

ENDOWED AND CREATED RESOURCES TOWARDS ECOTOURISM COMPETITIVENESS: NATURAL PROTECTED AREAS IN SARAWAK

Jun-Zhou THONG*

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Faculty of Economics and Business, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia, e-mail: junzhou_9@gmail.com

Abang Azlan MOHAMAD

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Faculty of Economics and Business, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia, e-mail: maazlan@unimas.my

May-Chiu LO

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Faculty of Economics and Business, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia, e-mail: mclo@unimas.my

Citation: Thong, J.Z., Mohamad, A.A., & Lo, M.C. (2020). ENDOWED AND CREATED RESOURCES TOWARDS ECOTOURISM COMPETITIVENESS: NATURAL PROTECTED AREAS IN SARAWAK. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 32(4), 1252–1258. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.32409-565>

Abstract: The richness of natural areas in Malaysia leads ecotourism to become one of the rapidly growing industries within the nation. The present study aims to discover the impacts of endowed and created resources on ecotourism competitiveness from both domestic and international tourists' perspectives. 189 respondents had completed the questionnaire and WarpPLS 6.0 was used to test the model created. The results revealed that endowed resources (e.g. natural resources and cultural heritage attraction) are positively and significantly correlated to ecotourism competitiveness. Surprisingly, created resources (e.g. tourism infrastructure and range of activities) were observed to have no significant relationship with ecotourism competitiveness.

Key words: natural resources, cultural heritage attraction, tourism infrastructure, range of activities, ecotourism competitiveness, tourists' perspectives

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

Tourism, it is a complex occurrence where movement of people across places or nations is involved alongside remarkable number of entities, subjects, sectors, happenings, and behaviours (Baggio, 2019). Recently, a study has shown the growing number of individuals who seek opportunities to travel for authentic experiences on natural and cultural (Forbes, 2017). Based on this fact, policy makers, such as destination marketing organizations (DMO's) and researchers have drawn their attention towards sustainable development of tourism (Hall, 2019). Past studies have postulated several returns led by sustainable development of ecotourism, which comprises alleviation on poverty as well as enhancement in the business opportunities. In conjunction with that, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (2019) has drawn its attention towards development of ecotourism whereby its campaign of visit 2020 targeted 30 million of international visitors in total with receipt of RM100 billion (New Sarawak Tribune, 23.7.2019, 3).

As revealed by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Sarawak (2019), Sarawak, Malaysia has encountered a rise in terms of visitor arrivals with a growth rate of 5.22%. Consequently, there is a possibility that over tourism issues may happen which is increasingly critical to the tourism management. Nevertheless, Centre for Responsible Travel (2018) suggested that, inactive tourism management plan contributes to the over tourism, which is overcrowding of a destination, specifically national parks. As a result, the fall in tourists' arrivals may happen at national parks due to the reduction in quality of visitors' experiences, eventually leads to loss of revenues. Furthermore, destinations might face environmental degradation including pollution in the air, noise, and water at the nature reserve due to ineffective tourism management (Eagles, 2002; Nianyong and Zhuge, 2001; Anup, 2016).

The natural resources of national park play a considerable role as tourists' attraction, as well as other built resources contributing to its destination competitiveness (Lo et al., 2017). As such, with high quality of tourism infrastructure it ensures tourists' expectations are met while increasing destination competitiveness (Su and Wall, 2009; Chin et al., 2017).

Moreover, it is vital to consider the range of activities for better attraction of tourists by offering appealing natural and cultural experiences (Ayikoru, 2015; Zehrer et al., 2017). Previous researchers have discovered that tourists' perceptions are a part of substantial determinants of tourism destination competitiveness (Barsky and Nash, 2002; Carneiro et al., 2015). Consequently, the present study aims to examine the perceptions of both domestic and foreign tourists on the impacts of natural resources, cultural heritage attraction, tourism infrastructure, and range of activities towards competitiveness development of tourism destination.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

Competitiveness Theory

Researchers (e.g.: Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; Hanafiah et al., 2016; Croes et al., 2020) highlighted theoretical basis for model development for destination competitiveness considering both concepts on comparative resource and competitive advantage. Comparative resources are referred to core attractions such as natural environment and resources, whereas competitive advantage is defined as elements which are more progressive consisting created resources such as tourism infrastructure and facilities (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999). Subsequently, theories of comparative resource and competitive advantage are focused on past studies in examining tourism destination competitiveness (Ritchie and Crouch, 1999; Mihalic, 2000; Navickas and Malakauskaite, 2009). Likewise, recent studies applied competitiveness theory to investigate sustainable competitiveness of tourism destination to explicate the key competitiveness development from both resources, namely comparative resource and competitive advantage (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Oye et al., 2013; Zehrer et al., 2016; Yozcu, 2017).

* Corresponding author