many developing economies (Blanke & Chiesa, 2013).

Tourism was also acknowledged as an increasingly important industry, which creates new products and well-managed tourism destinations. Over the years, the industry has experienced sustained growth and also been an area of significant development in recent years (UNWTO, 2014). Thus, in order for tourism to be a catalyst for socio-economic development, it is essential that governments pursue the sustainable development of tourism in a comprehensive and planned manner (United-Nations, 2006). Tourism will continue to develop as a significant social and economic activity (UNWTO, 2011; WTTC, 2012a). A recent report by UNWTO (2015), the number of international tourists (overnight visitors) reached 1,138 million in 2014, 51 million more than in 2013. With an increase of 4.7%, this is the fifth consecutive year of above average growth since the 2009 economic crisis. This shows that this industry is more powerful than other sectors when it comes to converting spending into incomes and jobs. In fact, this industry also offers many job opportunities that help to revitalise local economies that otherwise have few choices in participating in the global economy (WTTC, 2014b).

With this contribution in mind, this chapter is divided into sub-sections in order to discuss current issues and tourism development related to this study. The first part is an introduction to the industry, which relates to the background of this study and some issues that should be discussed in analysing rural tourism development. Subsequently, the objectives, research questions, the scope of the study, justification, and significance of this study will be discussed. The operational definitions for this study will be highlighted in the last section.

1.2   Background of the Study

The tourism industry in Malaysia has achieved such a leading position that it counts as one of the most important sources of income and foreign exchange. This growth will continue in the future and will contribute to make tourism the most significant industry in the world (Kayat, 2011). Besides, the industry is, like no other industry, in a position to create prosperity and economic development opportunities. Since 2000, Malaysia has launched the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) with the intention to tap the growth potential of tourism, as well as to realise Malaysia's aspiration of becoming a high-income country by 2020 (Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2013). As a result, the tourism industry recently was acknowledged as a major contributor to Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with an average growth rate of 12 per cent per annum since 2004 (PEMANDU, 2013).

Recent statistics by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) stated that this sector contributed significantly to the economy because it accounted for about RM61 billion, or 5.7 per cent of the total GDP in 2014. It is also expected to rise by 5.6 per cent in 2015, about RM95.9 billion or 5.8 per cent of total GDP for 2025 (WTTC, 2015). The Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU), however, highlighted that in 2014, tourism was the sixth highest contributor to the Malaysian economy. The country continues to see new records set, with tourism arrivals growing by 6.7 per cent to 27.4 per cent and receipts at RM72 billion compared to RM65.4 billion in 2013 (PEMANDU, 2015). Globally, tourism will continue to experience development and diversification, remaining a top growth sector in the world economy. However, the increasingly dynamic landscape of the sector will require industry players to step out of their traditional roles, to meet evolving demand for products aligned with the modern traveller's lifestyle needs. Malaysia will aim to intensify marketing and promotional efforts to create greater product differentiation with experiential offerings that deliver unique cultural identity and greater perceived (PEMANDU, 2015).

With the implementation of ETP, tourism has been identified as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs). The Malaysian Tourism Transformation Programme (MTTP) was formulated to achieve the target of attracting 36 million international tourists and generating RM168 billion in terms of tourists' receipts (Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2013). This strategic ambition will be achieved through, inter alia, the 12 Entry Point Projects (EPPs) proposed under the Tourism NKEA. As a result, it was reflected in the growth of tourist arrivals and tourist earnings, indicated significantly increased the number of tourist arrivals from 15.7 million in 2004 to 27.44 million in 2014. Similarly to the total tourism receipts, which showed a dramatic increased from RM29.7 billion in 2004 to RM72 billion in 2013 over the period of 10 years performance (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Number of tourist arrivals from 2004 to 2014

YEAR	🧳 ARRIVALS	👜 RECEIPTS (RM)
2014	27.44 million	72.0 Billion
2013	25.72 million	65.4 Billion
2012	25.03 million	60.6 Billion
2011	24.71 million	58.3 Billion
2010	24.58 million	56.5 Billion
2009	23.65 million	46.1 Billion
2008	22.05 million	49.6 Billion
2007	20.97 million	53.4 Billion
2006	17.55 million	36.3 Billion
2005	16.43 million	32.0 Billion
2004	15.70 million	29.7 Billion

Source: Tourism Malaysia (2015)

The contribution of tourism to Malaysia's economy can be measured from the Malaysian tourism satellite accounts. It is estimated that tourism industry in Malaysia will be increased by 2.1 times, by contributing RM115 billion in receipts and providing two million jobs within the industry in 2015 (PEMANDU, 2011). Due to its historical locations, sites, and its natural attractions, Malaysia was recognised among the top 10th most touristic countries in the world (WTTC, 2012c). Recently, with the immense growth industry, Malaysian tourism is representing the only Asian country to have made the cut in Lonely Planet's "*Best in Travel 2014 - Top 10 Countries*", ranking 10th on the list. It is also ranked by Singapore's Crescent Rating as the world's best Muslim travel destination in 2013 (PEMANDU, 2013). As a result, the tourism industry made Malaysia the attractive holiday destination in the ASEAN region (WTTC, 2012b).

