

Original Article

Understanding tourists' motives for visiting Malaysia's national park

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Abstract:

The objective of this study is to identify tourists' motives for visiting the National Park (Taman Negara) in Malaysia. In addition, this study also seeks to determine if motivational differences exist between foreign and local tourists for visiting Taman Negara. Dann's (1977) push and pull theory was used as the theoretical framework to examine the motivations of 150 local and foreign tourists visiting Taman Negara. Descriptive analysis and t-tests were used to evaluate quantitative data. Findings demonstrated that tourists were more likely to be motivated by intellectual factors such as discover and learning new things to satisfy their curiosity and expand their knowledge. Comparing tourists' motivation by their nationality suggest significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between local and foreign tourists. Local tourists are motivated by social, competence and stimulus-avoidance more than foreign tourists.

Key words: tourists' motivation, sport tourism

Introduction

Travel motivation has been studied by various researchers from diverse fields such as psychology, sociology and anthropology (Cohen, 1979; Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979). Most of the discussions in the tourist motivation literature have tended to revolve around the theory of push and pull motivation (e.g. Crompton, 1979; Kim, Lee & Klenosky, 2003). Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981), push factors have been suggested as internal forces that appear due to a state of disequilibrium in the motivational system (Dann, 1977; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003). Most of the push factors are intangible or inherent desires of the travelers such as challenge, rest, relaxation, adventure, and desire for escape, prestige, love of sport, health and fitness. In a study on national parks, Kim et al. (2003) identified family togetherness and study, appreciating natural resources and health, escaping from everyday routine, and adventure and building friendship as the main travel motives. Other push factors such as escape, novelty, social interaction, and prestige explain why tourists travel to a particular destination, engage in certain activities and seek certain kind of experiences (Ryan, 1991).

Pull factors, on the contrary, are those that appear as an effect of the charisma of a destination which is perceived by the travelers; either they are natural (climate), artificial (theme parks or hotels) or derived (the warmth of the people). According to Mill & Morrison (1985) pull factors influence when, where, and how people travel. Klenosky (2002) on the other hand suggests pull factors are related to the features, attractions, or attributes of the destination itself. In sport tourism, the reasons why sport tourists choose to visit a place and destination to spend their holidays are not clear because destinations are many and differ from one destination to another. As a result, pull factors in the form of destination image and attributes have been a popular topic of research in tourism. Kim et al., (2003) suggest the choice of destination comes from a tourist's assessments of destination image and perceptions of the attributes of the destination. Some authors such as Beerli & Martin (2004), Ryan & Cave (2005) and Dolintina, Yusof & Soon (2013) suggest nationality as an important variable to understand differences in perceptions about a destination due to cultural factors of different nationalities that help shape the meanings, beliefs, and value systems of a visitor.

Malaysia is known as one of the popular tourist destinations in the world, and sport tourism has been increasingly growing and becoming an important contributor to the country's economy (Yusof, Shah & Geok, 2009). However, information on why sport tourist travels to Malaysia is not available. Additionally, no data exists on sport tourist perceptions of Malaysia as a sport tourist destination. One popular place that attracts sport tourists in Malaysia is the national park (Taman Negara). A national park, Taman Negara is valued not only by sport tourists but also by environmentalists and nature lovers. It is also famous because of its beautiful nature and different activities. Canopy walkway, Hides, Jungle Trekking, Rapid shooting, Nature trails, night safari, Night Jungle walk, fishing, boating, mountain climbing, caves exploring, river rafting and golfing are the activities which draw sport tourists to Taman Negara. Unfortunately, tourist promotions on Taman Negara are often

established without complete market research. Lack of information on sport tourists' profile, preferences, and motives and their request for certain sorts of destinations and events, make it difficult for the Malaysian tourism authorities, service providers and marketers to promote Taman Negara as a sport tourist destination. Determining the characteristics of sport tourists and motives to engage in a certain activity or choose a specific destination, would allow travel managers to be more capable in matching a potential sport tourist to best event or tourist destination.

The objective of this study is to examine the motives (push factors) of foreign and domestic sport tourists for visiting Taman Negara. This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are demographic profiles of tourists visiting Taman Negara?
2. What are sport tourists' motives for visiting Taman Negara?
3. What are the differences between domestic tourist's motives and foreign tourist's motives for visiting Taman Negara?

