

Analysis of the Potential and Tourists Impacts When Introducing Ecotourism Development to Sha Tau Kok

Shuyi Tang

Xijing University, Shaanxi 710123, China

suzie_tsy@163.com

Abstract. There are contrasting developments on both sides of the boundary. On the Mainland side, Shenzhen has been developed from a small town into a bustling major city with a large population. On the Hong Kong side, however, some of the Frontier Closed Area (FCA) and its adjacent area, such as Sha Tau Kok, especially Lin Ma Hang are still rural in nature. Since increasing concern for environment, ecotourism is believed to be the fastest growing tourism segment. Ecotourism can be introduced to Sha Tau Kok to stimulate the local economy, benefit local communities and aid in conservation of natural resources. However, in order to reach the goals, effective plan and management of this historical place are very significant to contain traveler impacts within an acceptable limitation and keep the destination sustainable.

Keywords: Ecotourism; Sha Tau Kok; Tourists Impacts.

1. Introduction

Sha Tau Kok is the border between mainland China and Hong Kong with abundant tourism resources [1]. In this case, residents of FCA have repeatedly been requesting for opening up these areas by tourism so as to seek for economic development and revitalize the local economy, while some have pointed out that development can affect the environment, particularly the area of ecological importance and cultural heritage. Actually, if the Government is able to strike a balance between development and conservation, Sha Tau Kok can be opened up for ecotourism by collaborating with adjacent area.

2. The Development Opportunities and Tourism Potential

The idea of ecotourism, a form of nature-based tourism, contributing both towards socioeconomic and environmental benefits, burst into the scientific and later public consciousness in the 1990s [2]. It can now be considered one of conservation biology's hottest "buzzwords" [3]. Ecotourism is a form of tourism that involves visiting natural areas—in the remote wilderness or rural environments. According to the definition and principles of ecotourism established by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in 1990, ecotourism is "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." (TIES, 1990).

Within Sha Tau Kok, it has extensively retained traditional agricultural and cultural heritage values which are evocative of Hong Kong's pre-colonial past and the villages there have many houses which were built by traditional architectural style. All of these provide a chance for sustainable heritage and ecological tourism.

2.1 Culture Heritage

Sha Tau Kok Public Pier. As a public pier in Sha Tau Kok, it is located at the easternmost of the land boundary between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. It is used for loading and unloading goods and berthing of Kaitos operating between Sha Tau Kok and Kat O, and other rural places. It plays an important role when the Government introduces ecotourism here. Not only for visiting, can travelers also use it to visit the village across the river.

Chung Ying Street. It is the famous street of Sha Tau Kok, was once a famous place for shopping. In the 1990s, when China was still closed to the world, tourists from mainland China visited to buy

foreign goods, mostly watches, clothes and jewelry. However, the prosperity has declined in recent years due to the policy that most visitors from Mainland China can apply to visit Hong Kong directly. Nowadays, as a historical place, Chung Ying Street can be transformed to a sight-seeing place of its cultural value.

San Lau Street: Tong Lau. The Tong Lau here, the typical arcade building, was built in 1930s. Now, it is regarded as listed building. The ground floor portion of the Tong Lau is reserved for commercial use, mostly by small businesses. The upper floors were residential use and catered to residents here. Owing to the customers only from Sha Tau Kok, most of the shops were closed. As a kind of tourism resource, they can be used for business again.

Wet Market. It has been the place to sell food related dry goods and wet goods, commodities, fish as well as cooked foods. After having lunch there, as for tourism development, it is better for owners to provide more special and traditional snacks or foods, like farm-style food, to give the urban tourists a sense of back to the past.

2.2 Ecological Recourse

As a survey shows that there are at least 63 butterfly species, which account for nearly a quarter of Hong Kong's total. The survey results are encouraging, including four rare and one very rare species.

2.3 Recreation and Education Potential

“Returning to twentieth century of Hong Kong” may become a theme for travelers visiting Sha Tau Kok. Thus, specific trails can be designed. Eco tourists travel along the trails to experience the traditional buildings and culture, visit the bunkers and taste the food. Apart from the existing recourses, boating program, traditional activities and barbecue site can be set. Specific barbecue site is effective to control and management visitors do this.

As to Education Function, apart from visiting the cultural heritage, a small museum showing the old times and history about Chung Ying Street, Sha Tau Kok, as well as Anti-Japanese activities are a way to educate the visitors and next generation. In addition, people will learn more about ecology from the theme of “Protecting Butterfly”.

