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Visitors' Visiting Motivation: Bako National Park, Sarawak

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Abstract

This study was conducted to analyse the visitors' motives of visiting Bako National Park. A total of 564 local and foreign visitors were interviewed. Factor analysis with the varimax rotation method was employed to gain information from visitors on their behaviour reflecting their motives for ecotourism activities in the national park. The results showed that visitors visit a national park for four factors, which are challenge excursion, social trip, nature tour and getaway outing. This result may help the management authority to reposition national park attributes without neglecting the objectives of the national park existence. Several marketing implications also can be drawn from this study.

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Keywords: National park; motivation; protected area; ecotourism

1. Introduction

Motivation is basic strength behind human behaviour (Berkman and Gilson, 1978). This refers to the internal needs and wants that generate a state of disequilibrium within individuals (Crompton and McKay, 1997). Many studies have discussed the travel motivation in tourism literature. However, the discussion of motivation has not been expanded to the national park tourism in a developing country such as in Malaysia. This study adopted the motivation scale applied by Boxall and Adamowicz (2002). The aim of this paper is to understand why visitors visiting national parks by applying to the site Bako National Park (NP). These reasons of visiting would help the authorized management in promoting the national parks. Hence the result may be applied to other parks to improve the marketing strategies. National park supplies

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the most important part of tourism experience. This is because it is the only category of protected areas that can be visited. National park has tremendously high value in ecological, recreational and cultural setting which catches the attention of the necessity of being continuously managed.

1.1. Ecotourism

In 1993, Ceballos-Lascurain has defined ecotourism as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (MOCAT and WWF, 1995, p. xi, Part 1). As ecotourism activities are motivated by nature, visitors’ experiences occur almost entirely in the state’s national parks. The state has plenty of nature and cultural based resources which yet to be fully explored.

Visitors are attracted to visit a national park because of the natural surrounding and the environmental benefits that the site can offer. Ranging from easy strolls to hiking in parks on trails are among the most common recreation facilities provided in parks. Nature or built up trails provide an excellent way for visitors in exploring the natural areas hence, the most restorative of ecotourism activities (Oh and Hammitt, 2010). Visitors enter national parks with expectations. Accommodation facilities, park interpretation and information, wildlife observation and food and beverages are part of their concern. Hearne and Salinas (2002) demonstrated that both foreign and local visitors preferred improved infrastructure at the visitors’ centre and more information about the area either written or oral presentation. In another research, these two populations had similar preference towards improved national park management and the presence of park guides for wildlife viewing (Hearne and Santos, 2005).

Visitors who decide to commit to ecotourism activities would want to experience it in the natural setting. Suh and Harrison (2005) stated that visitors experience of wilderness can be recognized as the highest valued service in the park. It was found that visitors preferences, level of satisfaction and importance onto the attributes in the park are affected by (a) previous experiences of visiting other parks, (b) prior knowledge about the park and (c) information that they learn and understand which can be a link to experience in the park (Arabatzis and Grigoroudis, 2010).

Factors above also gives different preferences among visitors. Backhaus (2003) reported that local visitors are more to leisure activities, and foreign visitors are actively engaged in activities such as hiking, tekking, observing plants, animals or local culture. Chui et al. (2010), in a study done in Taman Negara National Park, further categorised visitors activities into four clustered themes which are personality-centric, activity-centric, site-centric and environment-centric. Every national park is unique to their own natural and service setting. This includes differences in weather, accesibility, site congestion, use restrictions and tour packages. Therefore, the commitment from the government in promoting ecotourism activities and providing facilities should be considered as a continuous effort as visitors preferences are diverse.

2. Description of the area

Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia with a total area of 124, 450 km² or 12.445 million hectares that is 37% of Malaysia area. The state is situated on the island of Borneo. Sarawak is a small developing tourism destination in South East Asia. In 2010, of the total 24.6 million visitor arrivals to Malaysia, Sarawak has accounted for 13.3% (3.27 million) of visitors. Sarawak has recognized the need to conserve its natural resources in the 1950s. In Sarawak, total protected area (TPA) is referred to the forest lands which are designated and established under the provision National Park Ordinance 1958 (National Parks

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