VISITORS PERCEPTION ON ECO-GUIDES PERFORMANCE
IN BAKO NATIONAL PARK

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Visitors Perception on Eco-guides Performance in Bako National Park

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science with Honours in Plant Resource Science and Management

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Last but not least, I am deeply grateful to my family for their love, care and continuous support throughout my study in UNIMAS.
DECLARATION

I declare that no portion of work referred to in this dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree of qualification of this or any other university or institution of higher learning.

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Visitors Perception on Eco-guide Performance in Bako National Park

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is defined as a form of tourism with its primary goal is to foster sustainability through resource conservation, cultural revival and economic development. The purpose of this research project was to assess visitors perception on the important quality attribute of eco-guides and the performance of eco-guides based on the quality attributes in Bako National Park. The data were analysed by using Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. The most important quality attribute was good communication skill while the most least important quality attribute is use of stories. The highest performance quality of eco-guide was on respect visitors from other culture. The relationship between importance of quality attributes and performance of eco-guides was studied by using Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA).

Keywords: ecotourism, importance, performance, eco-guides

ABSTRAK


Kata kunci : ekopelancongan, kepentingan, prestasi, pemandu ekopelancong
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Tourism plays an important role as one of the major contributors to the economic development of a country. Through the development of tourism, significant impacts are visible in the destination region, where tourist interacts with the local environment, economy, culture and society (Mason, 2008). The impacts as the results of tourism development can be positive or beneficial and also negative or detrimental to the economy, social and environment. As for positive economic impacts, tourism sector has the potential to generate incomes from various sources including accommodation, facilities and services provided to tourists. Thus, higher revenue will be generated with increasing number of tourist arrivals. As for Malaysia, Malaysia International Tourism Exchange (MITE), (2011) reported Malaysia generated MYR 56.5 billion in tourist receipts in 2010 as compared to MYR 53.4 billion in 2009. Similarly, tourist arrivals in Malaysia was reported 24.6 million tourist arrivals in 2010 which 3.9% higher in comparison to the previous year (Bernama, 2012). With promising prospect in the global tourism sector, the number of visitor arrivals in Malaysia is expected to increase further in the coming years. Besides, tourism developments also create employment opportunities and generate income to employees in this industry. This industry also stimulates profitable domestic industries such as hotels and lodging facilities, restaurants, food services, transportation systems, handicrafts and guide service.
In fact, tourism development also contributed to the creation of national parks and wildlife parks which helps to preserve and conserve the existing flora and fauna. In terms of social benefits, tourism fosters local pride. In Malaysia, younger generations are not really fond on learning the handicrafts and other skills. However, once the culture is seen on the tourists’ eyes, they will start to value them. Educational process is one the important parts in the tourism industry. Tourism takes people to new places and broadens their understanding and knowledge of other culture and environment. The knowledge is not only obtained by tourists, but also by the local residents. In addition, when a place is being developed as a tourism destination, enhancement will be done on the infrastructures. For example, improvement water supply and waste treatment, entertainment facilities, access roads and restaurants. Thus, local community will also benefit from the shared infrastructure and indirectly enable them to enhance their quality of life.

However, in terms of negative impacts, Mason (2008) claimed that excessive development in tourism caused damage to the environment. Page and Dowling (2002) listed a few environmental impacts of tourism such as damaged natural attractions due to overcrowding and pollution from vehicle used, depletion of flora and fauna as the result of overdevelopment, destruction of natural resources due to unregulated recreation, and disturbance of wildlife habitats. In terms of economics, negative impacts of tourism development include increase in the prices of properties (land, and houses) and food, which become particularly evident during the tourist season (Mason, 2008). Apart from that, the production of tourist products and services requires the commitment of resources that could otherwise be used for
alternative uses (Cooper et al., 2005). In addition, despite having enhanced infrastructure such as roads, water supply and sewage treatment, local communities have to pay increasing tax burden. Tourism may also cause negative social impacts such as deterioration of local values, loss of local identity, and increase in social problems including crime, drug abuse, and alcoholism. The unawareness of tourists for the local customs may cause them to behave in a way that creates severe social friction between tourists and residents and ultimately between the residents themselves. Thus, “uncontrolled” development of the tourism is regarded as unsustainable usually yield greater negative impacts rather than providing positive benefits.