2.4 Potential Chances to Cooperate with Other Attractions

Owing to the limited space of Sha Tau Kok, it can cooperate with other destination to seek for development and revenue. As the information board illustrates that one-day tour of ecotourism and cultural tourism set out from Sha Tau Kok - Robinson Island - Lai Chi Wo - Yan Chau Tong, and return to Sha Tau Kok is a feasible plan. Besides, as Lin Ma Hang will be opened in the near future, the managers of Sha Tau Kok can make a plan to intergrate resouces, design tourism products and create their brands to attractive tourists.

3. The Impacts of Ecotourism Development

3.1 Positive Impacts

Ecotourism has great potential to benefit local communities and aid in conservation of natural resources [4]. It is believed that opening Sha Tau Kok can help the development of the area and the outlying islands nearby into a tourist attraction.

When it comes to open up the Sha Tau Kok, on one hand, the travelers themselves get the chance to experience the history of Hong Kong and incur costs during visiting. On the other hand, the demand of visitors definitely helps to stimulate the local economy, improve traffic infrastructures, and create employment opportunities to host the community. In particular, local residents can sell food, souvenir and provide service to earn money.

As the video reference showed, some percentage of population here has moved to urban areas to seek for economic development. As is well known, housing shortage is a serious problem, so job

opportunities will decrease this relocation phenomenon. Therefore, for local people, they are looking forward to open up this area.

In addition, ecotourism can lead to increased conservation of natural areas in and around the host community as well as give rural communities a source of external capital.

3.2 Negative Impacts

However, ecotourism is a two-edged sword, which also brings many negative impacts. In addition to the benefits already mentioned, even potentially profitable ecotourism development also imposes unforeseen impacts - cultural, moral, social and environmental changes - on the host community.

As for this ancient place, people are worried that its peaceful will be destroyed due to tourism pressures. In concrete terms, they are concerned about the disruption of the pre-existing relationships between local people and higher incidences of crime. What's more, another alarming thing is the transformation of traditional cultural symbols into commodities to sell to visitors. Besides, a majority environmentalist hold the view that ecotourism will affect the habitat of creatures here, especially the abundant varieties of butterflies.

4. Suggestions for Ecotourism Development

As far as concerned, residents and developers should hold a long-term view to develop this historical place instead of short-term economic benefits. Thus, methods need to be taken to keep a balance between development and conservation. As mentioned above, negative impacts have become a management concern in Sha Tau Kok. Before a management system can be designed, managers need to identify the causes which contribute the problems. Then, developers need to implement a variety of strategies and actions in order to contain traveler impacts within an acceptable limitation and keep the destination sustainable.

To begin with, government must support in formulating and establishing policy and management frameworks that guiding development of the ecotourism sector, government institutional arrangements, and laws affecting tourism. The zoning segregation is very common to shield sensitive natural or cultural resources from being affected. For example, specific barbeque sites and eating site of Wet Market are set to separate incompatible visitor behaviors. This strategy is intended to minimize traveler impacts by confining use to limit non environmental activities and destructive develop of land. In addition, policies need to be formulated to carefully choose investors to support the development of exemplary ecotourism products by providing technical assistance, capacity building, and funding to communities, and partners [5].

Secondly, managing ecotourism needs the strong participation of local communities. Ecotourism development programs emphasize understanding community approaches toward tourism to achieve a win-win situation between both communities and tourists [6].

Last but not least, sustainable development requires the active and educated participation of visitors. It involves everyone, including visitors, tourism industry and communities to self conservation. This can be called the initial management phase. During the travelling at Sha Tau Kok, visitors can experience and learn from the nature and history to heighten the conservational awareness.

References

- [1]. Sha Tau Kok Pier, from <http://www.touristlink.com/hong-kong-china/sha-tau-kok-pier/overview.html>.
- [2]. Wearing S, Neil J. Ecotourism: Impacts, potentials and possibilities? [M]. Routledge, 2009.
- [3]. Krüger O. The role of ecotourism in conservation: panacea or Pandora's box?[J]. Biodiversity & Conservation, 2005, 14(3): 579-600.
- [4]. Archer B, Cooper C, Ruhanen L. The positive and negative impacts of tourism[J]. Global tourism, 2005, 3: 79-102.

- [5]. Leung, Y. F., & Marion, J. L. (1999). Spatial strategies for managing visitor impacts in National Parks. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 17(4), 20-38.
- [6]. Chow A S Y, Liu S, Cheung L T O. Importance of residents' satisfaction for supporting future tourism development in rural areas of Hong Kong[J]. *Asian Geographer*, 2019: 1-15.
- [7]. Ratti, R. (1993). Spatial and economic effects of frontiers: Overview of traditional and new approaches and theories of border area development. *Theory and Practice of transborder cooperation*. Basel Verlag Helbing & Lichtenhahn.