Methods

The research was conducted in Taman Negara (Pahang/Malaysia). Taman Negara is the largest and the oldest protected area in Malaysia which spreads over three states in the Peninsular Malaysia; Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. Taman Negara is one of the Malaysia's first eco-tourist destination which is fast becoming a famous universal destination. The growing number of tourist visiting this place (81,974 in 2007 vs. 79,758 in 2006) shows its rising fame. On the other hand, the greater increase of overseas tourist arrivals over the locals over the years (7% vs. -1% in 2007) indicates its power as an international tourist destination. The growth was qualified by the diversity of tourism product offerings mainly its archaism attractions as well as its natural resources. The design of the study is descriptive ex-post facto with the aim to examine the tourists' demographic profile, their motives and perception of choosing Taman Negara as a sport tourist destination. Data collection was conducted in various part of Taman Negara such as recreational places, hotels and other main tourist attractions in Taman Negara/Pahang. One hundred and fifty tourists with required attributes either local (domestic) or foreign (international) were randomly selected to participate in this study. The convenience random sampling technique was used to select the tourists.

The samples included about 63% males and 36% females with a diverse range of ethnicity (43.3% Caucasian, 37.3% Malay, 3.3% Indian, 8.7% Chinese, and 7.3% other). Tourists' motives and perceptions were assessed via questionnaire which is divided in three sections: The first section includes travel characteristics - questions on tourist purpose, tourist activity namely, trip duration, travel type, type of accommodation and number of people in group; the second section concerns respondent's socio-economic and demographic characteristics, namely gender, age, nationality, education, occupation and income; and the third section measures the "push" factor of travel motivations which contains a shortened version of the Leisure Motivation Scale (LMS), uses five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), includes 32 questions (developed by Ragheb and Beard 1983). It contains following dimensions of travel motivations which are: a) intellectual (the extent to which an individual is motivated to travel to be involved in activities such as exploring, discovering or creating); b) social (the extent to which an individual travels because of the need for friendship and interpersonal relationship); c) competence-mastery (the extent to which an individual engages in tourism activities that is challenging, achievement-oriented or competitive in nature); d) stimulus-avoidance (the extent which an individual needs to escape and get away from over-stimulating situations). The reason for using a Likert-type scale and employing a number of multiple motivations was that, motivation is multidimensional and tourists want to have more than one experience during a holiday or at a destination (Pyo, Mihalik & Uysal, 1989).

The collected data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS for PC) software. Descriptive analysis was used to provide the frequency of demographic information, travel characteristics of the respondents and their motives to clarify the factors which are more attractive to push tourists for visiting Taman Negara as a sport tourist destination (research questions: What are demographic profiles of tourists attending sport events in Taman Negara?; and What are sport tourists' motives for visiting Taman Negara?) Furthermore, the independent T-test was performed to identify the differences between domestic and foreign tourists' motivation (research question: What are the differences between domestic tourist's motives and foreign tourist's motives for visiting Taman Negara?)

Research Findings

A majority of the respondents surveyed were male tourists (63.3%), and the rest were female (36.7%). Age was measured with the ten life stages by Levinson (1996) and over a third of the respondents were between the ages of 22 to 28 (31.3%), followed by the ages of 46 to 60 years (18.7%) and 29 to 38 years (18%). A significant proportion were highly educated people (36% hold Bachelor degree and 22.7% hold Master/PhD

degree), while 46% of them, as they responded to the occupation and salary questions, were company employees (46%) followed by 20% who were government servants.

The results also indicated that around half of respondent earned a salary of less than RM 5000 (46%). More than half of respondents were single (58%) and around (38%) of them were married. In terms of place of residence, approximately 49% of tourists were from Malaysia (37.3% Malay, 8.7% Chinese, and 3.3% Indian) and 38.7% of tourists came from European countries. The main purpose of their travel was to participate in recreational or sports activities (58.7%) and the most popular activities were jungle trekking (36.7%) and canopy walk (31.3%). The average length of tourists' vacation at Taman Negara were from 3 to 4 days ($M=3.58$) with a mean group size of 15 tourists staying in hotels (37.3%) followed by those staying in hostels (30.7%).

Motives

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics for the four composite factors. The intellectual factor of motivation received the highest mean score ($M=3.85$, $SD=.61$), which shows learning and discovering new things due to expand knowledge and satisfying curiosity were more the most important motives for tourists who visited Taman Negara. This is followed by the stimulus-avoidance factor ($M=3.58$, $SD=.69$) which suggest tourists were seeking for calm place to relax and relieve tension from the hustle and bustle of daily activities. Two motivation factors, "social" ($M=3.57$, $SD=.77$) and "competence" ($M=3.57$, $SD=.83$), obtained moderate scores.