Hence, sustainable development approach is introduced and considered as a better approach to undertake development including for the tourism development. The concept of sustainable development was defined and popularised by Brundtland Report in the 1980’s as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Weaver, 2008). According to Wight (1995), the concept of sustainable tourism only comprises a challenge to develop tourism capacity without seriously affecting the environment (Wight, 1995). However, sustainable tourism should be understood beyond environmentally responsible tourism. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) (1996), sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that meets the needs of the present tourists and host region while protecting and enhancing the opportunity 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. In addition, Mason (2008) interpreted Inskeep’s (1991) view of sustainable tourism as ‘non-intrusive, non-depleting and renewable, scaled to the particular environment, natural in material make up and presentation and well integrated into the local physical, social, cultural, and economic environment’.

Ecotourism is recognized as a subset of sustainable tourism which is considered as responsible tourism approach (Weaver, 2008). Newsome et al. (2002) claimed that ecotourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry and suggested that “the primary goals of ecotourism are to foster sustainable use through resource conservation, cultural revival, and economic development and diversification”. In addition, Newsome et al. (2002) also argued that to individual level, ecotourism should add values to people’s lives through natural world exploration. Although, issues on ecotourism have been widely discussed in the literature, however, there is still a lack of consensus concerning an accepted definition on ecotourism (Goodwin, 1996; Ross and Wall, 1999, Sirakaya, Sasidharan and Sonmez, 1999).

One of the first definitions of ecotourism was made by the Mexican architect Hector Ceballos-Lascurain in 1983 which is “that form of environmentally responsible tourism that involves travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the object of enjoying, admiring, and studying the nature (the scenery, wild plants and animals), as well as any cultural aspect (both past and present) found in these areas, through a process which promotes conservation, has a low impact on the environment and on the culture and favour the active and socioeconomically beneficial involvement of local communities” (Ecotourism in America, 2013).
Blamey (1997) identified three core criteria of ecotourism that recur in other definitions that are dominant nature-based element in the attractions, an educational component and a requirement of sustainability. Wood (2002) defined ecotourism as a travel or visitation to naturally undisturbed area for the purpose of enjoying and appreciating the nature (including past and current culture) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local population. In addition, Fennel (1999) defined ecotourism as a form of sustainable natural resource-based tourism which focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature which is ethically managed to be low impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented which typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas. Therefore, it can be concluded that ecotourism is a type of tourism which is nature-based, environmentally educational, sustainably managed and avoiding or minimizing negative environmental, social and economic impacts to natural environment. In fact, interpretation is an important component of ecotourism which is relevant to educate and enhance experience of ecotourists.

According to Tilden (1957) as cited by Randall and Rollins (2009), interpretation is defined as “an educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original object, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information”. Ham (1992) defined interpretation as an approach to communication where a person translated the technical language of a natural science or related field into terms and ideas that an ordinary person can understand. It involves doing it in way that is entertaining and
interesting. Hence, there is a close relationship between interpretation and tourism (Moscardo, 2003). Besides, interpretation is concerned with delivering information to tourists about the attractions and as well as encouraging them to appreciate and care for attractions. In addition, Newsome et al. (2002) stated that interpretation is an important and necessary factor in managing tourism in sensitive environments. Interpretation can be seen as part of the process of making places accessible to a public audience and provide visitors with views and insight of a place (Mason, 2008). Many interpretation techniques are available to visitors including using tour-guide services as interpreter to learn and enhance experiences.

Essentially, the role of interpreter was rated higher compared to providing field guides and books for the tourist groups (Randall & Rollins, 2009). In addition, in order to learn nature through tourism, tour guides roles are very important in interpretation. Ap and Wong, (2001) claimed that tour guides are the ‘bridge’ between the host destination and visitors. Eco-guides are considered as the key player to the success of the ecotourism. They also reported that the highest importance of guides were as environmental communicator and motivator. Visitor’s experience through their travel at a destination and their understanding tend to be influenced by visitor’s encounter with eco-guides. Eco-guides also play important roles to educate and enhance learning experience of visitors, to provide leadership in tour and to protect safety and security of visitors. Apart from that, eco-guides are also responsible to create a comfortable environment for visitors and to enhance communication from management, policy-makers, and operators to visitors.
In order to provide quality service to visitors, guides competencies is vital to satisfy the visitors. Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of eco-guides to influence visitors, there is a need to abide to the Quality Service Standard. According to Kimmel (1999) as cited by Randall and Rollins (2008), tour operators and guides can play an important and influential role in information delivery, interpretation and as conduits for natural resource management agencies. Studies examining the guide from the perspective of the customer or tourist include examining customer satisfaction with guided tours, characteristics of good guide in mediating authentic experiences and importance of various roles of guides. Service quality is defined as the difference between customer’s expectations and perceptions of the service (Parasuraman et al., 1998). The customer is said to be satisfied if their expectations are met or exceeded but if the service falls short, it would resulted in their dissatisfaction (Heitmann, 2011). Tourist satisfaction with the ecotourism experience is essential to the continuity of ecotourism industry and thus, the experience should match or exceed the realistic expectations of the visitor (Newsom et al., 2002). However, Ap and Wong (2001) stated that there has been relatively little research examining the way that clients perceived the performance of tour guides in natural areas.

