

Tourist Attitudes towards Sustainable Tourism: Empirical Evidence From Malaysian National Park, Taman Negara

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Abstract— Tourism is one of the biggest industries in the world and one of the economical sectors which grows rapidly. The recognition that tourism is a leading contributor to a nation has led this industry to be increasingly developed and marketed. While this approach helps ingenerating employment as well as improving the local infrastructure, more often than not development is rushed, taking little or no consideration of the product's life cycle or the environment. This practice of unsustainable tourism eventually threatens the attractiveness of a tourist destination and strips the competitiveness of that destination. The purpose of this paper is to provide empirical evidence on the types of tourist visiting Taman Negara. A total of 230 useable questionnaires were obtained and subsequently analysed. Based upon the study findings, three clusters of tourists were identified and a profile of Taman Negara tourists was drawn.

Keywords-sustainable tourism; tourist attitudes; Malaysia

I. INTRODUCTION

Researchers have attempted to explain and predict the nature of tourism's impacts on the host community and environment. As the numbers of nature travellers outgrow the rate of the tourism industry three times over poorly managed ecotourism destination threatens the attractiveness of a tourist destination and strips the competitiveness of that destination [1]. As a result, the very attractions that draw travellers to that destination in the first place will be eliminated. Sustainable development, therefore, has become an important agenda in destination management. Malaysia, blessed with many eco-tourist destinations are in place to take advantage of this tourism trend. Promoting and developing eco-tourism, hence, has become an important agenda with greater emphasis on the preservation of natural attractions [2].

As tourists are heterogeneous in nature and travel for different reasons, identifying and attracting the 'right' visitors is a must, for sustainable tourism to be achieved. In short, custodians of protected areas must make a conscious effort to draw tourists from an established market segment that practices sustainable tourism and try to reduce the number of tourists practicing unsustainable tourism. Looking from this perspective, successful sustainable tourism calls for a strong tourist database that accounts and relates the characteristics of holiday makers, their travel motives, knowledge and attitudes towards sustainable tourism,

intention to act, responsible behaviour, and travel satisfaction.

The recognition that nature travel is the fastest growing sector of the tourism business has led to many protected areas being increasingly developed and marketed. While this approach helps in generating revenues, employment as well as improving the local infrastructure, more often than not development is rushed, taking little or no consideration of the product's life cycle or the environment. This practice eventually threatens the attractiveness of a tourist destination and strips the competitiveness of that destination. As a result, the very attractions that draw travellers to that destination in the first place will be eliminated.

Taman Negara, one of Malaysia's premier eco-tourist destinations, is in danger of this phenomenon. Taman Negara is fast becoming a popular global destination. The increasing number of tourist arrival to this destination (81,974 in 2007 vs 79,758 in 2006) indicates its growing popularity. On the same note, the bigger increase of foreign tourist arrivals over the locals over the years (eg. 7% vs -1% in 2007) signals its strength as an international tourist destination.

Besides the abundant wildlife and diversity of its rainforests, other attractions at Taman Negara include nature trails, caves, and canopy walkway. Activities such as Fishing Trips, Night Safari, Night Walk, Gunung Tahan Expedition, and Jungle Trekking are promoted extensively to tourists. To accommodate the diverse needs of its travellers, several types of accommodations are available, the most exclusive is situated in Taman Negara itself. Within its walking distance, budgets hotels are aplenty to cater for price sensitive visitors. Rows of floating restaurants line up along the (Kuala Tahan) riverbank near the entrance of Taman Negara to cater to the needs of the visitors. Understandably, along with these set-ups, evidences of unhealthy environmental practices greet the visitors.

The contribution of this study to Taman Negara, therefore, is in setting up a database that would enable choices about which segment/s are the most appropriate to serve, thus, making the best of finite resources. In the realm of academics, this study provides another insight to 'travel motivation' as a profiling base and traveller attitudes towards sustainable tourism.

Thus, the objectives of this paper are to:

- i. Explore the activities engaged by tourists visiting Taman Negara and the dimensions of travel motivation among these tourists.
- ii. Profile tourists according to their travel motivation and to select the best segment/segments that Taman Negara Park operator should concentrate their marketing activities.

II. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ITS CHALLENGES

Ecotourism and nature tourism are the two most commonly associated and contrasted terms with sustainable tourism. Nature tourism is "travel to natural places", while Ecotourism is "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people (TIES, 2002)". Sustainable tourism, on the other hand, is the "development that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems"[3].

Nature tourism, therefore, is a passive activity with little participation of the local community, while the opposite is true for ecotourism. Sustainable tourism extends the concept of ecotourism as it embraces all segments of the industry with guidelines and criteria that seek to reduce environmental impacts, particularly the use of non-renewable resources, using measurable benchmarks, and to improve tourism's contribution to sustainable development and environmental conservation.

While sustainable tourism is the only way forward, putting it in practice is a challenge as it requires strong commitment and participation of all relevant stakeholders. The practice of the government and corporations in treating social and environmental costs and benefits as externalities is one such challenge [4]. Business ownership is another, if it was in the hand of the foreigners. Further, sustainable tourism calls for maintaining a high level of tourist satisfaction. Keeping tourists satisfied, however, is challenging, as they are heterogeneous in nature and seek different tourism products/experiences.

Still, recent studies have shown that consumers are becoming more interested in sustainable forms of tourism. While interest and preference of tourists towards sustainable tourism is on the rise, the proportion of those who would participate in sustainable tourism practices is however very much lower. In another study, 38 percent said that environmentally-friendly tourism is a consideration when travelling, 38 percent had stayed at an environmentally-friendly hotel, 9 percent specifically sought out such hotels, 34 percent were willing to pay more to stay in environmentally-friendly hotels, 37 percent are willing to pay a premium of at least 5-10 percent, and 24 percent believed air travel should be avoided.

As tourists are heterogeneous in nature and travel for different reasons, identifying and attracting the 'right' visitors, therefore, is a must, for sustainable tourism to be achieved. In short, custodians of protected areas must make a conscious effort to draw tourists from an established market segment that practices sustainable tourism and try to reduce the number of tourists practicing unsustainable tourism. Looking from this perspective, successful sustainable tourism calls for a strong tourist database that accounts the characteristics of holiday makers, their travel motives, knowledge and attitudes towards sustainable tourism, intention to act, responsible behaviour, and travel satisfaction. In essence these are the objectives of this study.

III. METHODOLOGY

The questionnaires were distributed to a cross section of tourists in Taman Negara. A sample of 230 respondents was obtained via stratified (according to tourist type) non-random sampling. This method was used to provide a respectable number of completed questionnaires in a relatively short fieldwork period. Questionnaires were distributed to tourists in various manners. Some were given to tourists directly by the researchers either at the lobby of their hotels or while they were waiting to check-in into the hotels, some were distributed in restaurants, while others were given out by hotel or guesthouse staff, usually when the guests checked-in or when they were watching televisions and relaxing at night.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 230 tourists participated in this study. It was found that a slightly bigger proportion of female than male tourists visited Taman Negara, although arguably, this outcome is due to the greater willingness of the former to participate in the survey than the latter. Taman Negara tourists were young and sadly, an overwhelming 88 percent were not a member or affiliated with any environmental organization. This piece of information probably signals a warning to the Taman Negara operator that only a handful (12%) of the visitors are committed to environmental issues. In the aspect of behaviour, many (88%) were first time visitors and roughly half visited Taman Negara via own arrangement. The majority of respondents stayed at Taman Negara for less than 3 days and roughly an equal number of the respondents stayed at motels and hotels.

The most popular activities participated by Taman Negara travellers were canopy walkway and jungle trekking (Table I). Activities that were moderately participated include rapid shootings, night jungle walk, visit Orang Asli Settlement, photographing, and cave exploration. The remaining activities such as fishing, mountain climbing, bird watching, kayaking & rafting and shopping were not as popular. The unpopularity of these attractions could be explained by two main reasons. One is the 'niche' nature of these activities, exemplify by activities such as bird watching and mountain climbing. The other explanation could be that these attractions are still poorly developed. Kayaking and rafting could be in this category.

