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**VOLUME 7(4) 2018**

(This volume is larger than normal in article numbers and VOLUME 7(5) 2018 will thus be shorter. A Special Edition Vol 7(6) has been requested by and International Conference in Italy)

1. **An exploration of the internal communication practices in hotels of Gauteng province, South Africa- Sibanyoni, J.J., Tabit, F.T. & Annan, C.Y. (postgraduate student) (University of South Africa)**
2. **Fundamental Potentials, Challenges and Opportunities for Ecotourism Development in Lake Hayq, Ethiopia - Alubel Workie (University of Gondar, Ethiopia). Dessale Kassaw (Wollo Culture and Tourism Office, Ethiopia) & Yirdaw Asfaw (University of Gondar, Ethiopia) Department of Tourism Management, Gondar, Ethiopia**
3. **Benchmarking organizational culture in hospitality, tourism and leisure management enterprises: bridling the unattractiveness of the Inner-city Core of Akure - Chen, T. (Ton Duc Thang University, Vietnam), Tasawar, H. (Quaid I Azam University, Pakistan), Mpofu, T. (University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe), Bison, J.M. (University of Urban and Regional Planning, Nigeria) & John CY Chen (BRAC University, Bangladesh)**
4. **Judgment in turnover purposes, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship practice in the hospitality industry- Chen, T. (Ton Duc Thang University, Vietnam), Tasawar, H. (Quaid I Azam University, Pakistan), Monsour, M. (National University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe), Bison, J.M. (Federal (University of Urban and Regional Planning, Nigeria) & John CY Chen (BRAC University, Bangladesh)**
5. **An Exploratory Inquiry: The Influence of Line Management on an Employee's Wellbeing -Mathafena, R. (Post-Doctoral Fellow -University of South Africa) & Hewitt, M. (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)**
6. **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategy to manage the impact of HIV and AIDS within Tourism Workplaces: A case study of Buffalo City - Goliath, K.& Vallabh, D. (Walter Sisulu University, South Africa)**
7. **Geographical analysis of mortality in Najaf city, Iraq: prospects for Tourism -**





Rwanda/ PhD Student, Pan African University)

9. **Analysis of the research design used in a Tourism Management service learning project - Mokoena, P. P. (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa)**
10. **Investigating the tourism potential of Gafat industrial village: South Gondar Administrative Zone, North Western Ethiopia - Ertiban Demewoz (Debre Tabor University, Ethiopia) & Fridiywok Abebe (University of Gondar, Ethiopia)**
11. **The Attitudes of Residents towards Agro-tourism Impacts and Its Effects on Participation in Agro-tourism Development: A Case Study of Vietnam - Nha Thi Huynh Nguyen (Prince of Songkla University, Thailand and Quy Nhon University, Vietnam), Suwanno, S. (Prince of Songkla University, Thailand), Weerapon Thongma (Maejo University, Thailand) & Visuthismajarn, P. (Prince of Songkla University, Thailand)**
12. **The 'decision-making' on the trade of 'Cultural Artefacts', applying the role of tourism to measure the economic perspective – Baur, P.W. (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)**
13. **Profiling and segmentation of international tourists in Lesotho – Ramukumba, T. (Nelson Mandela University, South Africa) & Moeketsi, M.V. (Lerotholi Polytechnic, Lesotho)**
14. **Tourists' knowledge and perceptions on the impact of climate change on tourism in Okavango Delta, Botswana - Dube, K. (Vaal University of Technology, South Africa), Mearns, K. & Mini, S.S. (University of South Africa, South Africa) & Chapungu, L. (Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe)**
15. **Consumer well-being a' la Maslow: A driver towards ecstatic and leisure motorcyclists' overall happiness – Kruger, S. (North West University, South Africa)**
16. **Community-based tourism development model and community participation - Giampiccoli, A. (Durban University of Technology, South Africa) & Saayman, M. (North-West University, South Africa)**
17. **Effect of Stereotypes Created by Movies on the Satisfaction of Tourists with Movie Induced Tourism (MIT) - Muchiri Murithi Justus (Maasai Mara University, Kenya) & Damiannah M. Kieti and Rita W. Nthiga (Moi University, Main Campus, Kenya)**



