

Responsible Tourism: An Inductive Approach

Ramachandran, S
Department of Hospitality and Recreation
Faculty of Economics and Management
Universiti Putra Malaysia
E-mail: sridar@econ.upm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine responsible tourism indicators. An inductive approach is used to achieve this objective. This paper adapts the 4-phase research process of design principle, data elicitation, data analysis and knowledge interest. The empirical assessment is undertaken at Taman Negara (National Park), Malaysia. In-depth interviews were carried out to capture the indicators for responsible tourism from a stakeholder's perspective. Four broad categories out of the 68 stakeholders who participated in this survey include local community, domestic tourists, international tourists and policy makers. Political, ecological, social, economic, technological and cultural are the six dimensions used as a topic guide during the in-depth interviews. The findings of this paper discuss the underlying meaning of responsible tourism indicators from various stakeholders' perspective.

Keywords: Responsible Tourism, Indicators, Inductive Approach

Introduction

Role of tourism in generating economic growth is inevitable. The tourism industry's challenge is to manage resources in a responsible manner. Sustainability of tourism especially in developing countries fears the rich getting richer and the poor neglected. This socio-economic gap if not addressed will cost political, economical and social unrest to a nation. The purpose of this research is to establish pragmatic processes and techniques in responsibly managing tourism activities.

Two contrasting models (United Nations, 2003) are used in studying responsible tourism. The first being the market force and government allocation in distributing tourism income; and the second – a pro poor tourism (Torres, 2004) approach that generates net benefit for the poor, aims to unlock opportunities for economic gain, improve the livelihood of local community and last but not least incorporate community decision making (Reed, 1997) in tourism planning. The pro poor approach is adopted for the purpose of this research as responsible tourism practice is captured in a holistic manner through the involvement of various stakeholders in the tourism system.

The scope of this research is to provide public, private, communities and stakeholders useful information that will assist to achieve best practices in responsible tourism.

The Study Site

Taman Negara is 130 million years old covering the states of Pahang, Kelantan and Terengganu. Richness in biodiversity includes 14000 species of flora, 200 species of mammals, 300 species of birds. Natural geological landscape of this park includes the highest mountain in the region (Mount Tahan- 2186 metres) that requires an adventurous 7 day journey. There are numerous caves around the park. The popular cave, Gua Telenga (Ear shaped cave) being home to thousands of round leaf bats, giant toads, whip spiders and cave racer snakes. Few caves like Cave Bewah and Cave Taat is believed to be in existence since the Neolithic (4000 B.C.) Era. Taman Negara's rivers like Dayang, Wa, Tabing, Tembeling and Tahan are home to many aquatic fauna especially to the protected species of *Kelah* fish.

Any remaining errors or omissions rest solely with the author(s) of this paper.

The built environment provided as facilities for nature lovers are the canopy walk way, high-hide, jeep track and accommodation. The canopy walk way is the longest in the world, spanning 430 metres long and 40 metres of the ground. Due to the nocturnal nature of many mammals, the 6 high-hides (Bumbun in local language) are built at strategic location to catch the glimpse of the nocturnal wildlife that includes Tiger, Samabar deer, wild boar and Sumateran Rhinoceros. Variuos range of accommodation is provided at Taman Negara that includes campsites, jungle lodge, chalets, hostel and resorts. Taman Negara is governed by the Federal Government under the banner of Department of Wildlife and National Parks (PERHILITAN). This agency reports to thef Malaysian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. PERHILITAN's role is to manage, protect, and preserve wildlife and national parks in Peninsular Malaysia.

Boasting rich biodiversity with reasonable support facilities, Taman Negara is a popular ecotourism destination for both domestic and international tourists. Taman Negara was chosen for this study as it has been one of the most established natural resources that has proven to be a successful ecotourism destination for Malaysia.

Methodology

Four dimensions (Figure 1) in social research drawn from the work of Bauer (2000) is utilised in this research.