In the future, the government will be focusing on how to enhance the country's position as a leading foreign tourist destination while continuing to focus on high-yield tourism and employment growth for the nation. Despite these targets, several issues need to be addressed. These include the need to develop vibrant and iconic tourism products, improving maintenance of existing tourism sites, and adopting focused tourism promotions (Department of Statistics, 2013). Indeed, cooperative effort between the public and private sectors is crucial in maximising tourism sector growth. It is believed that holistic partnership also enables Malaysia to be ranked as the 10th most visited country in the global arena (PEMANDU, 2013). In order to achieve these targets, the focus will be on attracting a larger share of high spending travellers and capturing a higher share of high growth segments particularly from Russia, India, China and the Middle East (PEMANDU, 2013).

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Nature, in the form of the rainforest/jungle is identified to be Malaysia's main strength (WTO, 2001). In addition, a recent study by World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) found that nature-based activities are the fastest-growing tourism product in Malaysia. In fact, nature tourism represents 35 per cent of tourist arrivals per year and currently makes up 10 per cent of the country's tourism revenue (WWF, 2012). Thus, the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia is actively involved in promoting rural tourism activities in which the National Eco-Tourism Plan and Rural Tourism Master Plan was formulated to promote, encourage and enhance the community-based tourism program (WTO, 2001). The plan also encourages rural dwellers to open up their areas for tourists to experience rural activities.

The potentials of developing tourism activities in rural areas cannot be over-emphasised and recently became an interesting field for further understanding of a gap in literature. Tourism in rural areas upstages an increase of benefits receivable from tourism activities that will help local residents and ensure synergy between tourism development and biodiversity conservation (Sadler, 2004). Indeed, tourism experience is also very important for rural areas that need to develop appealing and distinctive offerings for a demanding and heterogeneous tourism market (Maria & Loureiro, 2014). Therefore, an integrated framework or model for maximising benefits from tourism development is needed to show how tourism can directly support community development and conservation efforts (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2012).

In recent years, researchers show an increased interest in analysing rural tourism development all over the world, such as China, India, and Russia and even in Malaysia. A considerable amount of literature was published in tourism journals, which are mainly concerned with the significance of this industry towards tourism stakeholders (Tian, Lee & Law, 2011). For those reasons, this study intends to explore the development of rural tourism from the tourism stakeholders' perspective, which has greater contributions towards tourism development. This was focuses specifically on the prospects of Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest (hereafter SSAF) in Kulim, Kedah, one of the best eco-tourism destinations in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2010; UPEN, 2009).

The current study explores the past and current scenario of tourism development that encourages growth of rural tourism by highlighting those who complain about the inconclusiveness of the evidence and the subsequent dearth of understanding of economic and social viabilities of rural tourism. This ambivalence should be quieted by the sheer advantages of involving rural communities in tourism activities at SSAF. This study also focuses on the significant impacts and perceptions of developing tourism products in rural areas with a concern for tourism stakeholders that are directly involved in tourism activities. It is important to highlight their opinions, ideas and experiences regarding the development of tourism activities within the area because they are considered to be major players and resource for successful tourism development (Imran, Alam & Beaumont, 2014).

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1.2.1 The Provision of Tourism Industry in Kedah

Kedah, which is one of the oldest states in Malaysia, has a population of 1.5 million people comprised of various ethnicities (Kerajaan Negeri Kedah, 2013). Kedah has many historical heritages and is rich in natural resources that have the potential to be developed as tourism products. In the early 1990s, the Kedah State Government gave serious attention to the tourism industry due its ability to generate economic growth, creating more job opportunities and changing the rural development landscape (Kulim District Council, 2004). Vision 2020 gave Malaysian citizens a clear direction, hope, and aspiration to achieve fully developed country status by the year 2020. In line with that national goal, Kedah State formulated a long-term development plan that aims at transforming Kedah into a developed state by the year 2020 (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2008).

Tourism Malaysia is intensifying its efforts in promoting tourism products in Kedah where two tourism packages, Alor Setar City Tour and Royal Heritage Trail, are able to lure tourists away from other destinations (Bernama, 2011b). Many breath-taking tourism products in Kedah remain outside most tourists' notice. They include, but are not restricted to, The Greater Ulu Muda, Baling Hot Spring, Jerai Mountain, Pedu Lake and Kuala Muda. Also, the uniqueness of these natural resources and heritage products such as Paddy Museums, Lembah Bujang, and Alor Setar Tower are amongst the most popular tourist attractions in Kedah, yet remain to be maximally explored (Kerajaan Negeri Kedah, 2013). With comparatively advantageous effects on income and employment generation in Kedah, the tourism industry is an option for enhancing rural lifestyles and for inducing positive changes in the distribution of income in underprivileged areas (Liu, 2006). Further information about Kedah state is provided in Appendix E1.

Figure 1.1: Map showing the administrative divisions of Kedah state
Source: Kerajaan Negeri Kedah (2013)

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The tourism industry in Kedah has diverse attractions, a variety of natural resources, historical heritage, and even the World's Longest Tree Top Walk (hereafter TTW) at Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest (Tourism Development Council, 2012). It also has great potential for tourism development, especially in cultural and natural touristic segments. Tourism products in Kedah are also unique and offered in specific locations for tourists. Opportunities are abound for entrepreneurs, business owners and investors who support the government's direction as Kedah has some of the most attractive holiday destinations in the world (PEMANDU, 2011). Therefore, Kedah is starting to receive benefits from tourism industry development because of an increasing number of tourists are arriving each year (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2008).

Tourism development in Kedah has changed its physical landscape, especially in rural and remote areas. Since 1990, the Kedah state focused on industrial development, tourism and commercial agriculture sectors (UPEN, 2009). Political stability in the state is a major contributing factor to the economic growth in the form of foreign and local investments in industry, tourism, and infrastructure sectors flourish throughout the state (UPEN, 2009). As a result, Kedah has successfully transformed its economic structure from an agricultural base towards an industrial base (Kulim District Council, 2004). Nevertheless, over the past few years, the tourist arrival trend to Malaysia in particular has changed development of the tourism industry in Kedah, where the number of tourist arrivals has dropped significantly, and this has raised alarms.