- in Tourism - Dubele, Z.H.W. & Makae, M.P. (University of Kwazulu-Natal, RSA)
20. **The fast food industry in South Africa: the micro-environment and its influence - Mhlanga, O.(University of Mpumalanga, South Africa)**
21. **Future tourism trends: Utilizing non-fungible tokens to aid wildlife conservation - Mofokeng, N.E.M. & Matima, T.K. (Durban University of Technology, South Africa)**
22. **Demographic profile of participants and the types of rural enterprises in Zululand District Municipality, KwaZulu Natal - Chamane, Z. [PhD Candidate] & Mdiniso, J. (University of Zululand, South Africa) & Selepe, M. (University of Limpopo, South Africa)**
23. **Level of awareness of Google AdWords by accommodation establishments: cause for concern?- Cant, M.C. (University of South Africa) & Van Rooyen, N. (IRI RSA)**
24. **Potentials and Challenges of Religious Tourism Development in Lalibela, Ethiopia - Berhanu Esubalew Bayih (Madda Walabu University/Punjabi University, India)**
25. **The Use of AdWords – a Contributor or an Inhibitor of Marketing Success? - Wiid, J.A. (University of South Africa) & Van Rooyen, N. (IRI South Africa)**
26. **Perception of tourism graduates and the tourism industry on the important knowledge and skills required in the tourism industry - Wakelin-Theron, N., Ukpere, W.I. & Spowart, J. (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)**
27. **Tourist perceptions of factors influencing destination image: a case study of selected Kimberley resorts – Haarhoff, R. (Central University of Technology, South Africa)**
28. **Prospects and Challenges of Positioning Harare as an Urban Township Tourism Destination- Mukoroverwa, M (Botswana Accountancy College, Botswana / University of Derby, UK) & Chiutsi, S. (Namibia University of Science and Technology, Namibia)**
29. **City marketing to city branding: A novel practice in Zimbabwe destination branding - Chigora, F. (Catholic University of Zimbabwe) & Hoque, M. (University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa)**
30. **Post-flight food waste and corporate social responsibility at South Africa Airways: Perceptions of employees at Air Chefs South Africa - Sambo, N.P. & Hlengwa, D.C. (south Africa)**





(Durban University of Technology, South Africa)

32. **Implications of management practices on the physiognomic features of the vegetation at the Kainji Lake National Park, Nigeria – Akinyemi, A.F. (University of Ibadan, Nigeria)**
33. **The impacts of coastal tourism on the Wild Coast community: a case study of Elliotdale- Goliath, K, Mxunyelwa, S. & Timla, S. (Walter Sisulu University, South Africa)**
34. **Proactive responses to mitigate Climate Change impacts by the hospitality sector in South Africa- Odeku, K.O. (University of Limpopo, South - Africa)**
35. **Evaluating tourists' expectations and experiences visiting the Royal Natal National park and Game Reserves in Southern Drakensberg, KwaZulu- Natal - Nkwanyana, S., Usanda Bekebu, U. & Mhlongo, S. (University of Zululand, South Africa)**
36. **Confirmatory analysis of the preference in Boutique Hotels in the city of Oporto, Portugal - Tavares, F.O. (ISCET - Higher Institute of Business and Tourism, Portugal) & Jose Antonio Fraiz Brea (Universidad de Vigo/Campus Universitario As Lagoas s/n, Spain)**
37. **Residents' perceptions of the economic benefits brought by religious tourism: A case study of Quigney, East London - Vallabh, D., Maxongo, S. & Apleni, L. (Walter Sisulu University, South Africa)**
38. **Creative industries in Central Johannesburg: entrepreneurs, organisation and locational choice -Gregory, J.J. & Rogerson, C.M. (University of Johannesburg, RSA)**
39. **A Systems Approach to Food Waste Prevention in Food Service Operations: An Integrative Review – Lefadola, B.L., Viljoen, A.& Gerrie Elizabeth du Rand (University of Pretoria, South Africa)**
40. **Push-Pull Motivations for, and Intrinsic-Extrinsic Constraints Against, Traveling to a Textile-Based Tourism Destination - Suhud, U., Maulida, E. & Kusumawardani, D. (State University of Jakarta, Indonesia)**
41. **The early development of hotels in Johannesburg ca 1928-1963- Rogerson, J.M. (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)**



R. & Mearns, R. (University of South Africa, South Africa)

44. **Heritage-Tourism Resources of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia - Melese Kebede (Dire Dawa University, Ethiopia)**

45. **The value of workplace learning in attaining discipline-specific skills for ecotourism employment - Ndlovu, T.P. & Mofokeng, N.E.M. (Durban University of Technology, South Africa)**

46. **Drivers of efficiency in hotels in South Africa - Mhlanga, O. (University of Mpumalanga, South Africa)**

