

Exploring Tourist Experiencescape and Servicescape at Taman Negara (National Park Malaysia)

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Abstract—Taman Negara (TN) Malaysia, as one of the oldest rainforest national parks in the world has attracted many tourists. Travel destination selection can become a complex phenomenon because it is influenced by multiple factors given the economic vulnerability facing the tourism sector. There is no differentiation as many leading destinations are offering excellent attractions, services and facilities. As a result, the focus is to offer heightened tourist moments and a conducive servicescape to ensure repeat patronage. Tourists perceive destinations in many ways, looking for different ‘signs’, culture and the whole experience and adventure at a national park (Backhaus, 2003). Visitors to TN are seeking for authentic experiences, untainted, natural environment in harmony with local traditional culture. Understanding experience-seeking behaviors of nature-based tourists is deemed important for park management and tourist marketers. This paper explores tourists’ experience-seeking behavior in a nature park setting. The environmental dimensions of how tourists perceive servicescape support the whole evolutionary trail of experience-seeking in a nature park. This study examines the importance and satisfaction of servicescape at TN. Methodology involved qualitative studies using personal interviews and focus group discussions with park stakeholders. The quantitative study entails an on-site survey questionnaire approach to 265 park visitors. Findings revealed experience-seeking behaviors of TN visitors as site-centric, personality-centric, nature-centric and activity-centric. Tourists perceived servicescape as very important at TN. Overall servicescape satisfaction was fair with maintaining cleanliness and hygienic environment as the main contention among tourists. Findings have significant value for nature-based segmenting and marketing-mix strategies for TN.

Index Terms—tourist experience, experiencescape, servicescape, site-centric, activity-centric, personality-centric, nature-centric

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has undoubtedly become one of the most important and lucrative industries in the world. Key trends of the tourism industry in Malaysia pointed to the increasing role and contribution of tourism to the economy. Malaysia received as many as 12.4 million tourists between January and July 2007, a 24% jump over the same period in 2006. Tourism revenue contribution amounted to RM37.6 billion or 6.5% of GDP in 2006 (Malaysian Tourism Industry Report, 2007). Among the many possibilities to promote a destination, nature-based tourism has great potential for

Malaysia (Backhaus, 2003); of which Taman Negara (TN) remains one of the main nature-based tourist attraction in Peninsular Malaysia.

TN, a 1,676-square-mile national park housing 130-million-year-old virgin rain forests is one of the oldest in the world. It is home to much wildlife and is a popular tourist attraction to both local and foreign tourists. TN is enriched with abundance and diverse nature and is highly regarded as one of the world’s most complex and rich ecosystems. It remains the country’s most important protected area of natural rainforest under the management of DWNP. DWNP is responsible for the enforcement of the protection of wildlife and biodiversity resources of the park to ensure it is controlled and managed in a sustainable manner. As one of the country’s most visited nature-based tourist attractions, it is also home to the indigenous community of aborigines (Orang Asli) of Malaysia. At TN, one can observe wildlife from a canopy walk or huts in the trees, river cruises and jungle-trekking, while huts built high above the ground allow guests to stay overnight in the forest (Haines, 2007). Other main tourist activities are rapid shooting, water rafting, visits to Orang Asli (Batek) settlements, bird and butterfly watching, wildlife adventure, jungle and mountain trekking, fishing and angling, cave exploration and waterfall sites.

II. IMPORTANCE OF TOURIST EXPERIENCES AND SERVICESCAPE SETTING

Tourist experience is associated with multiple interpretations from social environment and activity components of the overall experience (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2007). It has been defined as a temporal account of tourist moment (Cary, 2004) and tourist gaze (Urry, 2005) to describe the process through which a tourist reminisce the place or experiences he or she encounters. Mossberg (2007) argues regardless of what kind of tourism product or service in mind be it a visit to nature park or theme park, experiencescape and servicescape shape destination selection and repeat patronage of tourists. Thus it is vital in understanding the realistic, imaginative and experiential characteristics within tourist encounters. Visitor perceptions of a landscape experiences is an authentic experience (Athindoros and Hampton, 2008). At the same time, tourists look for experiential holiday options with personal, social and cultural meanings (Morgan, 2007).

Experiencescape and servicescape go hand in hand in

ensuring success in destination marketing strategies. Reimer and Kuehn (2005) posits a conducive servicescape for a tourist destination is vital to establish interaction between visitor, service provider, personnel, physical surroundings and facilities to elicit tourist satisfaction and repeat visits such as tourist setting of a national park, where most of its leisure activities and adventures are driven by hedonistic appeals. In leisure services consumption such as tourism experiences involves more than just perception of service quality but its physical surrounding that supports tourism activities, driven by hedonistic arousal. Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) highlight paucity in studies on servicescape effects on leisure services especially in national park setting. Evidence points to park authorities lack of knowledge on how servicescape affects visitor's behavior at TN. The study examines touristic experiences in a nature park setting at TN and servicescape at TN. The importance and satisfaction of servicescape examined are cleanliness and hygiene at the park, convenience and accessibility to transportation, natural scenery, landscape quality, maintenance as well as friendliness of the local people.

