

Measuring Resident Attitudes towards Voluntourism: An Analysis of the Social Exchange Theory (SET)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to introduce the concept of “voluntourism” and its applicability as an alternative form of tourism due to its ability to combine recreational activities with service and learning. The location and proximity of a local community to tourism practices affect the way in which the community perceives the effects of voluntourism as a whole, which is why importance is placed on the residents’ perceptions and attitudes towards voluntourism through an analysis incorporating the Social Exchange Theory (SET). This study will focus on the perceptions of residents living on Andaman Island in Thailand, an area that was significantly affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.

Keywords: *tourism, voluntourism, resident attitudes, social exchange theory, Andaman Island, Thailand*

INTRODUCTION

Wearing (2001) argues the concept of “volunteering” is founded on notions of altruism and self-development. These notions engage volunteers to work for a cause they believe in and as a result, volunteers feel they have meaningfully spent their time. Volunteer tourism, or “voluntourism,” is a term that “applies to tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment” (Wearing, 2001, p. 1). Voluntourism is an increasing research topic of interest due to its ability to provide a socio-cultural approach to recreation and community service. Individuals engage in voluntourism due to its ability to combine the best intentions of the not-for-profit sector with the excitement of the tourism sector to create stimulating, service-oriented vacations (Globe Aware, 2010). Current academic research on voluntourism focuses on the motivations and behaviors of “voluntourists” and their experiences. However, existing research on voluntourism has neglected to inquire or consider the host residents’ attitudes toward voluntourism. In this regard, it is important to remember voluntourism is two-fold with host communities playing an essential role.