47. **Assessment of food hygiene knowledge and practices among food handlers in selected hotels around uMhlathuze Area - Mjoka, J. (University of Zululand, South Africa) & Selepe, M. (University of Limpopo, South Africa)**

48. **Employees' perceptions of food waste management in hotels -Mabaso, C.H. & Hewson, D.S. (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)**

49. **Employment condition differences based on gender: A case of adventure tourism employees in Gauteng, South Africa - Ntanjana, A., Maleka, M., Tshipala, N. & du Plessis, L. (Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa)**

50. **Hierarchical forecasting of tourist arrivals at the Victoria Falls Rainforest, Zimbabwe – Makoni, T. & Chikobvu, D. (University of the Free State, RSA)**

51. **Constraints for successful implementation of Public Private Partnership (PPP) for tourism infrastructure projects - Tshehla, M.F. (University of South Africa)**

52. **South Africa as a tourist attraction – A study into the internal ethical state of organisations across sectors - Grobler, A. & Grobler, S. (University of South Africa)**

53. **Marketing of tourism destinations: A misapprehension between place and nation branding in Zimbabwe tourism destination - Chigora, F. (Catholic University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe) & Hoque, M. (University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa)**

54. **Constrictions of emerging tourism entrepreneurship in the townships of South Africa- Nsizwazikhona Simon Chili (Durban University of Technology, South Africa)**

55. **The impact of Safety and Security on the behaviour of consumers and tourism demand in South African townships - Nsizwazikhona Simon Chili (Durban University**



Mutambara, E. (University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa)

57. **Rural Tourism as a way to build Economic Independence – Triyanto (Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia), Iwu, C.G. & Musikavanhu, T.B. (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa) & Rif’ati Dina Handayani (University of Jember, Indonesia)**
58. **Rural Tourism as a Mechanism for Poverty Alleviation in Kwa-Zulu-Natal Province of South Africa: Case of Bergville – Mthembu, B. (Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Education, South Africa) & Mutambara, E. (University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa)**
59. **Towards the sustainability of a financially constrained university’s Hotel School: lessons from local and international universities’ Hotel Schools - Crowther, D., Strydom, A.J. & Dzansi, D.Y. (Central University of Technology, South Africa)**
60. **A Study on the Global Economic Impact on the Tourism Industry in Yemen - Mosleh Abdu Mosleh AL-Najjar (Research Scholar: Mangalore University, India) & Ishwara, P. (Mangalore University, India)**
61. **Perceived economic impacts of the National Art Festival on Bed and Breakfast establishments: A case study of Grahamstown, Joza Location- Vallabh, D. & Kutsi, H. (Walter Sisulu University, South Africa)**
62. **Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Practical Application of Residents in Dusit District, Bangkok -Supattra Pranee (Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand)**

## **VOLUME 7(5) 2018**

1. **Understanding a tourism culture amongst students to advance domestic tourism in South Africa - Ray, G & Wakelin-Theron, N. (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)**
2. **Critical Resources for the Development of Rural Tourism within the greater Bergville area of Kwa-Zulu Natal South Africa - Mutambara, E. (University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa) & Mthembu, B. (Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Education, South Africa)**
3. **Status of Tourism Marketing and Promotion: Gambella People’s National Regional State, Gambella, South West Ethiopia – Fakana, S.T. (Gambella University, Ethiopia)& [unclear] al University, Punjab, India)**



# Rural Tourism as a way to build Economic Independence

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## Abstract

Economic liberation and equality in the rural area is a deliberate aspiration towards building a successful community. The aim of this study was to explore the potential for economic independence of the village of Brayut that has earned the reputation of a "tourist village" in the Republic of Indonesia. The data was gathered over two months through interviews and close observation using field notes and video recording. The results of the study indicate that the community of Brayut has seen consistent financial growth from a rising number of domestic and foreign tourists. Also, there is a change in the functional use of residences that rent space to tourists. This study is expected to provide an overview of the benefits of the existence of rural tourism to boost the economy of communities.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, economic independence, Brayut village, tourist village, Indonesia

## Introduction

The Indonesian population has been disfavoured by a widened economic gap between the urban and rural population due to its urbanisation. The village ministry reported that in the 1980s the number of villagers was 78% of the Indonesian population but the number of villagers has steadily decreased due to urbanisation. The rural economy has further been impacted due to the migration of higher educated youth (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). The modernisation not only depressed the rural economy, but the culture and local knowledge in the community as well. This globalisation has caused conflict between local and modern cultural values (Lorio & Corsale, 2010; Xu, Lü, Chen & Liu, 2009). The insistence on modernisation is regularly in the form of industrialisation, urbanisation, westernisation, colonialism, and village de-colonisation. ((Lorio & Corsale, 2010; Johannes, 2005).