The number of visitors to the state of Kedah has declined since 2007 from a total of 4.5 million to 3.8 million in 2008 and 2009 (Bernama, 2011a). The situation is even more alarming when in 2010, the number of tourists declined to 2.7 million (Jaafar, 2010; Manikumar, 2011). Meanwhile, according to the Domestic Tourism Survey (2011), which tracks the number of tourist arrivals by state, declared that Kedah received the highest number of domestic tourists in 2011, about 5.12 million. But this number decreased again in 2013 by approximately 4.47 million tourists (Department of Statistics, 2011, 2013), as shown in Figure 1.2.
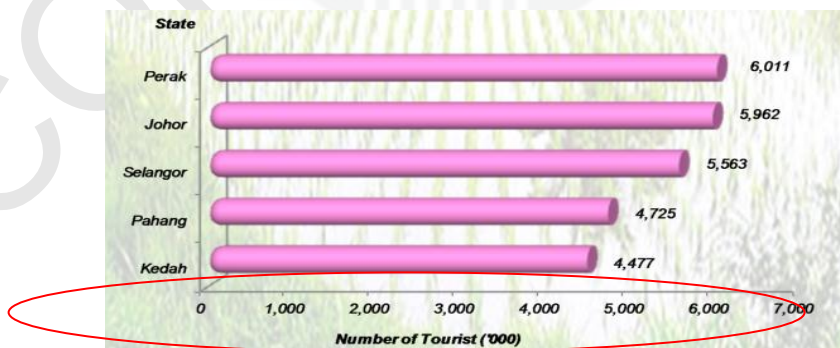
Figure 1.2: Arrival of domestic tourists by state, 2013
Source: Department of Statistics (2013)

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This change is quite surprising because the state has one of the most recognisable tourist destinations of the country, i.e. Langkawi Island, as compared to the other states in Malaysia. Does the change in tourist arrivals in Kedah mean that Langkawi Island is somehow declining, or should the state consider promoting other tourism products that are related to Kedah? In the past, the majority of local residents worked in the agricultural sectors. However, situations have changed towards the service sector when locals became actively involved in the tourism industry. Unemployment and poverty rates in Langkawi Island have declined considerably as a result of the many and relatively well-paying job opportunities available in the tourism industry (Bernama, 2010). As a result, tourism development in Langkawi Island is succeeding in adding value to the people's socio-economic status and is opening their minds to change and improving their knowledge in tourism.

Various incentives are provided by the Kedah government to attract tourists to Langkawi Island and make the legendary island a major destination for tourists in the State (Bernama, 2013). In fact, the tourism industry in Langkawi Island has changed the economic activities for local people. Langkawi Island development illustrates that tourism can also be an impetus affecting upward structural shifts in a rural economy, but its momentum can only be sustained and effective if there are conditions to stimulate changes (UPEN, 2009). With this mind, it is believed that if the tourism industry in Langkawi Island could be planned and managed properly, then the local government also should take the same strategies in order to improve and enhance the development of SSAF, in addition to the local communities' benefits.

With the diverse segments of tourism activities in Kedah (e.g. homestay, agro-tourism and eco-tourism) the State Government should encourage greater involvement of the local residents and required commitments be given to the provision of education and training opportunities to the rural residents (Liu, 2006). Although Kedah relies solely on the industrialisation and tourism development, the State Government has realigned several policies and strategies, namely: the Kedah as Developed State Policy 2010, Kedah Structured Plan 2002-2020 and Northern Region Economic Corridor (NCER) 2007-2025 (Economic Planning Unit, 2009). However, the challenges remain daunting. These plans can be implemented to evaluate the development direction of Kedah State in the next decade in addition to promoting tourism development in the state (Liu, 2006).

Tourism activities are suitable to remote or non-urban areas, if there is sufficient access for tourists. Additionally, the development of tourism is capable of developing rural areas, thereby reducing the gap and disparities in income between rural and urban people. It also solves some of the economic challenges that are related to depopulation caused by migration of rural population to urban centres (Ciolac, Csosz, Merce, Balan & Dincu, 2011; Paniagua, 2002). The issues of tourism planning and rural development in

Kedah State generally should be given special attention as one of the efforts to promote transformation of economic development of the rural population.

Local people and entrepreneurs, particularly in rural areas, should not be reluctant towards the positive effects of tourism because there is significant potential for economic growth, jobs, business and entrepreneurship opportunities, infrastructural development, high quality facilities and services in Kedah State. Therefore, this study strives to fill the gap in knowledge regarding these particular issues to ensure the synergy that exists between the sustainable development of the tourism industry and livelihood improvement, (especially for rural dwellers) is best understood and acted upon.

1.2.2 Research Setting: Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest (SSAF), Kulim, Kedah

Kulim is one of the small towns in Kedah that has several great attractions, particularly eco-tourism sites and its interestingly unique natural landscape with 13 existing tourist destinations. In addition, 25 areas committed for development have been identified as a source of tourist attractions. Of those, 17 areas are classified as new destinations while another eight are targeted for upgrading. With the overwhelming and rapid industrial development in Kulim, exemplified by Malaysia's first high-tech drive in Kulim Hi-Tech Park, investment from abroad in the form of developing high-tech factories has introduced thousands of jobs to the local people, especially for rural communities (Kulim District Council, 2004). There is a dramatic increase in population and rapid growth in this area.

