

ADVENTURE AND ECOTOURISM IN MALAYSIA



Faculty of Forestry
Universiti Putra Malaysia

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FOREWORD



Assalamualaikum w.b.t. and salam sejahtera.

“Adventure and Ecotourism” is a relatively new tourism market in Malaysia. This sector has great potential for expansion particularly in this modern era where people are more concern of living a healthy life style and being close to nature. For example, ecotourism used to cater to a small niche market. But ecotourism has grown rapidly over the past 20 years and is now at par with the main stream of the tourism industry. Based on that notion, the Faculty of Forestry took the initiative to organize the 1st International Conference on Adventure and Ecotourism (ICAE) 2014 at Mount Jerai, Kedah.

The conference aimed to provide an avenue for academicians, stakeholders, practitioners and the public to gather under one roof to discuss pertinent issues in the field of adventure and ecotourism. The conference also aimed to introduce new tourism destination suitable for adventure and ecotourism activities in Malaysia. Hence, Mount Jerai was chosen as the venue for the conference because it fits the conference’s aim of introducing new tourism destination for adventure and ecotourism. These efforts are in line with the establishment of the Department of Recreation and Ecotourism in the Faculty of Forestry, UPM in September 2012 that aims to champion issues related to recreation and ecotourism in Malaysia and the world.

With the successful organizing of the ICAE 2014, I have full confident that the Department of Recreation and Ecotourism will grow into an important focal reference point for the field of recreation and ecotourism including adventure tourism in Malaysia and elsewhere. I believe the publication of this e-book will benefit everyone because it is a compilation of both academic research works and experiences shared by stakeholders. At present, Malaysia faces a huge gap in obtaining reliable data on adventure and ecotourism topics. Thus, the publication of this e-book which is among the first of its kind in Malaysia will contribute substantially to the existing literatures in the field. We commit ourselves to produce more publications in our effort to enrich the body of knowledge and visitors’ experiences in recreation and ecotourism. We hope the (2nd) Langkawi International Conference on Adventure and Ecotourism (Langkawi ICAE) 2015 which is the continuation of our ICAE 2014 will attract more participants and produce more publications from their works.

Congratulations to all authors in this e-book and to all readers. As a last note, we encourage you to join us in our effort to save our forest and nature for our future generations. Thank you.

“BERILMU BERBAKTI”

Professor Dr. Mohamed Zakaria Hussin

Dean

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PREFACE

The Faculty of Forestry, University Putra Malaysia initiated the First International Conference on Adventure and Ecotourism 2014 (ICAE 2014) in December 2014 at the Regency Jerai Hill Resort in Yan, Kedah. The conference was supported by the Kedah state government, Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia. The conference aimed to promote Malaysia as a unique country with diverse ecotourism destinations, products and resources that have been preserved for generations. The ICAE held at Mount Jerai, Kedah also aimed to promote Mount Jerai as a potential adventure and ecotourism destination in the state of Kedah.

The conference garnered positive support and feedback from its participants. This has motivated the Faculty of Forestry, UPM to publish the papers presented during the workshop in this e-book. The e-book consists of 13 papers that covers a wide range of research works in the field of adventure and ecotourism. Therefore, the e-book is divided into 4 sections to provide you a glimpse into the adventure and ecotourism industry in Malaysia; the cultural ecotourism industry in Malaysia, the various research paradigms and behavioural studies.

The Faculty of Forestry, UPM would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Kedah state government, Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) and Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia for their support towards the organizing of the conference. We would also like to thank the presenters and participants of the conference and all those who had supported us in any ways in making the conference a success.