Economic improvement and equity in the village is the ideal of the Indonesian people, therefore there is a lot of potential in the rural area that can be managed and developed in tandem by the government and the community. Modernisation does not continuously bring a positive impact on the development of local culture: the positive impact derived from the cultural factor, social, economic and technological aspects provide a richness to the characteristics of local communities (Suwardani, 2015).

The potential of tourism routes has long been realised in developed countries (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Siswanto, 2015) and it is therefore a logical choice for development and economic expansion. Decreasing economic activity, restructuring the agricultural sector, and the dwindling rural industrialisation have collectively driven the need to create and implement a tourism strategy as an alternative for economic expansion and social revival of rural areas.

Tourism has long been considered as a potential means for socio-economic growth and improvement of rural areas (Hall, Roberts, Lesley & Mitchell, 2004; Lorio & Corsale, 2010; Siswanto, 2015). Every village in Indonesia has a local potential that can be managed as a business concept that works with the farming community, therefore rural tourism can play an important role in growing the rural economies.

### **Rural tourism**

Rural tourism is a living environment that has special characteristics in both natural and cultural resources and both sources aim to attract tourists to be able to enjoy, recognise, appreciate and study the characteristics of the community and all its charms (Setiadi, 2016; Susyanti, 2013). Rural tourism is an integration of attractions, accommodation and supporting facilities that manifest in the village structure and integrates well with prevailing procedures and traditions (Purbadi, 2016). Tourism villages have a unique and physical appeal in the form of environment and socio-cultural life and frequently has a tendency for rural areas to bring distinctiveness and attractiveness to a tourist destination (Wibowo, 2013; Wijaya & Udaya, 2016). Practically, tourists often stay in close proximity to the traditional atmosphere and learn about village life and the local environment. There is a host for visitors so that tourists can repay the local values that are still held by the community.

The development of rural tourism is expected to play an important role in the revitalisation of rural areas (Hall, et al., 2004). The government considers that developing rural tourism can directly influence the creation of new job opportunities for community independence. At the same time this will alleviate the impact of poverty. The most important element in the expansion of rural tourism is to involve farming communities in every aspect of tourism activities (Wibowo, 2013). It has been observed that rural tourism offers many opportunities to family enterprises (Hall, et al., 2004; Lorio & Corsale, 2010; Roberts & Hall, 2001). However, there are a number of widespread weaknesses that can affect the business and reduce the stimuli for rural development, including lack of professionalism: a frequent complaint directed at family businesses (Lorio & Corsale, 2010). Low entry barriers in rural tourism might attract people with no relevant training or education and this can seriously limit their potential to grow or prosper (Getz, Carlsen & Morrison, 2004), families traditionally do not want to increase their business beyond the subsistence level and therefore will not create significant job opportunities (Roberts & Hall, 2001).

Rural tourism is a versatile and multi-faceted concept that implores the need to define what is meant when studies and reflections on this topic are to be made (Frochot,





2005). This study therefore aims to provide insight into how families living in Brayut village might enhance their livelihood through tourism. In this way, the research focus is directed toward the ways in which local people can seek to meet basic and ongoing needs for food and shelter, as well as security and dignity through meaningful work.

### **Potential of rural tourism for economic independence**

Rural areas are often underdeveloped and marginalised as compared to urban areas in most developing nations. In an endeavour to redress this imbalance, rural tourism has emerged to accelerate economic development in rural areas. Rural tourism, interestingly, is not new to Western countries. Su (2011) states that rural tourism has been used in Germany and other developed countries to facilitate socioeconomic development in socially and economically disadvantaged areas. Unlike in the developed world, rural tourism might not rapidly attain sustainability or enable rural economic independence due to numerous prevailing challenges such as lack of proper infrastructure, poor communication networks, and lack of basic necessities such as water and electricity (Fons, Fierro & Gomez y Patino, 2011; Emmanuel, 2017). In this regard, Emmanuel (2017) suggests that the government and local municipalities can play a significant role in building community infrastructure and thereby enhancing rural tourism as an attractive opportunity for private enterprises to invest in.