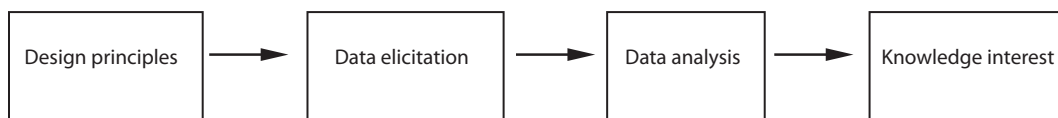


Figure 1. Four dimensions in social research

Design Principles

This is an exploratory study in understanding people and their environment. The study envisages in understanding the governing pattern of various stakeholders, to probe into the depth of their thoughts, and to churn the data that is grounded in the field. The design principle of this study is drawn from the ontology and epistemology of the interpretivist phenomenology. Hence, the design principle believes that the data is grounded. An inductive approach in search of knowledge is adapted simply because the aim is to probe the depth of the meaning as opposed to the deductive approach which focuses on the breadth of the knowledge. Hence this piece of research has to be treated as a theory building exercise as compared to a theory testing exercise.

Data Elicitation

Having adapted the above design principle, individual depth (in-depth) interview technique has been the preferred choice for data elicitation. Data elicitation means drawing out data from the field.

The philosophical position held for this study is as mentioned by Gaskell (2000):

“.....the assumption that the social world is not an unproblematic given: it is actively constructed by people in their everyday life, but not under conditions of their own making..... Hence the qualitative interview provides the basic data for the development of an understanding of the relations between social actors and their situations.”

The preparation, planning and respondent selection phases are as suggested by Gaskell (2000):

The preparation stage will first have to answer two questions:

- 1) What to ask (the specification of *topic guide*)?
- 2) Who should I select as *respondents*?

Topic Guide

The purpose of this topic guide is to achieve the aims of this research. Topic guide as it says, is not a structured regime that the interviewer has to comply by, but it is to facilitate the direction of the interview especially when the interviewer is lost for words. Also the topic guide will tailor the conversation towards reaching the aim of the research. The topic guide not only assists the interviewing process but also acts as an initial thematic scheme for the analysis of transcripts. Hence, the topic guide will be used in a flexible manner to accommodate the nature of the interviewee as well as the environment the interview is carried out. Regardless who the respondents are, the following themes will be included in the topic guide:

- 1) Role, background and history of their organisation and themselves in relation to tourism. This questioning type can be considered as descriptive (Spradley 1979; Taylor & Bogdan 1984) and used to begin an interview. The reason for this type of questioning is to make the interviewee feel comfortable (non-threatening) and allows them to talk about themselves and their experience.
- 2) Interviewees' opinion on the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of Responsible Tourism. The purpose of opinion/value based (Patton, 1980) questioning is to understand the cognitive and interpretive process of the interviewee. This mainly allows me to understand what the interviewer thinks about issues, events and experience surrounding the Responsible Tourism phenomena. Depending on the interviewing environment the SWOT theme will be tackled from a feeling and knowledge (Patton, 1980) based questioning approach. The feelings based questioning (what do you feel ofSWOT) revealed the emotional responses of the interviewees. On the other hand the knowledge (what would you know of SWOT) based questioning revealed the factual evidence.
- 3) Is 'Responsible Tourism' an appropriate/successful tourism practice in Malaysia? This is a probing question (Minichiello, 1991) and is asked to elicit information more comprehensively as compared to the introductory question. This type of questioning gives the interviewer in-depth understanding of the subject matter as compared to make assumptions from the more general introductory questions.
- 4) Some neighbouring countries (i.e. Thailand) have a sound 'Responsible Tourism' practice than Malaysia in the Far East region. Do you agree to this statement and what are your reasons? This questioning approach - the Devil's Advocate Question (Schatzman and Staruss, 1973) should be asked only if a good rapport has been established between the interlocutors. The benefits of this type of question further strengthens and clarify the earlier statements made by the interviewees. These are more aggressive and provoking questions; thus should be handled with care to avoid discomfort between the interlocutors.
- 5) This topic guide as mentioned earlier has no hard and fast rule to it. It is merely to facilitate and give guidance in the data elicitation process. Hence, the interviewing environment will actually determine the flow of interview.