Manohar Mariapan
Siti Suriawati Isa
Nor Akmar Abdul Aziz
Evelyn Lim Ai Lin
Khalid Rehman Hakeem

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ADVENTURE AND ECOTOURISM IN MALAYSIA

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“Tourism Protects, Preserves & Conserves
Mother Nature, Heritage & Culture” (Malaysia’s Tourism Philosophy)

ABSTRACT

The adventure and ecotourism sectors have gained significant attention from the tourism market these days. Although these sectors can be considered a niche market in Malaysia but they have been growing steadily for more than a decade. As a result more tourism stakeholders are giving attention to develop and promote adventure and ecotourism in Malaysia. The two most prominent stakeholders in Malaysia who are directly involved in these sectors are the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia and Langkawi Development Authority. The two stakeholders and Universiti Putra Malaysia have decided to publish the book on Adventure and Ecotourism in Malaysia to compile research works related to adventure and ecotourism into a book to serve as a guideline for academicians and practitioners. It is about time for adventure and ecotourism sectors to be given due recognition by the tourism industry as it is making an important contribution to the socio economic aspects. Malaysia has substantial potential in adventure and ecotourism sectors, but there are many things that should be looked into. Importantly the development of these sectors should not compromise with the damage they can cause to the environment. Malaysia should be extra cautious in developing and promoting these sectors in the market. Hence, proper planning with good policies and law; and enforcement must be implemented by the stakeholders in Malaysia particularly, involving sensitive area which these sectors are closely related to.

Keywords: Adventure; ecotourism; Malaysia; stakeholders.

1. Introduction to Adventure and Ecotourism

The goal of this chapter is to introduce adventure and ecotourism with special focus on Malaysia in order to have a better understanding of the present characteristics and policies of this important niche market segment. This chapter has been divided into five main parts and it particularly discuss on the background of adventure and ecotourism activities and sectors in Malaysia. Also, the chapter looks at how the federal government, policy makers and federal government subsidiaries in a destination approaches the market and promote Malaysia as an adventure and ecotourism destination locally and internationally. Understanding policy makers from the federal and local government are crucial



and useful to guide other government agencies, destination marketing organisations or destination management organisations, state or national tourism offices, adventure tour operators, gear and equipment companies and tourism operators in making any decisions. Also, preferences and trends, such as those outlined in this chapter could impact the design and development of attractive tourism products and services for this market.

Thirty years ago, ecotourism activities including adventure and nature related tourism activities were just a niche market in the tourism industry. However, for the past twenty years, ecotourism activities have been moving towards the mainstream (Christ, 2007). Nowadays, adventure and ecotourism are two of the most important outdoor recreations in the whole world. Realising the significant demand for adventure and ecotourism activities, it has attracted academicians, practitioners and policy makers to organise colloquium, conferences, discussions, seminars and workshops relating to the topics. This is a worldwide phenomenon as people are getting more concern about their health and want to lead healthy lifestyle. Nowadays, people are more aware about the importance of exercising. It is not only limited to indoor exercises at the gym, but the demand for badminton and futsal is also increasing as some people prefer to do outdoor exercises because they want to be closer to nature. To some extent some group of people prefer extreme outdoor exercises and sports during their free time.

However, one must remember that adventure tourism may not be ecotourism and vice versa. In addition, adventure and ecotourism are also known with other names and have close similarities to tourism activities such as adventure recreation, cultural/heritage tourism, green travel, multi sport adventures, nature travel, outdoor recreation and responsible tourism which might create greater confusion to some (Untamed Path, 2015). Importantly both adventure and ecotourism involved outdoor activities which are close to the environment substantially whether it is natural or man-made.

Almost every year the tourism industry will introduce new niche market such as cycling tourism, food tourism or also known as culinary/gourmet tourism, glamping and volunteerism. Some of these niche tourism markets have the potential of becoming significantly important in the industry like the development of ecotourism. Malaysia is a country that has abundant natural resources for many tourism activities and niche markets. Hence, the country has significant potential to become the market leader in adventure and ecotourism activities. Nonetheless, there are many aspects that need major improvement from the policy makers and stakeholders to bring Malaysia to the next level in the adventure and ecotourism market. The competition is getting tougher as many governments all over the world are promoting adventure and ecotourism as their core tourism products. Countries such as Australia, Canada, Brazil, Japan, Maldives, Nepal and New Zealand are better known for being one of the top adventure and ecotourism destinations for many years in the tourism market. To make sure Malaysia can position herself together with these countries, it is not an easy task and need major changes from the government and public, but it is possible due to the aplenty and diverse natural resources that Malaysia has.