The shift from traditional agrarian activities to tourism would require new set of skills such as marketing, management, financial management, public relations and other. These skills are pivotal for the sustainability and development of an economically independent rural community. Notably, rural areas are devoid of these essential human skills (Su, 2011), and it might take longer than 10 years to transfer skills to rural people (Emmanuel, 2017). A common factor that drives this is that rural dwellers often migrate to urban areas in search of greener pastures, leaving the rural community with the dependent category of family members, the economically inactive, that is the elderly and children. Identifying and developing skills necessary for rural tourism among rural community members is of paramount importance to achieve its sustainability. The local municipalities and other private enterprises such as tour operators, that are interested in community development, can assist to build community skills capacity (Emmanuel, 2017).

A Lithuanian study of rural tourism by Baležentis, Kriščiukaitienė, Baležentis and Garland (2012) highlighted an increase in interested parties willing to invest in community development after the government availed various funding avenues for all ventures willing to operate in rural communities. However, Baležentis et al., maintain that the government should ensure that there is balance between the funds supplied and demand for such services. In other words, the funding should be proportional to the destination tourist demand potential.

In most developing countries, rural areas are often disconnected from the outside world which makes information exchange with the formal world difficult (Fons, Fierro, & y Patiño, 2011). This can be an obstacle to effectively market the rural tourist destination, and inevitably affect the desired income by rural dwellers. In order for rural economic independence to be achieved through the use rural tourist destination as a catalyst, there ought to be an inflow of income, without which rural tourism development may never be realised. However, with the increasing use of mobile devices and network coverage, rural people can now easily communicate beyond their geographical locations.



Devesa, Laguna and Palacios (2010) are of the view that a tourist destination ought to offer compelling reasons for a tourist to visit the place. This is in light of the growing competitive nature of tourist destinations. Essentially, rural tourist destinations are not immune to competition; there is need to build and maintain a competitive brand. The continuous inflow of tourists to a rural destination hinges on its brand offerings (Ohe & Kurihara, 2013). Tourist destination brand development is captured in the marketing skills, which helps to expose the destination to potential clients. According to Komppula (2014), destination competitiveness is the ability of a destination to attract, meet and exceed tourist expectations better than competing destinations. Komppula further attributes the economic prosperity of a destination to the competitive nature of the destination brand.

A rural destination can sustainably achieve economic independence once the product package of the destination is clearly identified and marketed. Various organisations are taking advantage of the cost effectiveness and efficiency of information communication technologies (ICT) to market their products, however the potential of these ICT in enhancing a rural destination marketability is dependent on the user skills. Additionally, another essential skill for the rural tourist destination's sustainability is the ability to manage the destination efficiently. Rural residents in developing countries are often accustomed to hand to mouth behaviour. Subsistence farming or activities characterise their provision, however this is fuelled by the socio-economic conditions prevailing in rural areas (Su, 2011). The introduction of rural tourism will serve as an alternative income source which can help to achieve economic independence in rural areas.

The benefits of rural tourism are a pull factor for both the government and other interested parties to invest in. On the other hand, rural communities are often characterised by poverty and are marginalised, thus serving as the push factor for local government to look for alternative avenues to build rural areas such as rural tourism. However, achieving a self-sustaining rural community takes time and it requires both financial and human resources to be realised. The government as a major contributor to rural development, can support rural tourism by ensuring that the rural community members receive the necessary skills and also assist with necessary basic services.

## **Methodology**

This research was conducted in the tourism village of Brayut, Sleman district, Special Regency of Yogyakarta in the Republic of Indonesia. The Brayut village lends itself to eco-tourism, still maintains its region naturally and continuously manages a cultural value for its community. The Brayut rural tourism is located at an altitude of 243 m above sea level with an average temperature of around 26 degrees Celsius. The headcount of the village is 150 people, and the number of residents is 411 with the majority who work as farmers. The main focus of tourism in Brayut is agriculture since 90% of the farmland are individually-owned property of Brayut residents. The Brayut rural tourism is very rich in agricultural products such as rice (38 hectares), corn (15 hectares), soybeans (1 hectare), long beans (1 hectare), and chili (1 hectare), and peanuts (0.5 hectares) (Profile of the Brayut Tourism Village in March 2010).

The Brayut village still uses the traditional farming system, the way of life is still a Javanese culture that is close to traditional local values. The numbers of Homestay in Brayut signify 20 Javanese traditional houses. The tourism village provides lodging



facilities, traditional games, batik, traditional farming, traditional dance, *karawitan*, culinary, and cultural conservation within the village.