Respondent Selection

The challenging task in the data elicitation stage as compared to developing the topic guide is the selection of respondents. The word selection is preferred as compared to the word sampling in the context of this study. The reason being the scope of this study is not to collect representative samples but to identify links and to understand people's (actors/players) decision-making process with regards 'Responsible Tourism'.

The purpose of this in-depth interview is not to count number of opinions but to understand the meanings of the range of opinions, representations and issues with regards to 'Responsible Tourism'. Therefore to claim of a specific approach in selecting the respondents would be inappropriate. Due to the nature of this study what is more essential is the detailed procedure and choices made to select these respondents.

Snowballing (Cooper and Schindler, 1998) and theoretical sampling (Minichiello, 1991) are the combined selection procedures that will be used in carrying out this research. Snowball sampling means the researcher through a referral network knows the respondent. Gaining information from the first respondent, gaps can be identified to whom to speak next (or to which agency/department/organisation). This is when theoretical sampling will be used. The nature of this study does not determine the number of respondents to be question in the initial design phase. Theoretical sampling plays two roles: first identifying the information gap to look for the following respondent. Secondly, theoretical sampling assists to determine the final respondent. This means the information gaps are filled and the research comes to a point of saturation. This is how the 68 number of respondents were finalised.

Data Analysis

Data analysis follows data elicitation, and the broad aim of data analysis is to look for meanings of the study subject. A large text corpus being the outcome of the data elicitation is analysed using discourse analysis. Discourse can mean speech, lecture, sermon, treaties and conversation and in the case of this study is the dialogue (in-depth interview) between two interlocutors (interviewer and interviewee) at a time. Discourse analysis is derived from various roots or disciplines. There are at least 57 varieties (Gill, 2000) of discourse analysis and of these different theoretical traditions and diverse disciplinary locations; linguistics (Fowler et al., 1979; Fairclough, 1989) and philosophy (Fogelin, 1980; Bloor, 1983; Stroll, 2002) are seen to have contributed the most to discourse analyses. The common acceptance for all these variation is that discourse analysis is a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world) (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002).

Findings

Findings of this study is derived from four broad categories of respondent groups namely, the local community, domestic tourists, international tourists and decision makers. Five emergent themes of this discourse include socio-culture, economy, ecology, technology and politics. Major findings of the four respondent groups are presented as Table 1, Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4. The detail discussion of each group is as discussed below.

Perception of Local Community

The local perceive the orang asli (native) community has gone through changes due to the tourism activities. Preference to be alone, plenty of hard work and modernization are some of the changes observed. However, other respondents perceive that tourism intervention has not deterred in practicing their traditional lifestyle like hunting, gathering and farming. The clothing sense of the native is similar to the locals which is a sign of modernisation. Ancestral worshiping and animism remains core to their belief system though conversion to Islam, Christianity and Bahai is evident.

Some locals believe that tourism has cause negative impact on culture losing their humble and hospitable nature. Vandalism is evident though not extensive. The native and local have good communications. Locals find international tourists tyo be very courteous and respectable. However, some locals are concerned that the younger generation has started to behave like the tourists they mingled with resulting in deterioration in culture and values.

Locals agree that from an economic perspective, tourism has created more benefits than loss. Increase in disposable income, reduction in poverty and unemployment are major factors highlighted by the local community. Opportunities to become entrepreneurs as well as to participate in activities involving MNCs bringing in foreign direct investment are apparent since the intervention of tourism activities.

Table 1: Perception of local community

DISCOURSE WITH INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS	
<i>Socio-Culture</i>	Orang Asli's lifestyle is peaceful and one with nature. Orang Asli remain as one of the major tourist attraction. Modernisation influence on local community is evident. Although some problem with regards to communication but able to adapt.
<i>Economy</i>	Ability to operate own business. Provides job opportunity like boatmen and tourist guide.
<i>Ecology</i>	Littering is evident. However overall environment looks natural with sustainable development. River appears polluted.
<i>Technology</i>	Good platform to promote Taman Negara. Some nature lovers feel that ICT may not be of importance as the motivation to travel to a remote destination is to be away from all development.
<i>Politics</i>	Local involvement in planning and development appears to be indirect. Government intervention to maintain Taman Negara in a pristine state is very much needed. More participation of NGOs is encouraged.