For the past few decades, Malaysia has succeeded to position herself among the top 20 most visited destinations by international tourists. In 2013, Malaysia was ranked at 11th place as the most visited country or destination by the international tourists (25.7 million). Hence, Malaysia has already made herself known among the tourists as one of the best tourism locations to visit in the world. However, her position as an ecotourism destination is not as impressive as the general tourism destinations. Now it is just a matter of making the country an adventure and ecotourism destination.



There are many things that need to be improved and upgraded in the tourism industry and the adventure and ecotourism sectors. The government and public need to work closely and support each other in order to make the adventure and ecotourism activities as one of the most important tourism niche market in Malaysia. Both parties should sit down together regularly to find the best way if they have any problems to be solved.

2. Related Literature on Adventure Tourism and Ecotourism

To find related literature on adventure tourism and ecotourism is not a major problem. However, to find reliable data and writings on adventure tourism and ecotourism of Malaysia can be challenging. Not only data is poorly documented but to gain access to the data can also be another issue. Hence, this section will discuss on the literatures related to this topic in general and later, it focuses on Malaysia, based on the accessible related literature.

2.1 Adventure Tourism

Most dictionaries defined adventure tourism as “an unusual experience including some level of risk and uncertainty”. Many tourism scholars agree that the nature of tourism industry itself is about delivering good and memorable experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Nielsen, 2004; Isa et al., 2012) because tourism operators like commercial accommodation, airlines and travel agents demand a fee from customers for real services, goods or commodities. However, one can argue that while travelling to another country is often an adventurous experience, it is not necessarily “adventure travel” because people often perceived risk and some unconventional means of transport as adventurous. For example, a dug-out canoe journey deep into the Amazon basin with its attendant difficulties meets this definition but a city tour of Paris that may have some level of uncertainties is not by definition an adventure travel.

Adventure itself has a distinction between “soft” and “hard” adventures. Soft adventures have a lower level of risk, greater comfort in accommodations and are less physically rigorous. Hard adventures often have very basic facilities, higher risk factor and greater physical challenge such as backpacking or river expeditions. Activities such as a 4x4 exploration, bungee jumping, caving, mountain climbing, paragliding and rock climbing are examples of hard adventure tourism that are gaining attention in the market nowadays. Not only these activities provide greater excitement and risk to the participant but it also provides new knowledge to them.

On one hand, adventure tourism is not a new niche tourism market. On the other hand, it just gain significant attention especially in this new era particularly among the young urban group. To define adventure tourism can be challenging because the concept is poorly understood in the literature. According to Weber (2001), traditionally the definition focuses on adventure recreation (Hall & Weiler, 1992). As a result, some researchers determined what constitutes it with research taking place within these limited set parameters. Hence, their research tends to be relatively narrow focused and is not sufficient to gain a comprehensive understanding of adventure tourism.

Nonetheless, Walle’s (1997) definition that covers the insight model as its basis is the best definition of adventure tourism. He stated that, it is the quest for insight and knowledge (rather than risk) that underlies adventure and this is in contrary to the traditional believes of earlier scholars who said otherwise. He then argues that adventure tourism is essentially viewed as an extension of adventure/outdoor recreation without the contribution of the tourism aspect being discussed. Since



the intention of this present chapter is to focus on adventure tourism as the niche tourism market in assisting the management and marketing of adventure tourism; Walle's (1997) definition will be used.

2.2 Adventure Tourism Activities

Studies by Ewert (1993) and Hall and Weiler (1992) on adventure recreation pursuits as outlined in Table 1 show two significant observations. Firstly, the traditional prerequisites for adventure, risk and uncertainty are present. It is also apparent that the quest to gain insight features prominently. Yet, the absence of specific adventure or outdoor recreation activities is also noticeable. The physical movement through a variety of hostile environments rather than the participation in a specific activity poses risks and dangers to the overland tourist. These risks and dangers introduce the element of uncertainty about the outcome of the journey and affected their travelling behaviour to some extent.