As an industrial city, Kulim has a wide range of features that meets basic needs such as a good road network. The Kulim-Butterworth Highway is a primary basis for attracting investors in the town of Kulim. This was seen in 2000 when the State developed an integrated development plan to transform Kedah into a developed state by the year 2020. In addition, there is the Kedah State Structure Plan 2002-2020 and the Northern Corridor Economic Region 2007-2025, which aims to mobilize and stimulate economic growth and further develop the tourism industry (Kulim District Council, 2013). The state government estimates the number of tourists to Kulim's areas will increase to 109,500 tourists in 2020 compared to a total of 26,280 tourists in 2004, based on a 40 per cent rate of hotel accommodation in Kulim (Kulim District Council, 2004).

Kulim district is the third most important city in Kedah after Alor Setar and Sungai Petani (Kulim District Office, 2011). It has a variety of tourism assets and products to be offered and promoted either nationally or internationally. Among the most valuable products in this area are clear waterfalls, unspoilt natural forests, stately mountains and various agricultural products. Because of various tourism products that exist in Kulim and the development of the State's tourism, the industry is booming. Not surprisingly, the State Government is giving serious attention to making Kulim into the rural tourism and eco-tourism

destination of choice in Malaysia (Kulim District Council, 2004). Rapid development in this area has introduced many to further developing rural tourism in Malaysia. Further information about Kulim district can be seen in Appendix E2 whereas Table 1.2 shows the most valuable tourist attractions in Kulim district:

Table 1.2: Tourist attractions in Kulim

Tourism destinations	Types of attraction	Products
Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest	Eco and agro-tourism	River, natural resources, rapid Sport facilities for adventure activities (water rafting, kayak) Natural forest/ mountain Flora and fauna Accommodation for tourists Workshop and training centre Agro- tourism centre
Gunung Bintang	Eco-tourism	Natural forest Mountain/ Flora and fauna River and waterfall
Ulu Paip	Eco-tourism	Natural forest Mountain/ Flora and fauna River and waterfall Workshop and training centre
Pahau	Eco-tourism	R & D Centre/ Education Mountain/ Flora and fauna Workshop and training centre
Gunung Bongsu	Eco-tourism	Natural forest/Mountain/ Flora and fauna River and waterfall Historical monuments Workshop and training centre Agro centre
Right Paddy Scheme Areas	Agro-tourism	Agro- tourism centre Aquatic resources/ waterfall Feathered animals

Source: Kulim Municipal Council (2004, 2013)

With an abundance of natural touristic resources and good infrastructural facilities, Kulim has great potential to be promoted as a new eco-tourism destination. It will contribute to a positive impact and improve the local community's socio-economic standards (Kulim District Council, 2004). Realising that most tourist attractions are dependent on renewable natural and heritage resources, preservation and conservation efforts should be carried out properly and continuously. Five key elements are identified and will be focused on through the blueprint of product development namely; position the tourism assets, smart partnership, promotion and event presentation in line with

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national tourism policy and planning. Indeed, the formulation of policy and blueprint have impetus for positive direction of travel (Jaafar, 2010b).

Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest (SSAF), one of the most popular destinations in Kulim, was chosen as the research setting due to its characteristics and future contributions to host residents. It was recognized as one of the "*Top Five Chosen Destinations in Asia Pacific"* with 24 waterfall cascades along a 15 kilometre stretch (Kulim District Office, 2011). The forest is located in the north of Peninsular Malaysia, within Sedim's area and near Karangan, 30km from Kulim's town. The World's Longest Canopy Walk, the 925m long and 50m high Tree Top Walk (TTW), is among the best attractions at SSAF and offers great aerial views of the natural forest (Kulim District Council, 2013).

The potential of SSAF to be the best eco-tourism destinations in Malaysia can be seen from the rich, natural resource base that includes an adventurous waterfall that was promoted as being among the best white water rafting challenges internationally (Kulim District Council, 2013; Tourism Development Council, 2012). In addition to this, it has a rich combination of tourism endowments, such as forest recreational park, waterfalls, and mountains. Adventurous visitors can test their endurance by taking on the rapids with rafting, kayaking, or canoeing while the less daring can opt for soft adventure activities. Having the world's longest Tree Top Walk, SSAF also offers various types of eco-tourism activities like bird-watching, education tourism and research centre visits (Kulim District Office, 2014).
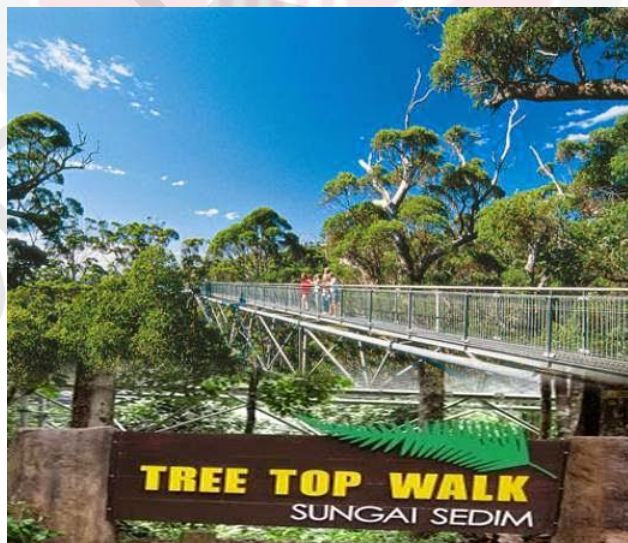
Figure 1.3: Tree Top Walk at Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest, Kedah
Source: Kulim District Council (2004)

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In addition, according to the Kedah Tourism Board, the SSAF, as well as the Merbok River Cruise, are expected to attract more tourists to the mainland of Kedah. This will help the tourism industry to create a more balanced inflow of tourists to the state (PEMANDU, 2009). The tourism board also will be continuously promoting Kedah's eco-tourism products on a low-key basis in the future and will be waiting for the government to improve the basic infrastructure in SSAF like public toilets, changing rooms as well as small shelters for the visitors. Tourism has become the priority tool of rural planning at SSAF, which tourism helps to energize the rural economy and plays an important role in creating a value-added commercial channel for local produce.