Table 1. Motives				
	Intellectual	Social	Competence	Stimulus-avoidance
Mean	3.8582	3.5767	3.5725	3.5817
Std. Deviation	.61764	.77972	.83184	.69499

Table 2. Independent t-tests on tourist motivation factors by nationality

	NATIONALITY	N	MEAN	Std. Deviation	t-statistic	Sig.level
INTELLECTUAL	Domestic	73	3.8682	.69344	.191	.849
	Foreign	77	3.8487	.53941		
SOCIAL	Domestic	73	3.9726	.66642	6.958	.000*
	Foreign	77	3.2013	.69127		
COMPETENCE	Domestic	73	3.9058	.74354	5.184	.000*
	Foreign	77	3.2565	.79054		
STIMULUS-AVOIDANCE	Domestic	73	3.8014	.67567	3.946	.000*
	foreign	77	3.3734	.65126		

Table 2 shows the independent t-tests results on tourist motivation factors by nationality (domestic and foreign). According to result, significant differences were reported in three factors; Social ($M=3.97$ and 3.20 , $p>.05$), Competence ($M=3.90$ and 3.25 , $p>.05$) and Stimulus-avoidance factors ($M=3.80$ and 3.37 , $p>.05$). It seems that domestic tourists were more interested in meeting new people, interact with and build friendship than foreign tourists. Furthermore, being active and challenge the ability were more important reasons for domestic tourists than foreign tourists to participate in sport activity. The result is quite interesting in the sense that the reasons for domestic tourists to travel to Taman Negara regarding the stimulus-avoidance factor were more for relieving tension and stress, rest and hustle avoidance of daily activities compared to foreign tourists.

Discussions and conclusions

This study attempted to investigate and provide an overview of tourists visiting Taman Negara Malaysia, with a focus on tourists' motivation and perception regarding the destination attributes. The findings generally indicate that the majority of tourists visiting Taman Negara were quite young with the average age between 23 to 28 years old: had some level of university/college education backgrounds: were mainly employed in companies: and had an average income of less than RM5000 per month. More than half of respondent were male. Additionally, the majority of tourists market came from Malaysia and Europe to participate in sport and recreational activities.

Intellectual and stimulus-avoidance motives were found to be the strongest motivators of tourists visiting Taman Negara. This indicates that Taman Negara seems to be a destination for those who want to discover new places and things and to be relaxed and relieve stress and tension from hustle and bustle of daily activity. This finding is consistent with Hudson, 1991 who reported intellectual factors as the primary motivators

for travelers staying at hostels. Similarly, Hudson (1991) examined psychological benefits of leisure participation of domestic workers and determined intellectual rewards contribute to satisfying leisure experiences. Kim Liên (2010) studied on Tourist Motivation and Activities in Vietnam and found out the same result with this paper results. He found out that intellectual motivation factor had the higher Mean in comparison with the other motivation factors. Social, competence and stimulus-avoidance factors possessed the highest mean scores for domestic tourists compared to foreign, which might be the prime reasons for them to travel to Taman Negara. The reason why domestic tourists were more motivated by social reasons compared to foreign tourists might be that domestic tourists were more sociable and warm, who liked to meet new people, interact with and build friendship. Malaysia is a multi-culture country, so people who live in Malaysia interact with different cultures and ethnicity; this might be one of the reasons which make them more friendly and sociable.

Additionally, domestic tourists showed higher mean score in mastery-competence factor which means they preferred to be active and challenge their ability compared to the foreign tourists. Domestic tourists spend shorter time to travel to Taman Negara which means they are closer to destination and it may not be their first visit and that they are more familiar with the local culture and circumstance, so there would not be new things for them. Thus, the second important reason for them to travel to Taman Negara is to participate in sport and challenge their ability. Mileage and financial factors may have induced them to travel to local destinations in addition to the familiarity of the local recreational spots. The finding that suggests domestic tourists are more motivated in mastery-competence factor is consistent with the findings of a study done on tourists visiting Mount Kinabalu, in Sabah Malaysia by Dolinting, Yusof and Soon (20013). In that study, international sport tourists scored significantly lower than the domestic sport tourists in mastery-competence factor and the authors suggest domestic sport tourists were more likely to have the desire to participate in mountain climbing for the purpose of improving skills as well as self-challenge compared to the international sport tourists.

On the other hand, the importance of the 'intellectual factor' did not differ among domestic and foreigner tourists. The stimulus avoidance factor was the second factor after intellectual component which has the highest mean score compared to the social and competence factor. Based on these findings, the researchers recommend developing related activities (social, competence and stimulus-avoidance) to attract more tourists, e.g. develop tours with a diversity of activities where two people or groups of individuals can participate, such as overnight camps, romantic places or music camps for groups of many people to ancient houses, where tourists can participate in cultural activities new places and cultures as well as relieve stress and tension and being relax.

The findings from this study are important for destination managers to learn the profile of its customers and implement effective positioning and market segmentation strategies. As this study identified the demographic profile, motivation and perception of tourists who were visiting Taman Negara and compared tourist motivations and perception across domestic and foreign tourists, both the methodology and findings could be helpful for other researchers who will probably undertake future similar research. Also further research on domestic and foreign tourists' motivation in Taman Negara, especially on stimulus-avoidance factor is recommended for future studies.

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