The locals observed high level of environmental awareness amongst international tourist as opposed to domestic tourists. In order to safeguard the uniqueness of Taman Negara, the locals believe that no further unnecessary development should occur. Present development is viewed to be environmentally friendly. Telephone and internet access are the two main technological components that the locals truly appreciated. The technology besides providing them access to the outside world for knowledge enhancement also acts as a business platform for those interested in setting up small business like Cyber-café. Locals agree that they have been involved in collaborative decision-making especially to the issues relating to the livelihood of the community. Locals' welcome NGO participation as their welfare is protected through awareness creation programmes organized by NGOs.

Perception of Domestic Tourists

The Domestic tourists are aware of the existence of Orang Asli in Taman Negara. This group perceives the natives as finding food from the forest, jungle tracking and in short living and surviving in a traditional way of life. However, some domestic tourist find it difficult to differentiate between the natives and the local as modernization has made them look alike.

Domestic tourists find the local community helpful, humble and courteous. With exception to some rare carving on trees, the domestic tourist feel the level of vandalism is low. Communication problem hardly arise as the exposure to foreign tourist have assisted the locals to communicate in English. However, the domestic tourists were quick to point that some aspects of modernization could be detrimental to the local culture and lifestyle.

The domestic tourists perceive that most job opportunities are generated due to tourism activities. Job opportunities couple with better income has positively reduced poverty and unemployment. This group of respondent also feels that opportunities are scarce and further development is required. The domestic tourist observed the potential of entrepreneurial activities that are available for the locals.

Table 2: Perception of domestic tourists

DISCOURSE WITH DOMESTIC TOURISTS	
<i>Socio-Culture</i>	Knowledge of Orang Asli exists. However, assumes that development has contributed to the modernisation of the native community. Hence unable to differentiate between locals and natives.
<i>Economy</i>	Most job created through tourism activities. Main economic source for local community. Better infrastructure development. Less poverty and unemployment. Entrepreneurial opportunities plenty.
<i>Ecology</i>	Clean air and pristine environment. Development appears to be moderate. Willing to pay if services are satisfactory. Water pollution visible.
<i>Technology</i>	Technology enables locals to interact with the global community. Technology as a learning platform for local community.
<i>Politics</i>	Relationship between community and governing agencies appears to be good. More NGO involvement required. Collaborative management between stakeholders' required for sustainable ecotourism development and planning.

The domestic tourists find the environment to be in pristine and in clean state. They find though not much pollution; the littering issue could be improved. The domestic tourist also observed that the quality of water, trails and other facilities are maintained.

On the technology front, the domestic tourists note positive points especially on the availability of internet and telephone that allows the locals to interact with the global society. Some find the coverage of mobile telecommunication can be improved.

On a political note, the domestic tourists perceive good relations between the locals and the governing agencies. Emphasis on increased NGO participation is suggested. They deduce that the governing agency have included various stakeholders in decision-making. The emphasis on collaborative management was highlighted on several occasions.

Perception of International Tourists

The international tourists would like to see the natives in their natural environment as oppose to a captive or programmed environment. Their argument is that Taman Negara is not a zoo but a national park whereby the habitats should live their natural lives. However, they acknowledge that the existence of natives definitely is an attraction in itself to visit Taman Negara. The international tourists have also noted that the natives live a traditional lifestyle which they were pleased to witness.

The international tourists realize that modernization has influenced the lifestyle of the local community. They don't find much barrier in communications even though not everyone could speak English. The international tourists have heaped praise on the local community for their hospitality and courteousness.

On the economic front, self owned job opportunities, income generated through tourism activities, creation of job opportunities through operators including tour guides and boatmen and higher disposable income are some of the factors observed by the international tourists.