One of the most significant current discussions related to the prospects and future development at SSAF is the nature of tourism products at SSAF, such as the adventure's waterfall and surrounding pristine forest. This often involves small-scale operations and the availability of culturally based or farm-based products can be conducive to wide community participation. There are also reasons why it is important to develop SSAF as a rural tourism destination in Kedah, namely: (i) to create economic growth and outline environmental objectives and (ii) to improve the social conditions of the local communities and tourism operators. Besides that, tourism development at SSAF can bring a range of other benefits to Kulim's areas, such as infrastructural development and spin-off enterprise opportunities.

There are developmental reasons to promote tourism at SSAF as a growth pole, such as diversifying a state's tourism image and travel packages or alleviating bottlenecks in popular sites. One key opportunity of involving more of the people in tourism activities at SSAF is to develop tourism enterprises where they live. Nevertheless, this is not to say that they will necessarily own an enterprise or even provide the labour just because it is located in a rural area. In this context, sustainable development is one of the best alternatives to be practiced and adopted in any tourism-related development, particularly in SSAF. Thus, various stakeholders must be assisted through capacity building in order to involve the local community in developing a sound tourism development plan that has potential for generating positive outputs to all (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2008).

1.3   Statement of the Problem

The Kedah government, under the State Economic Planning Unit (UPEN), built the TTW at SSAF in 2004 at a cost of more than RM10 million, which includes costs for the main road (The National Audit Department, 2012). TTW at SSAF could best be promoted not only through its natural scenery but also as the world's longest TTW that could only be experienced at SSAF (Tourism Malaysia, 2010; UPEN, 2009). Additionally, the Kedah Tourism State allocated more than RM1 million in 2009 through UPEN to build 20 chalets, parking areas as well as a Tourist Information Centre (TIC) that consists of an information centre, public toilets and a cafeteria (The National Audit

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Department, 2012). Nevertheless, both projects have not been able to promote and attract an adequate number of tourists to SSAF and its performance is still lagging despite being considered the most valuable product in Malaysia (Kulim District Council, 2004).

Despite this, according to the top management of TTW, there are no current and specific statistics or published data available that shows the number of tourists visiting SSAF nor the gross revenue or income of the project. Debate continues about the adequacies of SSAF's management and coordination, based on the National Audit Report 2012 (Series 1) by National Audit Department. There are four significant current issues that were highlighted in this report, which focused to the Forestry Department of Kedah, UPEN as well as the Kedah Tourism State. These issues are:

1. *SSAF has not yet been gazetted as State Reserved Forestry,*
2. *Incomplete of the management contracts/agreements,*
3. *Unattended and uselessness of infrastructures and facilities provided, and*
4. *Poor services maintenance by responsible parties*

(The National Audit Department, 2012, p.13)

In addition, SSAF is also slightly disadvantaged compared to other areas like Baling, Ulu Muda and Langkawi because it has not been chosen by the Kedah State to be included in the Malaysia Rural Tourism Master Plan and Nature Tourism Development Project. It has not received the attention and recognition of the United Nations Development Programme, World Tourism Organization (WTO), as well as WWF. Although there are various tourist attractions on the mainland of Kedah that can be promoted, a greater emphasis has been given to the development of Langkawi Island (The Jeweller of Kedah) to make the legendary island into a major destination for tourists (Bernama, 2010, 2011a). More attention also has been given to the development *Ulu Muda* Forests (the Greater Forest), *Ulu Lego*ng Forest, *Kuala Muda* district, Pedu Lake and Homestay programme (Bernama, 2011; Ibrahim and Ahmad, 2008; Liu, 2006), where various incentives have been provided by the State Government to attract tourists.

As highlighted before, there is more to Kedah than just Langkawi Island. A total of 20,000 copies of a brochure on tourism packages available in Kedah, including SSAF, were distributed by tour operators to promote tourism in the state as they believed that most of the tourists were still unaware of the attractive tourism products available on the Kedah mainland (Bernama, 2011b). Indeed, the Kedah State Government also received numerous enquiries from these operators for diversification of their packages that will include more eco-tourism sites and heritage attractions, not only focusing on Langkawi (Bernama, 2011b). To date, there have been few discussions and agreements on the potentials and contributions of SSAF as well as no formal documentation related to the development of SSAF. Although extensive strategies have been carried out to promote the tourism industry in Kedah, little

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attention has been paid to strategize and develop SSAF. Hence, the development of rural tourism at SSAF has been dislocated as an unfulfilled promise in spilling over the income to tourism stakeholders besides providing indigenous people with employment.