Table 1 Adventure Recreation Pursuits

Activities		
Backpacking	Kayaking	Rogaining
Bicycling	Orienteering	Sailing
Diving	Mountaineering	Snowshoeing
Hanggliding	Rafting	Spelunking
Balloonng	Rappelling	Trekking
Hiking	Rock Climbing	Sky Diving

Source: Hall and Weiler (1992)

Secondly, it is evident that most of the countries on the Asian Overland Route (such as Afghanistan, India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Turkey) are in spatial terms, situated on the periphery rather than being the core countries (Pearce, 1979). As a result, the popularity of these overland routes have declined when Iran's borders closed in 1979. However, the trail gave birth to an industry which has packaged the globe. Independent travel is fashionable, students' gap years are becoming the norm, and guide books on the route was the starting point for the Lonely Planet empire selling in substantial numbers. This also applies to other important adventure travel circuits, for example the "Gringo Trail" in Latin America or the "Salt Road" in Africa. Tourist flows linking regions in developed countries with Third World nations have been noted for various types of tourism. However, for overland travel the flow of tourists from core countries (in Europe and North America) both to and through a variety of peripheral countries is of particular importance.

For many years, adventure tourists often originate from Europe and North America. Hence, many new findings were discovered by the Europeans and North Americans that resulted in their names (or associated with) being used. There are many examples such as the naming of Mount Everest in Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India and Nepal. Mount Everest was named after Sir George Everest, the first surveyor general of India in 1865 (Nelsson, 2011). While Sir Edmund Hillary



received massive and much publicized recognition as the first man to concur Mount Everest in 1953, his Nepalese sherpa Tenzig Norgay who played a major role for the quest did not receive as much recognition as he deserved. For example, Sir Edmund Hillary a New Zealander was knighted by the Queen of England but Tenzig Norgay was only given the George medal for acts of bravery by civilians (Silverman, 2013). Nowadays, many people know Hillary as the first man to reach Mount Everest but only few recognised Tenzig. For the past 15 years or more, Asian tourists have become more adventurous and many destinations in Asian countries are becoming the focus for adventure tourism such as Bhutan, China, Nepal, India and Tibet. These destinations are not only suitable for adventurous activities but is also due to the political instability and the roughness of the destinations. However, adventure tourism may not be ecotourism although it is closely related to one another. In addition, ecotourism activists may disagree with some of the adventure tourism activities because they may bring greater damage and disturbances to the environment. Though ecotourism activities may also have an impact towards the environment but their impact is insignificant or minimal as explained by the definition of ecotourism itself which will be explained further in the next section. On that note, the proposed change in research focus on the subjective adventure experience may both have theoretical implications and prove profitable to practitioners. Therefore, it should be of interest to researchers and practitioners alike to engage in more research to further explore the adventure tourism phenomenon (Weber, 2001) which this book will not cover.

2.3 Ecotourism

Some people argue that ecotourism is not entirely a new concept but rather another term for nature tourism (Boo, 1990). Some even said that the ecotourism word is perhaps the most over used and miss used word in the travel industry. As a result, there are many definition of ecotourism in the literature from many schools of thoughts. However, most scholars use the definition of ecotourism from the person who first introduced the ecotourism concept in the 1987, that is Ceballos-Lascurain. He defines it as “travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas”. From his definition ecotourism covers a wide range of tourism activities not only relating to nature alone but also culture relating to the ecotourism destination such as the aborigine or native village people and local people.