TABLE I. THE ACTIVITIES ENGAGED BY TOURISTS

Activities	%
Canopy walkway	71.0
Jungle trekking	64.5
Rapids shootings	43.0
Night jungle walk	42.6
Visit Orang Asli Settlement	39.0
Photographing	34.1
Cave exploration	33.6
Swimming	26.9
Mountain climbing	12.1
Bird Watching	12.1
Shopping	11.2
Fishing	7.2
Kayaking & Rafting	4.9

Typology of Taman Negara Tourists

As outlined in Table II, Cluster 1 (n = 30) is made up of visitors who predominantly enjoy nature and want to experience something new, thus labelled as ‘Nature Enthusiasts’. The second group (n = 71) also come to Taman Negara because of its nature and to experience new things, but differs in the need to escape from the everyday activity and to mentally relax. This cluster is thus, labelled as the ‘breakaways’. The last group and largest group, also shared the same two dimensions of travel motives (being close to nature and wanting to have new experiences) but differs in the need to socialize. This group is named as the ‘socialites’ (n = 122).

TABLE II. TYPOLOGY OF TAMAN NEGARA TOURISTS

	Cluster					
	1		2		3	
	Nature Enthusiasts		Breakaways		Socialites	
Nature 5.12	3.53	4.78	3.43	4.66	4.02	5.46
Novelty 5.24	3.01	4.55	3.39	5.13	3.61	5.49
Social 4.59	2.15	3.07	2.87	4.10	3.69	5.25
Escape 4.76	2.27	3.58	3.25	5.06	3.11	4.88
Cluster size*	30		71		122	
% Cluster size	13%		32%		55%	

This study, believed to be the first of its kind conducted at Taman Negara marks an important step towards tourist management. To complement and provide an initial database of the park’s tourists, visitors’ profile via geo-demographics, travel motivation were built. Such input would enable park managers to understand visitors better and the consequent target marketing activities. Table III summarizes the findings for this study.

This study therefore presented three clusters of Taman Negara visitors for its management to scrutinize and chose the segment/s deemed most appropriate to serve. They are:

- Nature enthusiasts - make up 13% of the total tourists who visit the park to enjoy nature and to experience something new. They are most likely male, foreign tourists, 31-40 years old, make own travelling arrangement, enjoy more distinctive nature activities, and spend the most (RM522). They are the least likely to support nature preservation and thus, exhibit the least tendency to support sustainable tourism activities, even though, they possess the highest knowledge on negative activities impacting the environment. Nature enthusiasts express the highest satisfaction on Taman Negara and yet the least likely to visit Taman Negara again”.
- Breakaways - make up 32% of Taman Negara tourists to enjoy its nature, to experience new things, and to escape from the everyday activity and to mentally relax. They are primarily male, either foreign and local tourists, most likely 23-30 years old, make own travelling arrangement, engaged in many popular activities and spend the least (RM475). Similar to nature enthusiasts, they were not very supportive (although a bit more receptive) to nature preservation. The breakaways are the least satisfied with their visit to Taman Negara and most unhappy with the way this park is environmentally managed. Their likelihood of coming back again is greater than nature enthusiasts”.
- Socialites - make up 55% of Taman Negara tourists who travel to this destination for its nature and new experience as well as to socialize. They are predominantly females, local tourists, young (<23 years old), come on tour, take part in all the popular activities, enjoyed visiting to orang asli, and shopping, but spend moderately (RM506). This group exhibits the highest inclination towards nature preservation, are the greatest supporter of sustainable tourism, possess the highest intention to participate and had participated in sustainable tourism activities. Socialites were most satisfied with environmental management but lag behinds nature enthusiasts in overall satisfaction. Nonetheless, they are the most likely group to make return visits and to spread positive words of mouth.”

Looking at the above consumer characteristics and given that Taman Negara is home to the oldest rainforest in the world, nature enthusiasts should be the primary target market. This segment also contributed the most in economic sense and luring them would enhance the ‘image’ of Taman Negara as an international tourist destination. Nonetheless, efforts need to be undertaken to instil positive attitude towards nature and sustainable tourism practices to this group. On the same note, activities that could attract them to participate in sustainable tourism should also be drawn. Further studies, therefore, should be undertaken to understand better this group of customers.