With those matters, SSAF was chosen as the research setting due to its characteristics and potential contributions to host residents. Research site selection was specifically based on several criteria, including significant employment declines in natural resources sectors and their locations in areas characterized by the presence of mountains, river, and other natural amenities. In order to address these challenges, therefore, appropriate actions need to be taken and ways to deal with these challenges are needed. There is the need to strategize. A planned action for implementation ensures tourism development especially SSAF area remains strong and sustainable. It is hoped that the findings of this study may offer ways to overcome the economic, social, and environmental challenges and create a better understanding of the potential of rural tourism in Malaysia.

1.4   Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to explore the development of sustainable rural tourism at SSAF from the perspectives of local stakeholders (i.e. local communities, local authorities, tourism operators, and visitors).
Specific objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the strengths and contributions of sustainable rural tourism development at SSAF
2. To reveal the potentials and opportunities of sustainable rural tourism development at SSAF
3. To examine the impact of sustainable rural tourism development at SSAF from stakeholders' perspective
4. To describe the tourism stakeholders' support towards sustainable rural tourism development at SSAF

1.5   Research Questions

This study attempts to focus on the following questions:

1. What are the strengths and potentials of sustainable rural tourism development at SSAF from tourism stakeholders' perspective?
2. What are the impacts of sustainable rural tourism development at SSAF from stakeholders' perspective?
3. How do tourism stakeholders' support the development of sustainable rural tourism at SSAF?

1.6   Scope of the Study

This study primarily includes the local communities and tourism operators that live in Sedim area in addition to the visitors and the local authorities of Kedah that are involved in tourism development there. There are only seven tourism operators that are managing and offering their services at SSAF, which consists of accommodation providers (chalet, camping site, and resort), adventure activities (water rafting, kayaking etc.), the TTW operator, as well as parking services. Most of these operators started their business in 2000, although the development of TTW was recognised on September 2006.

As one of the best eco-tourism products in Malaysia, the main target of stakeholders of this study consists of four main players in the tourism industry (see Figure 1.4). The Tourism Development Council (2012) highlighted that cooperation and support between the different stakeholder groups is important so that sustainable rural tourism development can be attained. Indeed, listening to stakeholders' voices as well as the perception of benefits and expectations of stakeholders should be considered in order to determine the significance of tourism development within their area.
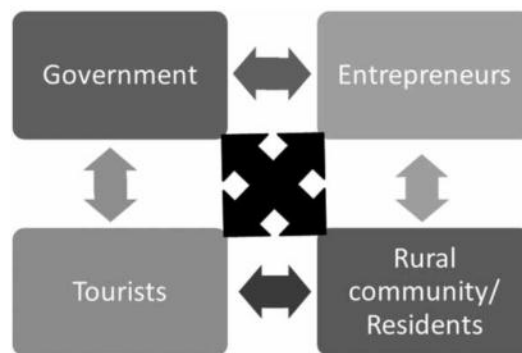
Figure 1.4: The Main Stakeholders in Rural Tourism
Source: Nair, Munikrishnan, Rajaratnam & King (2014)

1. *Stakeholders of the sites*: These consist of community leaders, local communities/residents and youth that are directly and/or indirectly involved in tourism activities, as well as the hosts and providers of the tourism attractions and activities.
2. *Tourism Operators/Entrepreneurs*: These are people who are involved in and running the businesses (products or services) related to tourism activities at the site/area. Businesspersons play important roles as 'core players' in rural tourism in delivering products or services.
3. *Government/local authorities*: These include the people responsible for planning, resourcing, and maintaining the basic infrastructures and

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draw the strategic approaches for sustainable rural tourism development in Kedah

4. *Tourists/Visitors:* These are the main consumers of rural tourism attractions/activities whom visit rural areas and rural attractions in order to experience the culture and heritage at rural areas.

1.7   Justification and Contributions of the Study

The present study differs from others in the same area of study in a few general perspectives. First, the study focused on Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest, Kulim that is hindered by many factors. SSAF has been neglected by many parties, especially in tourism development, and is characterized by a low level of infrastructural development as well as a lack of access to essential services. Thus, greater effort should be taken to provide a wider variety of quality tourism products and improve an image of SSAF to stimulate continuous tourism demand nationally and internationally. Secondly, the study strives to contribute to this growing area of research by bringing wider benefits of rural development to SSAF based on The 10th Malaysian Plan (RMK-10) with a holistic and coordinated approach that boosts the tourism industry (Economic Planning Unit, 2010). The implication of this is that it is significant stress on economic, environmental, and socio-cultural roles that affects all the stakeholders.

A number of reasons also support the choice of this topic. First, it should serve as better contribution to the old and on-going debate regarding whether the development and the potential of rural tourism are considerably important. The study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding towards the current of body of knowledge by exploring the contributions of rural tourism on the development of rural activities at SSAF. The study also contributes to the tourism field in finding out about the importance of developing rural tourism as a key player for local communities' economic advantage. Moreover, it is hoped that this study may contribute to the body of knowledge on rural tourism by finding out about the role and significance of sustainable tourism in enhancing the local communities' understanding and their perceptions towards the rural tourism.

In addition, there are also other reasons why it is important to develop SSAF as a rural tourism destination in Kedah, as well as to create economic growth and outline environmental objectives. The outcomes of this study are potentially to create and implement a high awareness and enthusiasm among tourism stakeholders on tourism potentials and opportunities at SSAF, such as home-stay operators, tour guides, as well as providing learning support. In addition, the study also offers some important insights into the development of tourism at SSAF. These included the ability to help tourism authorities and policy makers to formulate the state's development strategies without alienating SSAF community members or degrade the area's pristine beauty.