While according to Tickell (1994), ecotourism is ‘travelling to enjoy the world’s amazing diversity of natural life and human culture without causing damage to either’. Quite similarly, The International Ecotourism Society (1993) defines ecotourism as ‘responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people’. The Ecotourism Australia (1993) defines it as ‘ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation’. According to the Ecotourism Australia (1994), ecotourism is ‘nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable’. They recognise that sustainability involves an appropriate return to the local community. Hence, ecotourism involves these three components or dimensions; nature-based, environmentally-educated and sustainably-managed (Blamey, 1997).

The definition of ecotourism is still debatable until today and will continue in the literature. What one person or company calls “eco” another calls “sustainable” or “responsible” and other terms. The main distinction between these terms is the motives and ethics behind them. Is the environment being cared for? Is there genuine effort to help the local economies? Are resources being left intact



for future generations? Is the local culture being honoured and valued and not just photographed? These questions will cut through the semantics and allow us to see what is really being offered.

As stated above, it seems that almost everybody claim that they are promoting ecotourism activities and being eco friendly. There are many activities and development in the tourism industry worldwide being introduced which claims to be ecotourism friendly such as; culture, green, heritage, responsible and sustainable tourism. From all the definitions mentioned above, it can be concluded that the main concept of ecotourism is nature tourism based activities that will not bring or minimises any damages to the environment. The concept of ecotourism share many similarities with green, nature, responsible and sustainable tourism. For this chapter, the ecotourism term will be used rather than the other terms because ecotourism includes all of them.

For more than a decade, tourism activities relating to ecotourism have shown a steady increase all over the world including Malaysia. The tourism market has been accepting this concept as one of the most popular niche tourism activities. It is a modern trend worldwide these days particularly in the developed countries to associate their agencies and organisations to ecotourism activities or green tourism activities. Many ecotourism tourists are most likely willing to pay higher prices for environmentally less damaging products (Stabler & Goodall, 1997). Due to that, the ecotourism market segmentations normally vary according to destination. For example, the high end ecotourism destinations like Dubai, Greece and Maldives' main target market are perhaps the higher and middle income group. While the lower end destinations like Lombok, Indonesia may easily attract the lower income group. Nevertheless, the lower end ecotourism destinations can also attract the higher and middle income group. In addition, many ecotourism destination use multiple strategies to attract all market segmentations to their destination as they have facilities and services that meet the requirements of the high, middle and low end market. These ecotourism destinations like Bali, Krabi, Langkawi, Kyoto and Queenstown use mixed marketing strategies to cater for all type of tourist markets.

The questions whether one destination should attract high end or lower end tourists or also referred to the backpackers are hard to answer. While high end tourists may not necessarily spend more as compared to the lower end tourists, this question can only be answered from a thorough market study. Most often, tourism destinations end up offering faculties and services for all types of markets like most of the tourism destinations in Malaysia.

2.4 *Malaysia Adventure Tourism and Ecotourism*

There are a few agencies and ministries involved in the development of Malaysian adventure and ecotourism. Among the prominent policy makers for Malaysia adventure and ecotourism sectors are the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (MoTC), Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of International Trade and Industry. However, this section will focus on MoTAC since the ministry looks after both the nature and ecotourism activities in Malaysia. The discussion on this ministry will be presented further in this section.

The tourism industry has become the second largest contributor towards Malaysia's economy for more than 20 years. With a humble beginning, it grew significantly in the late 1980s. The tourism industry in Malaysia has gone through many transformations which will be discussed further after this. Today, the ministry which has significant role in the tourism industry in Malaysia is the Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MoTC) under its Minister, YB. Dato' Seri Nazri Aziz. Their realisation about the importance of adventure and ecotourism to the country started almost at the same time the term



had been coined in the market. As a result, the ministry launched the National Ecotourism Plan in 1996 and appointed Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, the founder of the ecotourism term as one of their advisors. In 2005, the ministry revised the plan to make it more competitive and marketable. This led to the many new destinations all over Malaysia being promoted as ecotourism destinations such as the Langkawi island, Taman Negara Pahang, Kinabalu Park and Gua Niah Sarawak. A special case study on Langkawi island geopark will be presented at the end of this chapter. Langkawi geopark is special because, it is the first UNESCO status geopark in the region which will be discussed further later in this section.

