

# 'Small is Beautiful But is it Practical?' Small-Scale Coastal Tourism and Economic Development in South-East Asia

Dr. Mark Hampton

University of Kent

United Kingdom

E-mail: [M.Hampton@kent.ac.uk](mailto:M.Hampton@kent.ac.uk)

Tourism in South-East Asia continues to grow both in scale and scope. Concerning scale, the region is one of the fastest-growing tourism areas in the world when measured by indicators such as international arrivals or tourists receipts (UN WTO, 2008). Regarding scope, the region is experiencing changes in the types of tourism. Long-haul international tourism from Europe and Australasia is now running alongside growing regional tourism from both the East Asian industrialising economies and other ASEAN countries. In addition, there is increasing domestic tourism particularly in Thailand and Malaysia. Tourism from all three categories is increasingly concentrated spatially along in the coasts and islands of South-East Asia.

Whilst governments and investors plan huge multi-billion dollar integrated developments such as Bintan Beach International Resort, Indonesia; across the region hundreds of small-scale coastal destinations have emerged. These have grown - often outside the formal government tourism planning frameworks - to cater for backpackers and independent travellers. Islands are particularly attractive to tourists with many examples of small-scale tourism including the Southern Thai islands (Cohen, 1982); the Gili islands of Lombok, Indonesia (Hampton and Hampton, 2009); and Malaysia's Perhentian islands (Hamzah, 1995).

This paper examines small-scale coastal and island tourism using examples from extensive field research in South-East Asia particularly Malaysia and Indonesia. Common issues include the fundamental question of how to retain more of the tourist expenditure in the local area, that is, how to minimise economic leakage, and conversely, how to strengthen economic linkages to locally-owned businesses. The paper argues that the key lessons are that small-scale coastal tourism, whilst not being a panacea for all circumstances, has great potential for real economic development that can benefit local host communities.



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