1.2 Problem statement

Eco-guides are acknowledged as being an important entity in the development of ecotourism. Essentially, eco-guides play important role to interact and communicate with visitors and enhances their experience. Besides playing the role of giving information and educating visitors, eco-guides are also responsible for visitor’s safety and security during their visit. Moreover, relatively little research has been
conducted to understand the performance of tour guides in ecotourism attractions. Since the ecotourism sector in Malaysia is still at an infancy stage, challenges related to eco-guides shortcomings have always been identified and highlighted in public. Although there are training programs which are available in Malaysia to train eco-guides, Sarawak’s ecotourism industry is still faced with issues related to shortage and quality of eco-guides. This has driven on the need to develop and implement quality assurance for eco-guides services. In fact, levels of professionalism of eco-guides in Malaysia including Sarawak has not been given due priority by ecotourism stakeholders. Unsatisfactory performance of eco-guides has a tendency to influence the outcome of visitor’s experience. In addition, complain on services of guides also reflect unsatisfactory competencies and capabilities of eco-guides.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

i. to determine the quality attributes which are necessary for eco-guides in order to meet visitor’s satisfaction when visiting ecotourism spots in our country

ii. to evaluate the eco-guides performance in the ecotourism destination such as in Bako National Park

iii. to conduct the Importance Performance Analysis (IPA)
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Ecotourism

Mexican architect Hector Ceballos-Lascurain in 1983 defined ecotourism as “that form of environmentally responsible tourism that involves travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the object of enjoying, admiring, and studying the nature (the scenery, wild plants and animals), as well as any cultural aspect (both past and present) found in these areas, through a process which promotes conservation, has a low impact on the environment and on culture and favours the active and socioeconomically beneficial involvement of local communities” (Ecotourism in America, 2013). Goodwin (1996) defined ecotourism as low-impact tourism which contribute to the maintenance of species and habitat either directly through a contribution to conservation and/or indirectly by providing revenues to local community sufficient for them to value and protect their wildlife heritage as a source of income. Fennell (1999) defined ecotourism as a form of sustainable natural resource-based tourism which focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature which is ethically managed to be low impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented which typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas. Ecotourism is based on natural environment with a focus on its biological, physical and cultural features (Page & Dowling, 2002). Mason, (2008) stated that ecotourism as a travel to undisturbed natural areas for study, enjoyment or volunteer assistance which
concerns with flora, fauna, geology and ecosystems, as well as the people living at the area, their needs, culture and relationships to the land. Weaver (2008) defined ecotourism as a form of tourism that fosters learning experiences and appreciation of the natural environment, or some component within it associated cultural context which is managed in accordance with the best practice in the industry to achieve environmentally and socio-culturally sustainable outcomes as well as financial viability. Therefore, ecotourism is a type of tourism which emphasises on natural values and conservation of nature, to educate people without damaging the naturally aesthetic beauty and give opportunity and benefits to local communities in the visited area.

2.2 Ecotourism Destinations

Ecotourism involves visits to nature-based areas such as reserved forest, mountains, islands, marine and lakes. The most common ecotourism destinations in Malaysia are national parks which are essentially equipped with infrastructures, accommodation facilities and interpretation services to aid visitors on visits to protected area. A global definition of natural parks received finalisation and approval in 1969 at a General Assembly of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (Butler and Boyd, 2000). This stated that there are three essential characteristics of Nature Park:

i. Relatively large area-ecosystem are maintained and not materially altered by human exploitation and occupation
ii. The highest competent authority of the country has taken steps to prevent or eliminate any works in the whole area and to enforce effectively the ecological, geomorphical or aesthetic features which has brought to its establishment

iii. Visitors are allowed to enter under special conditions, for inspirational, educative, cultural and recreation purposes.

