



Tourists' Perceived Destination Competitiveness in Protected Areas: The Case of Semenggoh Nature Reserve

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Abstract

Ecotourism is referred to sustainable tourism, whereby responsible travel is endorsed, especially in natural areas that emphasize on relaxation. In Malaysia, the richness of natural areas leads ecotourism to become one of the rapidly growing industries within the nation. Thus, there is a need for complete understanding of ecotourism practice in planning, developing, and resources management to ensure sustainability without causing environmental degradation. Over the decades, people are progressively pursuing for reconnection with the nature for pukka natural experiences during their travel. This study intends to identify the impacts of natural resources, accessibility, cultural uniqueness, carrying capacity, and perceived values on tourism destination competitiveness from tourists' perspectives. A total of 157 respondents had participated in completing the questionnaire. WarpPLS (version 6.0) was applied to assess the developed model based on path modelling followed by bootstrapping. The results revealed that accessibility and cultural uniqueness are positively and significantly correlated to tourism destination competitiveness based on tourists' perspectives. Surprisingly, natural resources, carrying capacity, and perceived values were observed to be no significant relationship with tourism destination competitiveness. The implications, limitations, and directions for future research are further discussed.

Keywords: Natural resources; Accessibility; Cultural uniqueness; Carrying capacity; Perceived values; Destination competitiveness.



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1. Introduction

Tourism, as [Baggio \(2019\)](#) suggested, it is a composite occurrence where movement of people across nations or places is involved alongside remarkable number of sectors, subjects, happenings, entities, and behaviours. Nevertheless, one recent study has revealed the increasing number of individuals who seek travel opportunities for authentic natural and cultural experiences ([Forbes, 2017](#)). Based on this fact, the attention of policy makers, such as destination marketing organizations (DMO's) and researchers is captured towards sustainable tourism development ([Hall, 2019](#)). Studies in the past have postulated several paybacks through sustaining ecotourism development, which comprises poverty alleviation as well as enhancement in the opportunity of business. In conjunction with that, the focus of Malaysia has been drawn towards development of ecotourism whereby its campaign of Visit 2020 targeted 30 million of international visitors in total with receipt of RM100 billion ([Bernama, 2019](#)).

As revealed by Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth and Sports (MTACYS) in 2018, National Parks in Sarawak, Malaysia has encountered a rise in terms of visitor arrivals with an inclination rate of 14.66% among international tourists. Consequently, there is a possibility of occurrence in relevance to overtourism issues which is increasingly critical to the management of tourism. As proposed by Center for Responsible Travel (2018), tourism management plan which is inactive contributes to the overtourism, which is overcrowding of a destination, specifically national parks. As a result, the fall in tourists' arrivals at national parks due to the reduction in quality of a visitor's experience, eventually leads to decrement in revenues of the national parks. Furthermore, degradation of the environment including pollution in the air, noise and water at the nature reserve due to ineffective tourism management ([Anup, 2016](#); [Eagles, 2002](#); [Nianyong and Zhuge, 2001](#)).

The present study was conducted at Semenggoh Nature Reserve, situated in Sarawak, Malaysia. Among numerous national parks and nature reserves in the state of Sarawak, Semenggoh Nature Reserve sustained substantial number of visits ranging from domestic or international, specifically nature lovers with a growth rate as

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