Realizing the importance of ecotourism towards Malaysia's tourism industry, MoTC came up with the Malaysia National Agenda and Policy on Adventure and Ecotourism as shown in Figure 1. MoTAC has stated that for the nature adventure sector, they want to establish Malaysia as the pre-eminent global biodiversity hub; rainforest and marine discovery centres (together with parks and gardens), introduce new and enhance live biodiversity sites.



Figure 1 Malaysia National Agenda and Policy on Adventure and Ecotourism
Source: Ministry of Tourism and Culture (2014)

In Malaysia, MoTAC is directly involved in formulating policies relating to the tourism industry including ecotourism. Nonetheless, other government and non government agencies are also playing their role either directly or indirectly. The policy makers of Malaysia have several related agenda and policies in adventure and ecotourism sectors. Some of these policies are directly spelled out but some are indirectly related to adventure and ecotourism. MoTAC is one of the main ministries that



is directly involved in making policies for the adventure and ecotourism sectors.

- Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MoTAC)

The tourism industry started as a small sector with the formation of the Tourism Development Corporation (TDC) in 1972, a government subsidiary agency under the former Ministry of Trade and Industry. After the successful organising of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) General Conference at Putra World Trade Centre in 1986, the Malaysian government realised the potential contribution of tourism towards the country. They formed the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (MoCAT) in 1987 and TDC was moved to MoCAT. Later, TDC was renamed as the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB) or popularly known as Tourism Malaysia in 1992. Tourism Malaysia remains as part of the MoTAC's entity until today. The major role of Tourism Malaysia is to promote Malaysia domestically and all over the world (Tourism Malaysia, 2015). MoCAT launched the Visit Malaysia Year (VMY) campaign in 1990 which boosted the industry as one of the most important economic contributor to the country's economy. With seven million international tourists arrival that year, it showed an increment of more than 53 percent as compared to 1989. Many practitioners and scholars believed that the significant success of the VMY 90' was an eye opener to the Malaysian government to pay serious attention to the tourism industry in Malaysia.

Tourism in Malaysia went through many transformation phases since its first establishment. For the record, culture and tourism used to be a separated entity in the year 2004 through the formation of the Ministry of Tourism (MTOUR). The tourism industry used to be a standalone ministry in Malaysia while culture was put under the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage. This has resulted both culture and tourism moving in different direction and was incomplete without each other. Without culture, the tourism industry will be meaningless because culture existed first, before tourism and that cultural tourism or heritage tourism remain as the most important reason for people to travel to places (Donert & Light, 1996). McKercher et al. (2005) highlighted that the link between tourism and culture can be fostered to help places become more attractive to tourists, as well as increasing their competitiveness as locations to live, visit, work and invest. Also, almost all tourism activities involve culture. Hence, the separation not only made the cultural sector in Malaysia lose its direction, but it also made it hard for MTOUR to set their tourism policies without including culture in them.

The tourism industry has been using culture as one of their major resources as tourism has been introduced to create distinctiveness between destinations in a crowded global market place. Top world tourism destination earners such as China, France, Japan and Spain are well known for their rich cultural background. Culture has been the main attraction for tourists to visit these destinations. Malaysia also has been using culture to promote the country's tourism since the formation of TDC. As a result, Malaysia's tourism campaign uses tag lines such as; *To Know Malaysia is to Love Malaysia* and *Malaysia Truly Asia* to directly promote the Malaysian culture as their major marketing feature. For more information about the close relationship between tourism and culture please refer to a special report on the Impact of Culture on Tourism published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2009.

Realising the importance of culture and tourism to work closely together, tourism and culture remarried in 2013 but it remain as the only ministry in Malaysia that does not have a Deputy Minister like other ministries in Malaysia. Once again culture and tourism were reunited to focus on the same objectives, mission, policies and vision. MoCAT's objectives, mission and policies as stated from their website are;