National parks can therefore be expected to be large, undisturbed areas of natural environment, with significant features, with highest level protection and allowing among other uses and recreation (tourism) (Butler & Boyd, 2000).

2.3 Eco-guides

The definition of tour guide which is accepted worldwide as given by the International Association of Tour Managers and the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (EFTGA) is that “a tour guide is a person who guides groups, individual visitors from abroad and home country around the monuments, sites, and museums of a city or region to interpret in an inspiring and entertaining manner, in the language of visitor’s choice, the cultural and natural heritage and environment” (Skanavis and Giannoulis, 2010). VUSSC (n.d.) defined tour guide as a professional whose job is to lead or direct visitors in a country, while pointing out and explaining about different places of interest to the travellers and tourists.

Meanwhile, ecotour guide is defined as someone employed on a paid or voluntarily basis that conducts whether paying or non-paying tourists around natural and / or cultural importance area utilizing the principles of ecotourism and interpretation
(Skana vis & Giannoullis, 2010). Apart from that, they also stated that ecotour guide played an important role in the ecotourism as an interpreter of the environment, in order to protect the natural and cultural environment. Eco-guide is not only a person who leads visitors on a tour. He / she play a role to communicate and interact in various ways with the visitors to ensure that the visit is attractive and interesting. Besides, a tour guide is also responsible to take a good care for the safety and security of visitors and ensure that visitors abide to the rules and regulations of the park to avoid any unwanted accident. The role of eco-guide is not only an important one but also one of influence. Studies have shown that guides have significant influence over the visitor’s behaviour (Skana vis & Giannoullis, 2010).

2.4 Service Quality in Relation to Guides/eco-guides

Zhang and Chow, (2004) stated that the performance of tour guide in each destination influenced the success of tourism industry. Precisely, they added that tour guides are the persons who will determine the ‘moment of truth’ for tourist, which either can make or break their trip. Thus the responsibility to satisfy tourist is mostly entrusted to the guide who is in good position to customize the tour’s quality to tourists’ individual needs and preference. Based on the study conducted by Ap and Wong (2001), it was concluded that good product knowledge, good communication skills and the right attitude in providing the service are considered as the important attributes for a professional tour guides. Besides, Zhang and Chow (2004) reported that the top three most important attributes which affect Mainland Chinese tourists’ level of satisfaction were “punctual”, “able to solve problem” and “knowledge of destination".
Black and Weiler (2005) reviewed six mechanisms to enhance guide performance. These mechanisms include codes of conduct, professional associations, awards of excellence, training, professional certification and licensing. The outcomes of implementing some or all of these mechanisms are aimed to improve individual guide performance, and industry-wide performance which appropriately enhanced visitors’ experience. The most important mechanism which may contribute to well-performed roles of guides is the development of tour guides code of conduct or codes of ethics (Black & Weiler, 2005). They cited that specialist guide codes also include reference to the roles of interpreter, motivator of conservation values, role model and cultural broker.

2.5 Evaluating Service Quality

One of the tools used to evaluate service quality is gap analysis. Gap analysis generally refers to the activity of studying the differences between standards and the delivery of those standards. It would be useful to study the differences between visitor’s expectation and actual visitor’s experiences in the delivery of interpretation by eco-guides. In order to identify the ‘gap’, a pre- and post-analysis must occur. The gaps between visitors’ expectation and their experiences lead to dissatisfaction. Therefore, by measuring gaps, it would probably enhance visitors’ satisfaction. Besides, many other approaches have been developed to evaluate service quality. These include SERVQUAL (Service Quality) and Importance Performance Analysis (IPA).
2.6 Importance Performance Methodology and Analysis

According to Zhang and Chow (2003), Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) is widely used by researchers in various areas and has been proven as a popular managerial tool. This analysis is based on the comparison of importance and performance of service quality attributes which is developed by Martilla and James (1977). By using IPA, the results of a study can be displayed graphically on an easily-interpreted, two-dimensional grid. Oh (2001) reviewed that interpretation of the grid follow the combination of importance and performance scores of each attributes.

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<td>A. Concentrate Here</td>
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<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Low Priority</td>
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Fig 1.1 Importance Performance Grids

In quadrant A, the company needs to focus on improving its performance. Quadrant B, 'keep up the good work' shows the attributes that customers think are important to their purchase decision and on which customer also perceived the company performs