Surf tourism and sustainable community development in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia: a multiple stakeholder perspective

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

The overall aim of this doctoral study is to identify and explore stakeholder perceptions of surf tourism development in the Mentawai Islands, and to examine the issues and inter-relationships that shape tourism development in the region.

Objectives

1. To examine the characteristics of surf tourists visiting the Mentawai Islands and to gain deeper insights into how they perceive the environmental, social and economic impacts of their travel.
2. To explore how government officials, surf tour operators, surf journalists and NGO employees perceive tourism and surf tourism development in the Mentawai Islands, and to examine their attitudes towards tourism management, stakeholder participation and the future development of the surf tourism.

3. To gain an understanding of how Mentawai communities perceive tourists and tourism development. What is the host population's view on current surf tourism and their participation in its development? What benefits or challenges has it brought?

4. To examine the common themes and key differences that emerge from the analysis, and to identify some potential approaches to enhance the future management in the industry.

Methodology

The methodology used in this doctoral study follows the interpretive paradigm and grounded theory approach. This research employed the process of triangulation using multiple methods, including the data-collection techniques of informal observation, online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Between the 8th of July and the 25th of September 2010, 72 in-depth community interviews and 36 online

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questionnaires were completed. The study design focuses on the interviewing process undertaken with each of the individual stakeholder groups: local community; government; operators and surfing tourists. The case study region of the Mentawai Islands are examined in detail, investigating the Islands' history, culture, tourism development and the subsequent formation of the surf tourism industry.

Results

This study found the general demographic profile of surf tourists travelling to the Mentawais was Australian or American, well-educated middle-aged males with high discretionary income, commonly travelling in groups and staying for an average of 12 nights. Most travelled on inclusive package deals, with very few being independent travellers opting to stay in local homestays. Those on package holidays had a marginally lower daily local expenditure (US\$21) than independent travellers (US\$22). The majority of surf tourists travelling to the Mentawais could be classed as "seekers", motivated by pull factors such as surfing high-quality waves, the warm tropical climate and the islands' remote location. Very few were motivated by a desire to experience the indigenous culture, although they did say it was a dimension of their surf holiday they would be interested in exploring.

Industry stakeholder perceptions were mixed regarding surf tourism development in the Mentawai Islands. Government officials and charter boat operators thought the surf tourism industry had developed in an unsustainable manner, due to the failure of the MMTA and government corruption, which did not effectively manage the region. Conversely, resort operators perceived the surf tourism industry had developed sustainably and was well within carrying capacities. Charter boat and resort operators overwhelmingly thought the greatest barrier to creating a more sustainable surf tourism industry was the current inadequate regulation by the local Mentawai government. Other obstacles identified were corruption, the

logistics required to implement an effective management system, and limited human resources.

Local community members interviewed at all four study villages thought tourists were a very positive force in their communities due to the economic benefits produced by their travel. There was, however, a variation in the study villages' perceptions of tourism development. The study sites with the highest level of engagement in the surf tourism industry had more positive attitudes towards surf tourism development than those sites with lower levels of tourism exposure. Local community thought that their participation in the industry was limited and identified education and training as the most effective ways to increase their involvement. Interviews showed that the development of surf tourism has had an impact on the culture and lifestyle of the communities at each village. Katiet village, because of its level of engagement in the surf tourism industry has undergone the most significant change in its traditional lifestyle. The community members who are involved in the industry are now heavily reliant on tourist dollars and the success of surf tourism in the area. Western surf tourists have also influenced the Mentawai culture at Katiet, reflecting the demonstration effect (Fisher, 2004) and acculturation theory (Nunez, 1989).

Theoretical conclusions

This doctoral study adds a large amount of empirical data to the existing literature on surf tourism (Scarfe et al., 2009). More specifically this thesis contributes to the sparsely researched area of surf tourism development and its impacts on local communities (Ponting, 2008) and their participation in surf tourism (Ponting and Obrien, 2013; Obrien and Ponting, 2013). Methodologically this study has pioneered a new method of data collection (online questionnaire) on a relatively under researched tourist group and tested out the applicability and suitability of the Community Based Tourism model (Okazaki, 2008) and the Sustainable Livelihoods model for tourism (Shen et al., 2005) in the context of surf tourism development in the Mentawai

Islands. Distinct contributions have been made to the growing literature on the value of exploring multiple stakeholder collaboration in sustainable tourism development (Aref, 2011 and Nault & Stapleton, 2011).

The thesis examined four villages all at different levels of surf tourism exposure, the results clearly display that surf tourism development has had a range of impacts on the four Mentawai study communities, bringing both opportunities and costs to the community members involved. The thesis contributes to the body of knowledge associated with local community participation and sustainable surf tourism (Ponting, 2008; Ponting and Obrien, 2013; Obrien and Ponting, 2013). This study builds on work by Siry (2011, p. 407) in Indonesia illustrating that the barriers local communities face to improving their participation in the surf tourism industry are magnified when government policies and management do not reflect the needs of the host population. Distinct contributions are also made to the growing literature on the value of exploring multiple stakeholder collaboration in

sustainable tourism development (Aref, 2011 and Nault & Stapleton, 2011).