The data was gathered over two months between May and July 2018 and collected by interviews and observations using field notes and video recordings. Data from interviews and observations are essential to this study however, the greatest attention was devoted to listening to the voices of the families. A total of twelve in-depth interviews were conducted on participants chosen for their leading roles in rural tourism development in the village. Interviews were conducted within a semi-structure with community leaders, elders and inhabitants of Brayut who were interviewed individually. They answered open-ended questions about their financial impact since their territory was transformed into rural tourism. In this study, the data was analysed and described qualitatively.

Qualitative data was analysed through six stages: organising data, exploring and sorting data, encoding for constructing themes, descriptive analysis, sustainability analysis and invention interpretation and validation. Validation was executed using the triangulation method. Triangulation, according to Johnson and Christensen (2013) refers to building studies and research processes for more systematic and accurate crosschecking of information so that conclusions taken through various procedures or sources are trustworthy. Basically, the consistency of data is achieved when the research steps can be verified through examination of raw data, data reduction and notes on the research process (Campbell, 1997).

## Results

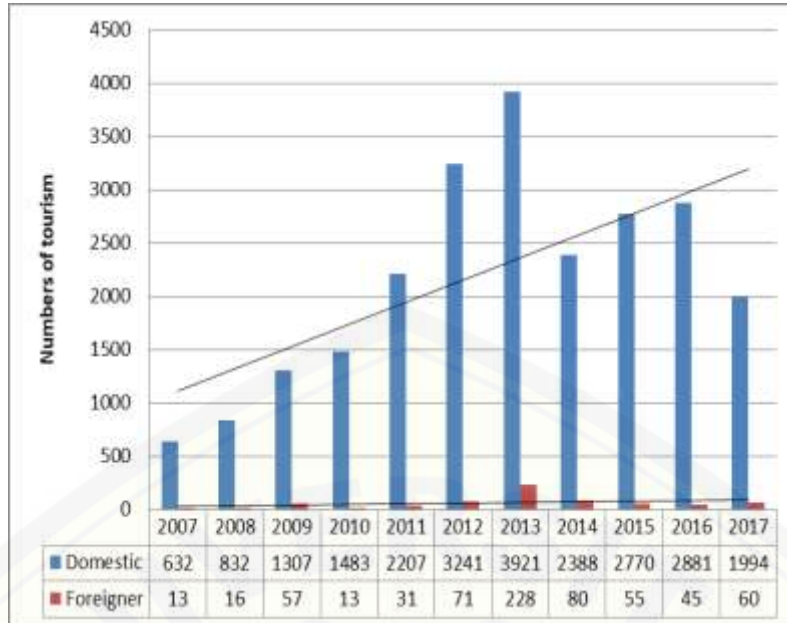
The Brayut village develops various attractions and sells products for tourists. All attractions and products have a price that boosts income for the community. The following are attractions and products in the Brayut area (Table 1):

**Table 1.** Ticket price list and activities in The Brayut rural tourism

Activities	Price (IDR)
<i>Jathilan</i> Attractions (Kuda Lumping)	750.000 / attraction
Agricultural Training	8.000 /person
Traditional dancing course	8.000 / person
Traditional music course ( <i>Karawitan</i> )	8.000 / person
Traditional clothes painting course ( <i>Batik</i> )	20.000 / person
Traditional game	5.000 / person
Traditional cooking course	8.000 / person
Crafting course	3.000/ person
Fishing	8.000/ person
Meeting room rental	250.000 /day
Banquet ( <i>Kenduri</i> )	30.000 / person
Homestay	80.000 / person /day
Traditional snack	8.000 / pax