This study also attempts to provide an important opportunity to advance the responsibility of maintenance and improvement of services offered at SSAF as they have very 'expensive' products – Tree Top Walk and Tourist Information Centres, upgrading public facilities such as public toilets and a prayer room, accessibility from Kulim to SSAF, and telephone and internet network among others. The study thus may improve the image and status of SSAF in the eyes of tourists, either domestically or internationally. If more tourism activities can be developed in SSAF, particularly in ways that involve high local participation in decisions and enterprises, then chances are that it will have a positive effect on livelihoods and ameliorate poverty. Furthermore, the development of SSAF as a rural tourism destination has the capacity to reduce out-migration and possibly increase re-population of local residents, particularly for the younger generation besides creating a competitive spirit, sense of entrepreneurialism and sense of belonging towards people and/or Malaysian assets-owned for future generations.

In addition, the development of rural tourism at SSAF also may provide more choices/opportunities available from different eco-products via an organised/structured management of eco-tourism, nature as well as culture and heritage. Indeed, various activities also could be introduced at SSAF that are not available at other eco sites, such as TTW and white water rafting, which have been declared as the best products in Malaysia. Eco-tourists or visitors at SSAF can engage more with local people in building up and sustaining their economy besides raising their own awareness of the Sedim's local environment and culture as they have various products and activities that can be offered to tourists. The findings are also aimed to make an important contribution for better understanding the potential of rural tourism, particularly in SSAF using the application of AI approach.

1.8   Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings

The research design process in qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions that the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative study. In addition, researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study. Further, in many approaches to qualitative research, the researchers use interpretive and theoretical frameworks to further shape the study. Good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry (Creswell, 2007). He added that there are five main philosophical assumptions that may lead to an individual's choice of qualitative research, which is ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions. Thus, the qualitative researcher has to choose a stance on each of these assumptions, and the choice has practical implications for designing and conducting research.

In the choice of this study, the researcher believed that inquirer makes certain assumptions, which relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics. When researcher conducts the qualitative research, we are embracing the idea of multiple realities, thus, may lead to the ontology philosophical assumptions. When studying individuals, the qualitative researcher conducted a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities. Evidence of multiple realities includes the use of multiple quotes based on the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives from individuals (Creswell, 2007).

According to Creswell (2007, 2009), the procedures of qualitative research, or its methodology, are characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analysing the data. The logic that the qualitative researcher follows is inductive, from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer. Sometimes the research questions change in the middle of the study to reflect better the types of questions needed to understand the research problem. In response, the data collection strategy, planned before the study, needs to be modified to accompany the new questions. During the data analysis, however, the researcher follows a path of analysing the data to develop an increasingly detailed knowledge of the topic being studied.

After researchers make this choice, they then further shape their research by bringing to the inquiry paradigms or worldviews. Paradigms used by qualitative researchers vary with the set of beliefs they bring to research, and the types have continually evolved over time (contrast the paradigms of Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, with the paradigms of Denzin and Lincoln, 2005 in Creswell, 2007). Individuals may also use multiple paradigms in their qualitative research that are compatible, such as constructionist and participatory worldviews. In addition to that, Creswell (2003) also highlighted four major worldviews that inform qualitative research and identify how these worldviews shape the practice of research.

The four are positivist, post- positivist, critical and interpretive. However, after study these four paradigms, the researcher found that interpretive view would be useful as this paradigm turn the conventional positivistic approach to knowing upon its head. Rather than arguing that only the qualified researcher is capable of knowledge production they consider that the complex social world can be understood only from the point of view of those who operate within it (Jenny Phillmore & Goodson, 2004). Thus, research is undertaken in a collaborative fashion, with the researcher and the researched viewed as partners in the production of knowledge and the interaction between them being a key site for both research and understanding.

The critical roles of both values and context in knowledge production mean that these two aspects of the research process have to be explored in some depth.

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This means undertaking research in a reflexive way whereby ethical, political, and epistemological dimensions of research are explored as an integral part of producing knowledge (Marcus 1998). From this perspective, only through openly reflexive interpretation validity can be claimed for any research, regardless of whether it is quantitative or qualitative. Although the qualitative methods have become more widely used and, arguably, more accepted as a legitimate approach to research, however, it would appear that many researchers are still operating within the boundaries of a limited range of epistemological, ontological and methodological frameworks.

1.8.1 Theoretical Knowledge of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Approach

This study also provides much scope to expand the literature by considering methods to apply the Appreciative Inquiry approach to rural tourism development at SSAF. Study of stakeholders' perceptions concerning the development of rural tourism using the AI approach has contributed to the 'knowledge rich' tourism field. AI is a new approach and only a limited numbers of studies have been conducted, particularly in Malaysia, using this approach. Indeed, there are also limited studies that have been conducted using the AI approach within the tourism field (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012; Raymond & Hall, 2008b). Thus, it is important for tourism practitioners to extend AI into the field of tourism to create a focus on the strengths of a system instead of using deficit-based thinking (Raymond & Hall, 2008). The detail of information of associated with the AI approach will be further discussed in the Chapter 2 (section 2.4) of this study.

