Abstract

This paper focuses on Pingle ancient town in Sichuan province as the research destination. A quantitative survey questionnaire method was used to investigate the perceptions of tourism impacts (economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts) according to different situations in a small number of local communities’ residence proximity, length of residence, and job involvement in tourism industry.

The findings of this research firstly indicate that, at the stage between involvement and development in terms of Butler’s destination life cycle, with a quite high domestic tourist influx, local people living and working in Pingle ancient town have positive perceptions of all tourism impacts stated in the questionnaire.

Secondly, based on the hypotheses testing results by Independent t-test reveal that two variables lead to distinctive perceptions, which are job involvement and length of residence. According to the boundaries of this study the variable of residence proximity plays no role on different perceptions of tourism impacts. On the other hand, people have different perceptions on economic and environmental impacts. Most of the respondents had common perceptions of socio-cultural impacts. For economic impacts, people mainly have different perceptions on “increasing cost of daily life”, “tourism seasonality makes local economy more unstable”, “funding promotion is waste of money”, and “tourism enlarges the gap between rich and poor people”. Respondents whose jobs involved in the tourism industry were more sensitive of negative economic impacts than those whose jobs are not involved in the tourism industry. Long-term residents cared more about negative economic impacts than the new arrivals. In terms of environmental impacts, long-term residents and the new arrivals have statistically significant different perceptions on “litter pollution”, “noise pollution”, and “tourism brings damage to this destination”. Long-term residents were more care about their living environment.

This research also gives some recommendations in terms of the findings:
i. Local tourism administration should provide some training courses for the local community, in order to make them more familiar with tourism business, and improve their language skill and cultural knowledge.

ii. Survey results, local community cares about their living environment although most of them have positive perceptions on many statements of environmental impacts. There should be more eco-friendly businesses established, they should also be consistent with the local culture and architecture. Moreover, given the growing “green” awareness around the world, environmental issues and thus whether a destination complies with eco standers, are likely to play an increasingly bigger role in the choice of a destination.

iii. In light of the big development opportunities, looming in the horizon what the local communities think about tourism, what the local community needs, what frustrates them, all these should known when consider in a tourism planning. This way, the relationship between the local residents and other stakeholders can be harmonious and ethical.

Further study provides an opportunity to investigate more variables which would influence people’s perception from extrinsic and intrinsic environment. In addition, this research can cover more areas of Pingle ancient town. The methodology also could be improved, in order to hear more voice from local community.

Key Words: local community; perception; tourism impacts; Pingle ancient town