III. STUDY METHOD AND DATA GATHERING

Using triangulation method, the quantitative study entails survey on local and foreign tourists while qualitative study involves in-depth personal and focus group interviews with park stakeholders. Two site visits to TN obtained first-hand experience on outdoor activities offered and observations on primary tourist services. The survey fieldwork was conducted in August, the peak period for tourist arrivals. Judgmental sampling was employed. Data was collected on-site from 265 respondents. Field enumerators aided foreign tourists with language problems. The research instrument comprises questionnaires that tapped on tourists' experiences at various sites, nature activities and personal experiences with the environment at TN. In-depth interviews

were conducted among mountain guides, tour agents, boat operators, restaurants, souvenir shops, hotels and the local community. A focus group interview was conducted with Department of Wildlife National Park (DWNP) officials followed by a personal interview with Tourism Development Corporation (TDC), Pahang responsible for marketing programs of TN.

IV. FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the categories of tourist experiences encountered at the park. Factor analysis generated four categories of tourists' experiences at TN with acceptable reliability scores. The four categories are identified as hedonistic self-expression, touristic activities, landscape tour and nature adventure experiences as shown in Table 2. Hedonistic self-expression such as cave exploration, mountain hiking and fishing appear as the most common and popular activities which imply visitors are personality-centric type, seeking hedonism for self-image and extreme experiences. Next touristic adventure experiences such as visits to aboriginal and community villages, canopy walk, rapid shooting and camping belong to activity-centric visitors who seek cultural experience with the local community and prefer the mainstream attractions at the park solely for relaxation purposes. Landscape tour experiences comprise jungle tracking, night jungle walk and waterfall visits are typical of tourist who are site-centric who enjoy and admire the temporal nature of trips and landscape. Nature adventure experiences involve environmental-centric tourists whose interests in TN are to seek knowledge and education about flora, fauna, birds and insect species. Results suggest multiple tourist experiences at TN form the unique and core part of the impression and experiencescape that visitors create in their minds about TN.

TABLE 1: FACTOR ANALYSIS OF TOURIST ACTIVITIES AT TAMAN NEGARA

Tourist Activities	Mean Score	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Cronbach Alpha
Cave Exploration	3.03	0.421				0.61
Hiking Gunung Tahan	3.03	0.816				
Hiking Bukit Terasik	3.17	0.715				
Fishing	2.31	0.609				0.68
Visit Aboriginal Village	3.26		0.805			
Visiting Villages	3.06		0.830			
Canopy Walk	3.38		0.632			
Rapid Shooting	3.40		0.327			
Camping	2.83		0.300			0.58
Jungle Tracking	4.17			0.762		
Night Jungle Walk	3.67			0.608		
Swimming/Waterfall	3.48			0.664		0.50
Bird Watching	2.74				0.706	
Flora and fauna	3.92				0.787	

TABLE 2: CATEGORIES OF TOURIST EXPERIENCES TAMAN NEGARA

Factor	Tourist Experiences Categories	Number of Items	Experiencescape Theme
1	Hedonistic Self-Expression	4	Personality-centric
2	Touristic Activities	5	Activity-centric
3	Landscape Tour	3	Site-centric
4	Nature Adventure	3	Environment-centric

V. TOURIST SERVICESCAPE ENCOUNTER AT TAMAN NEGARA

Respondents rated the importance of servicescape at TN. Friendliness of the local people appear as the most important factor followed by quality of natural scenery, landscape and environment, convenience and access to local transport and cleanliness and hygiene at the park. Tourists were generally satisfied with servicescape at TN with a high level of satisfaction indicated for friendliness of local people, followed by quality of scenery, landscape and environment and convenience and access to local transport. Cleanliness and hygiene however had a low satisfaction level comparatively. Overall experiencescape that visitors encounter on support services at TN especially park rangers and mountain guides was high in satisfaction levels but visitors' satisfaction on toilet conditions, signage and on-site tourist information centers needed improvement. Such poor service experiences can have an adverse impact on tourists' destination choice. Other services such as hospitality and transportation were satisfactory. However there is still a need for park authorities to improve on general cleanliness and hygiene of the park environment and its surrounding.

VI. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Tourists' experience-seeking characteristics at TN are clustered into 4 main themes: personality-centric, activity-centric, site-centric and environment-centric. The activity-centric and personality-centric traveler that seeks experiential destination options will focus on activities in which they are personally engaged through self-drive and heightened moments. Site-centric and environment-centric would emphasize on landscape, touring places of interest and less on activities and people. Understanding the fundamentals of tourist experience and experience-seeking behaviours are significant in managing tourism experiences, design and delivery of experiences (Ritchie and Hudson, 2009). This is deemed important in unraveling the whole process of experience thinking in a nature-based tourism setting such as TN. These represent opportunities for tour agents and tourism marketers in providing appropriate travel products and services at TN. Findings have implications for DWNP as planning and management team and TDC as tourism marketers for TN. They can use tourist experiences to understand the types of tourism packages to offer and the

amount of promotional resources and type of promotional package to offer to different segments.

Similarly, creating a pleasant servicescape in the minds of customers is necessary to understand the overall experiencescape, theoretically and practically (Lin, 2004). A tourist's evaluation of servicescape at TN arises from the tourist, the environment and interaction between the two. Knowledge about factors influencing tourists' experiencescape with physical environment and servicescape is important to tourist managers and park management when allocating promotional resources and formulation of marketing strategies. Findings provide DWNP an insight into the importance of interaction of servicescape and tourist experience in improving quality of tourist-related support services as well as the planning and design of developments at TN.

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