This study has established that tourists coming to this Taman Negara with the expectation of bringing back *new* experiences (87%), be it new things about nature, flora and fauna, or new culture. In Taman Negara, it is acknowledged

that efforts have been made to educate tourists on nature. Information on animals is one such activity. Nonetheless, this 'on the board' information is too passive and uninteresting. Active and interactive flora and fauna learning would be a better alternative (as practiced at Mon Repos Conservational Park in Queensland, Australia). Wildlife department should therefore aim to provide active and interactive educational experience to the tourists in a convenient way as they could not expect everyone who visits this park is willing to travel deep into the jungle to experience nature in itself.

Night Jungle Walk, Cave Exploration and Visit Orang Asli Settlement are interactive and active educational experiences available at Taman Negara. However, this study indicates that only roughly 40% of the tourists engaged in Night Jungle Walk as well as visited Orang Asli Settlement while about 30% of tourists took part in Cave Exploration. This rather low turnout should serve as a caution to Taman Negara operator that these activities need to be improved. For instance, the success of these activities depends very much on the knowledge and passion of the assigned tour guides. Thus, training programmes for these night walk guides must be ongoing and only certified guides could conduct such activity. On the same note, monitoring must be done to ensure that these activities should not be conveniently offered by chalet or restaurant operators surrounding Taman Negara.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

From the study that was conducted, it was found that there were three types of tourists. The profile of each group is as follows:

- Nature enthusiasts are most likely male, foreign tourists, 31-40 years old, make own travelling arrangement, enjoy more distinctive nature activities, and spend the most (RM522) in Taman Negara.
- Breakaways are primarily male, foreign and local tourists, most likely 23-30 years old, make own travelling arrangement, engaged in many popular activities and spend the least (RM475).
- Socialites are predominantly females, local tourists, <23 years old, come on tour, took part in all the

popular activities, enjoyed visiting to orang asli and shopping and spend moderately (RM506).

The profile highlighted that these three segments were good segments for Taman Negara to pursue and attract, although one could say that the socialites should be the top priority. The movement towards sustainable tourism, as noted in earlier was the result of greater environmental awareness and the realization that the natural environment would not provide an unlimited resource base for population and economic growth. Putting in place the practice of sustainable tourism is a challenge to tourism developers as sustainable tourism requires strong commitment and participation of all relevant stakeholders. Likewise, achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Further, a strong political leadership is needed to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Without a doubt, similar scenario should be at work at Taman Negara if sustainable tourism practices are to be achieved. Continuous research on the tourists' attitudes on sustainable tourism such as this one needs to be undertaken on a yearly basis to track the changes in attitudes and preferences. Tracking studies can also be used to assess the effectiveness of any new program developed towards this exercise.

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TABLE III PROFILE OF TAMAN NEGARA TOURISTS

		Traveller Typology			Total
		Nature Enthusiasts	Breakaways	Socialites	
Gender	Male	53.3%	55.9%	33.9%	43.4%
	Female	46.7%	44.1%	66.1%	56.6%
Tourist Type	Locals	23.3%	42.6%	65.3%	52.5%
	Foreigners	76.7%	57.4%	34.7%	47.5%
Age	<23	20.0%	8.8%	22.3%	17.8%
	23-30	36.7%	50.0%	38.8%	42.0%
	31-40	36.7%	33.8%	31.4%	32.9%
	> 41	6.7%	7.4%	7.4%	7.3%
Type of visit	Own	63.3%	67.6%	38.8%	51.1%
	Tour	36.7%	32.4%	61.2%	48.9%
Jungle trekking	Yes	60.0%	69.0%	63.6%	64.9%
Night jungle walk	Yes	43.3%	45.1%	41.0%	42.6%
Rapids shooting	Yes	36.7%	33.8%	50.0%	43.0%
Canopy walkway	Yes	80.0%	59.2%	76.2%	71.3%
Cave Exploration	Yes	30.0%	31.0%	36.1%	33.6%
Photographing	Yes	46.7%	33.8%	31.1%	34.1%
Bird watching	Yes	16.7%	12.7%	10.7%	12.1%
Visit orang asli	Yes	13.3%	21.1%	55.7%	39.0%
Kayaking and rafting	Yes	10.0%	4.2%	4.1%	4.9%
Shopping	Yes	6.7%	5.6%	15.6%	11.2%
Expenditure		RM522.37	RM474.52	RM506.42	RM498.41
Cluster size		30	71	122	
% Cluster Size		13%	32%	55%	

** italics and bold – significant differences between groups