The current study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge within tourism's method whereby the empirical findings from this study may provide a new understanding of the theoretical knowledge on AI in rural communities. Moreover, the methods that were used in this study provide extensive potential to discover the strengths in developing rural tourism as well as to demonstrate a vision that creates an ecologically healthy and sustainable learning community (Raymond & Hall, 2008b). This was done at SSAF by implementing the 4-D Cycles in which all stakeholders were empowered throughout the process. The extensions of AI methodology into the field of tourism were done through the involvement of rural communities, tourism entrepreneurs, community's leaders, as well as tourism officers. Indeed, the use of AI as a research methodology in this study is to provide an alternative approach to view the field of tourism by focusing on the strengths of the system instead of focusing on the weaknesses of the community.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) stated that inquiry into the social potential of a social system should begin with appreciation, should be collaborative, should be provocative and should be applicable. Thus, the original approach of AI consisted of a collective process; (i) discovery process-grounded observation, (ii) vision and logic, (iii) collaborative dialogue, and (iv) collective experimentation to discover. In this sense, Bushe (2011) claimed that the AI

approach not only focuses on the best of what is, but it may engage all stakeholders in a processes of re-imagining what could be and taking ownership for what will be.

The "fusion of strengths" and "activation of energy" is generally considered essential to the generative momentum of the change process (Cooperrider, 2014). Therefore, through the implementation of AI approach in this study, it is believed that it is able to create integration and coordination on various parties such as government agencies at state and federal levels, private agencies, tour operators and the local residents, in which the key element is "questions about things positive create a more positive environment". Although there were studies that discussed about the AI approach, limited attempts were made to investigate the development of rural tourism, particularly in Malaysia's perspective. Thus, it is necessary to do deep research in this field and it is also important to ensure that all parties have the same vision and mission in developing the tourism industry especially at SSAF.

1.8.2   The Application of the Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The Social Exchange Theory (hereafter SET) was adapted widely by tourism researchers since the 1970s, particularly in a study of rural residents' perceptions of tourism development as well as rural residents support related to the perceived positive or negative impacts of tourism. Although SET has been widely used and accepted as a framework in this field, particularly in explaining residents' reaction to tourism development, however, it still allows for the capturing of differing views based on experiential and psychological outcomes (Nunkoo, 2015). Thus, the theoretical contribution of this study using SET is two-fold.

Firstly, the study addresses tourism issues by integrating the AI approach to explore the significance of rural tourism development at SSAF. Based on an extensive review, there are very limited studies that integrated both the SET and AI approach in their study, particularly in tourism field. SET was applied as a guideline to assess the understanding of residents' views and perceptions of tourism stakeholders because they are essential for the success and sustainability of tourism development. Indeed, the stimulating effect of this support is also of great importance for tourism stakeholders and this has been a subject for on-going research in tourism field. It is believed that, the findings of this study demonstrate the validity of a model of stakeholders' support by including the domains of perceived impacts (economic, social and environment) of tourism at SSAF. Even so, the integration of these elements will provide a more nuanced understanding of stakeholders' views and perceptions.

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Secondly, the findings stress the future contributions and the significance of tourism development not only in relation to the single stakeholder, as commonly done in tourism literature, but by encompassing the whole cycle of tourism stakeholders using the elements of SET. Limited research has been conducted comparing multiple stakeholders groups in a community (Byrd, Bosley & Dronberger, 2009). With that, the findings also provide a more in-depth understanding of how stakeholders evaluate the "exchange" that involved in tourism development and how this evaluation is shape and intertwined by their abilities to take advantage and level of dependence for future tourism development. Further discussions on SET will be highlighted in the next chapter (section 2.5) of this study.

1.9   Operational Definitions of Concepts

Several concepts and terms should be defined and discussed to orientate the reader and to provide a foundation for the study. These concepts include rural tourism, community tourism, sustainable tourism, appreciative inquiry, and stakeholder.

Rural Tourism: The term rural tourism is used when rural culture is a key component of the product on offer. The distinguishing feature of tourism products in rural tourism is the wish to give visitors a personalized contact, a taste of the physical and human environment of the countryside and, as far as possible, allow them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people (UNWTO, 2014)

Community tourism: This term is used to describe an approach to tourism in which the needs and views of local residents are incorporated in the planning and development process (Medlik, 2003)

Sustainable Tourism (ST): Thought of as a goal or vision; as a process of achieving or moving towards that vision; and as the policies, plans and activities of those organizations, whether private, public or third sector, that are involved in sustainable tourism development" (Sharpley, 2009)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI): AI is a philosophy that incorporates an approach, a process (4-D Cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny) for engaging people at any and all levels to produce effective and positive change. It has been used as an adaptable change method in combination with other organizational processes and currently has been used throughout the world either in small-and large-scale change initiatives (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008)

Stakeholder: "Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by tourism development in an area" (Feeeman 1984, p 46)

1.10   Chapter Summary

Overall, this chapter provides an account of and the reasons for the widespread significance of the background of the study that was conducted at Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest in Kulim, Kedah, one of the best eco-tourism destinations in Malaysia. The chapter was divided into a few parts: introduction and overview of the study's purpose, the provision of research setting, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, justification, and significance of study, scope, and limitation of study as well as the operational definitions of concepts. An implication of this is the possibility that the study will assist in alleviating poverty among local indigenes, offer ways to overcome new economic, social, and environmental challenges and create a better understanding of the potential of rural tourism in the Sedim area. The findings of this study are intended to serve as a baseline for future studies, as well as to avoid the failures in the process of tourism planning and development particularly in remote areas. The next chapter discusses the current provision of rural tourism development for the past few decades, which served to motivate this study. The first section of the next chapter will address the provision of rural tourism, followed by the issues related to rural tourism development for the study. The next section, however, will further discuss on the significance of sustainable development in the tourism field in general and rural tourism in particular. The Appreciative Inquiry approach also will be deeply discussed in the next section followed by the concept of SET that was applied in this study.

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