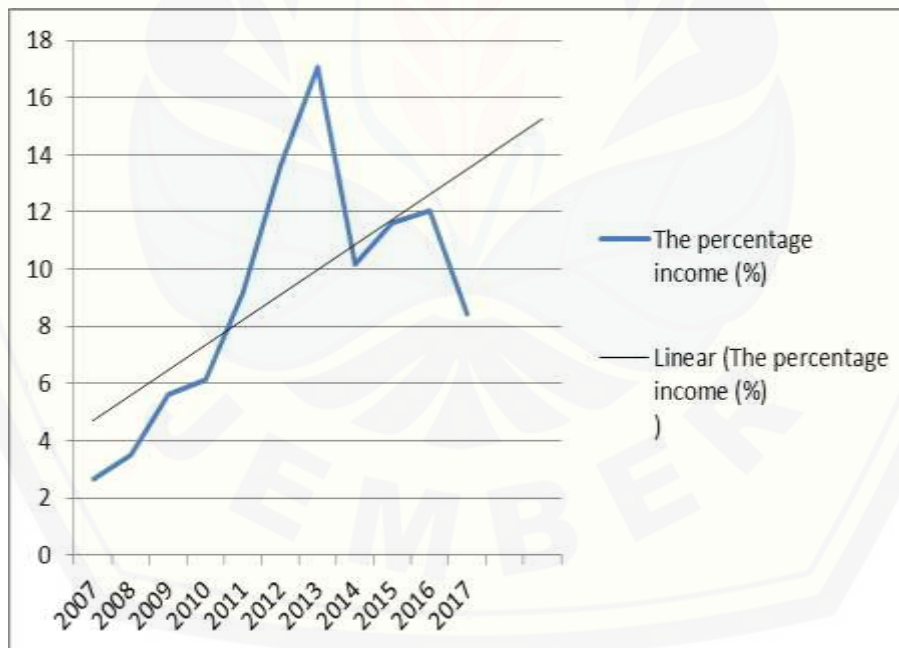
Various products attract the consideration of tourists to Brayut. From year to year the number of tourists have steadily increased. The following graph shows the number of tourists in Brayut over ten years (2007 up to 2017).





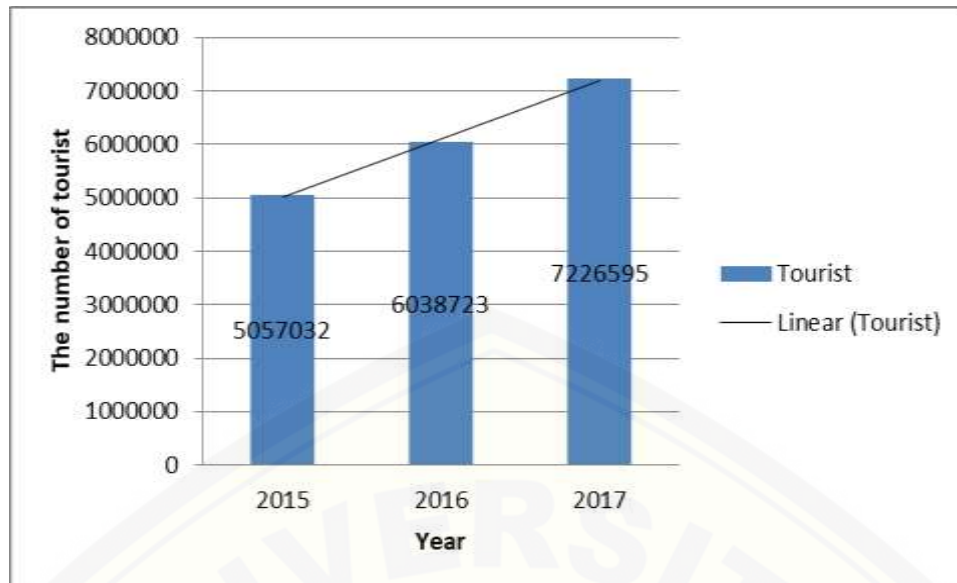
Graph 1. The number of domestic and foreign (Source: Board of Tourism, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2017)

The increasing number of tourists has an impact on the income of the residents of Brayut. The following graph notes income percentage in Brayut over the past 10 years.



Graph 2. The percentage increase in people income (Source: Board of Tourism, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2017)

The increasing number of tourists in Brayut has a positive impact on the number of tourists in Sleman district. The number of tourists has increased over the past three years. Here is a graph depicting the increasing number of tourists in Sleman Regency.



**Graph 3.** The numbers of tourists in Sleman District (Source: Board of Tourism, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2017)

## Discussion

The Brayut rural tourism has various physical and non-physical resources. The physical assets are in the form of traditional Javanese houses (*Joglo*, *Limasan*, *Kampung*) that are more than 200 years old. The location of the village is surrounded by farmland, animal husbandry and fisheries. This physical wealth is used as a support and attraction for tourists to visit the village. Nonphysical wealth is in the form of local wisdom, such as cultural arts. This local culture includes farming, raising livestock, fishing, traditional games, as well as local community day activities. Physical resources and cultural diversity in the Brayut rural tourism are the assets to develop the village.