Practical application of the dissertation

One practical application stemming from this research is a way forward can be developed through stakeholders finding common ground after collaborating and exchanging information. Figure 1 displays potential future directions for sustainable development of the surf tourism industry in the Mentawai Islands. The proposed way forward is a systematic process, requiring each stage to be completed before moving on to the next. The model has five stages: tourism forum; sustainable tourism strategy; co-management model; diversification of tourism product and continual collaboration and assessment of tourism strategy.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of chapter one

Chapter one provides a review of Sustainable Tourism Development, and the subsequent evolution of alternative tourism. The role of stakeholders in sustainable development is discussed, and the topics of sustainable

Figure 1. *The way forward*

livelihoods, community participation and stakeholder collaboration are explored in the context of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands. The Chapter then examines the emerging theory of collaborative advantage in relation to multiple stakeholder collaboration in tourism development. The Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model is also introduced as a framework that may be applicable to understanding the impacts and outcomes of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands. The last section of Chapter one traces the evolution of surf tourism from its roots in Hawaiian culture through to modern-day commercial surfing packages to remote regions of the globe. Then the current scope of surf tourism research is discussed, with particular reference to the definition of surf tourism. The chapter concludes with an overview of surf tourism-related impacts, highlighting several of the issues produced by the development of surf tourism; with a brief introduction to the case study region of the Mentawai Islands.

Abstract of chapter two

Chapter two outlines the methodology adopted in the research, describing the interpretive paradigm and grounded theory approach. The process of triangulating data-collection techniques is presented. The rationale for the case study approach is given, followed by a synopsis of the case study region of the Mentawai Islands. An historical overview of the Mentawai surf tourism industry is provided, identifying current challenges to future development, as well as exploring current marine management policies in Indonesia and surf tourism management in the local context. The overall study design is presented, along with the interviewing process undertaken with individual stakeholder groups and subsequent data analysis. The last section of Chapter two explores the challenges of undertaking fieldwork in the Mentawai Islands, and outlines how these issues were addressed.

Abstract of chapter three

Chapter three provides a detailed profile of surf tourists who visit the Mentawai Islands, with a specific focus on surf-holiday

characteristics, travel motivations and local expenditure. This chapter gives insight to the perceptions of tourists of the social, environmental and economic impacts associated with their visits and with surf tourism in general. The concluding sections of the chapter examine visitor views on the current surf tourism-management scheme, local community involvement in the industry, and the future development of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands.

Abstract of chapter four

Chapter four constructs a profile of surf tourism operators, and assesses how industry stakeholders in the Mentawai Islands perceive tourism and sustainable development. This chapter also provides a detailed insight into how the government and operator stakeholders perceive the impacts generated by surf tourism, and identifies the major challenges to individual stakeholder groups. The level of local community participation in the Mentawai surf tourism industry is examined through the eyes of operators and officials, and potential methods for increasing involvement of the host population are explored. The final section of the chapter investigates government and operator stakeholder perceptions for the future of the surf tourism industry in the Mentawai Islands, highlighting major challenges to its sustainability.

Abstract of chapter five

Chapter five examines how members of four local communities in the Mentawai Islands – Ebay, Katiet, Silabu and Mapadegat – perceive tourists, tourism and, specifically, surf tourism development. This chapter also provides a detailed picture of how the host population views community change related to surf tourism and its associated benefits and challenges. Lastly, investigation of the host population's perceptions of participation in the planning, management and consultation processes and future development of the industry.

Abstract of chapter six

Chapter six presents a synthesis of findings from Chapters three, four and five. The five

main cross-cutting themes identified enable the complexities of individual stakeholder group perceptions to be further investigated and barriers to sustainable tourism development to be uncovered. The emergent themes include unsustainable surf tourism development, tourism planning, stakeholder communication, management frameworks, community participation, and future surf tourism development. These themes are explored in detail with specific reference to individual stakeholder groups.

Abstract of chapter seven

Chapter seven concludes the thesis with a discussion of the contributions of the research to the literature on surf tourism, STD and local community participation in tourism. Attention is given to the methodological contributions of the study, the use of multiple interpretive research methods, and the advantages of incorporating community-based frameworks on the perspectives of the host population. Practical contributions are discussed, such as the feasibility of establishing a regular tourism forum and the prospect of creating a sustainable tourism-management strategy. A future research agenda is proposed, which recommends further investigation into the practicalities of implementing sustainable surf tourism development in the Mentawai Islands.

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