The Brayut rural tourism emphasises seven principles known as *Sapta Pesona* namely safe, neat, clean, fresh, delightful, friendly, and memorable. These programs are promoted as a basis to attract tourists and visitors. Cultural diversity by the rural tourism can be an iconic development for visitors. This will greatly affect the growth of the community that will further develop the sector of economic benefits. Economic benefit will improve if rural communities are able to tap into the *Sapta Pesona* philosophy by consistently offering programs that reflect any of the principles. As a consequence, it is not uncommon to find most rural women relying on the philosophy to offer some form of hospitality as is evident in a respondent's comment below:

When the tourists arrive, I and other women in this village make traditional cakes. This is very helpful for us to receive extra income

Also, tourism activities led to the development of multiple functions of houses and agricultural land in the form of renting rooms to tourists.

I changed the function of the room in my house, which initially served as a dining room, to a room that can be rented out, so that it increases family income





As for the agricultural system, tourists are invited to participate in farming such as cleaning the grass in the farmland (*matun*), plowing the fields (*lukon*), renewing and planting rice to provide fertiliser. Money obtained from tourists will be given to tour guides and paddy owners so that it will directly increase income for villagers. One resident said:

"We share the income with the rural tour guide, and this is very beneficial for us"

Rural tourism has the potential to develop and improve design-based traditional culture which can translate into a simple concept commonly provided through knowledge and experience for the visitors. In general, rural tourism offers activities aimed at introducing and providing experiences for rural life such as the introduction of culture and traditions in the village, eating the typical food of the village, carrying out local activities with people. The concept of rural tourism seems to have a positive impact since it is involving the local community, for example, providing homestays in their homes and making souvenirs from regional art and craft items that are typical of the village.

The Brayut village coordinator tries to provide the best co-operation to the tourists by changing the behaviour of the citizen. According to the superintendent "building residents" behaviour is more difficult than building physical infrastructure". Therefore, efforts to continue to promote and improve habits change by respecting the environment thereby allowing local culture to thrive. Broadly, the existence of tourist villages in Sleman has a significant effect on economic activities, physical, social and cultural development in the community. Village owned enterprises (*Bumdesa*) can be a driving force in managing tourism villages. The village government can help with the seed funding capital, also to be able to work with banks or other private parties in developing tourism villages. The Village Community Activities Unit (UKM) plays an essential role in the development of tourism villages as supporting industries in the tourism sector, such as culinary business, regional souvenirs, transportation, homestays/lodging, travel agents, as well as tour guide services. These sectors will continue to exist if the number of tourist visits can continue to increase.

*Bumdesa* and guide must conduct good practices in promoting and providing services to tourists. Surely a successful rural tourism not only provides a beautiful tourism landscape but also has to be able to make interesting activities and attractions available to attract the visitor impression and experience. The village government must play an active role in providing knowledge and assistance to the community in maintaining and serving the tourists. One of the most important things is to keep the village environment clean and pretty so that the comfortable atmosphere during the holidays can be felt by tourists while visiting and living in the homes of residents. The community must explore the cultural potential to be used as a tourist attraction so that the nuances of Indonesian villages full of high cultural traditions can be one of the motivations for tourists to visit and re-visit.

A weakness of rural tourism activity is the insufficient number of homestays. This problem can be temporarily overcome by involving other tourist villages around Brayut so that indirectly it will boost and benefit other tourism villages. In addition, researchers see a tendency to change the function of land around the Brayut tourism village to become a place of business that disrupts the existence of tourist villages that highlight the beauty of nature and culture. This requires the role of the district and provincial



governments to more care about the existence of rural tourism while maintaining their existence.

### Conclusion, implications and directions for future research

We set out to explore the potential for economic independence of the village of Brayut that has earned the reputation of “tourist village” in the Republic of Indonesia. What we found confirms that the community of Brayut has seen consistent financial growth from a rising number of domestic and foreign tourists leading to a change in the functional use of residences for rent by tourists. Thus, this study has implications for rural community development through rural tourism. Firstly, it sheds light on how local and provincial governments are able to maximise the potential of rural tourism for rural economic independence. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential benefits of rural tourism which aids to encourage both public and private funders and investors to pursue untapped rural opportunities. Future research can focus on how to build a rural tourist destination brand that can attract and sustain the inflow of tourists to rural tourist destinations. There is also a need to understand how community dwellers can balance their custom activities and managing a tourism business as an added activity.

Rural tourism is an alternative local business to increase the economic independence of rural communities. The management of rural tourism directly involves the entire community. This means that the community must have the requisite resources – homestay for tourists and people with good communication skills. In this instance, the role of the district government is really essential to maintain and develop the quality of tourist services, as well as the sustainability of tourism villages.

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