The environment is perceived to be natural and conserved. Development is viewed to be under control. They perceive pollution to be very low, although they find the rivers to be a little dirty. Littering was highlighted as an issue to be addressed. If the environment is kept at a level that can provide satisfaction, the tourists are willing to pay for the conservation effort. Another positive point noted is that Taman Negara is not crowded.

Table 3: Perception of international tourists

INDICATORS	DISCOURSE WITH LOCAL COMMUNITES
<i>Socio-Culture</i>	Positive impacts include good communication, acceptance of tourists and tourism activities. Negative impacts include vandalism, less hospitable, deterioration in moral values.
<i>Economy</i>	Positive impacts include higher earnings, better job opportunities, and potential for SMEs, Foreign Direct Investment via international hotel chains creating job opportunities. Reduced unemployment and poverty.
<i>Ecology</i>	International tourist more sensitive towards environmental conservation. Present development suffices as further development may cause negative impact.
<i>Technology</i>	Telecommunications like telephone, internet facilities are available. Local community provided with technology based small business like Cyber-cafe .
<i>Politics</i>	Community-participation in decision-making is evident. Governance of Taman Negara emphasises the welfare of local community.

The international tourists view the technological component as a excellent platform to promote Taman Negara to the global society. Telephone appears to be common in the National Park. However, a few hardcore nature lovers who want to escape from development disagree with the extensive availability of communication facilities as it defeats the purpose of going back to nature. Nevertheless, majority of the respondents enjoyed the internet facilities as they could communicate with their friends and family.

The international tourists feel that the local community's involvement in decision making is rather indirect. Even though the relationship between the governing agencies and other stakeholders appears to be in harmony, the international tourists expect more active participation from the local community. It is also noted for more entrepreneurial opportunities to be created. Awareness campaigns by NGOs to be done on a more frequent time frame. As well as a major role for the governing agency to ensure that the National Park is conserved for perpetuity.

Perception of Decision Makers

The decision makers perceive the natives as leading a nomadic lifestyle. Natives are also considered as an ecotourism product. However, the decision makers on a precautionary note stated that the involvement of natives should be to perform their cultural practices to create awareness amongst the visitors without being exploited by certain selfish parties. The relationship between native and the governing agency is in harmony as there are natives employed in the agency.

The decision makers feel that the locals are becoming less friendly as they find their privacy invaded. Locals do not find Taman Negara as tranquil as it used to be. The negative implications of tourism activity on the values of the community include involvement in drugs, drinking alcoholic beverage and theft. The locals find the development is too extensive making the society feeling uncomfortable.

Job opportunities are in abundance especially in the food and beverage, transportation and guiding areas. Prior to tourism the locals were dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. The intervention of tourism has brought in many positive outcomes from an economic perspective to the local community. Relatively low levels of unemployment and poverty are indicators that the local economy has benefited from the tourism sector. Not only are there entrepreneurial and private job opportunities, but it is evident that the local community have been provided with opportunities to join the public service that at present account to approximately 100 local employees.

Table 4: Perception of decision makers

DISCOURSE WITH DECISION MAKERS	
<i>Socio-Culture</i>	Natives are nomads practicing animism. Natives are tourism product. Locals are becoming less friendly. Native welfare matters are ignored.
<i>Economy</i>	Excellent job opportunity. Low unemployment rate. Poverty level low. Approximately 100 members of the local community working for the governing agency. To curb leakage, economic activities are prioritized for the local communities.
<i>Ecology</i>	Development should be controlled. Local not appreciative on a clean environment. Decrease in the quality of air and water.
<i>Technology</i>	Assist efficient management. Potential to expose community to socially ill activities
<i>Politics</i>	Stakeholder relationship in harmony except for the resort owners as they are alien to the local economy. Role of NGO is not prominent. In general the local abide by legal matters.

On the ecological front, the advice is to control development and conserve environment. Extensive development will cause crowding, pollution and eventually causing Taman Negara to lose its charm. Locals do not seem to be appreciative about the cleanliness of environment that results in littering and other uncalled for pollution. Consequently the deterioration of water and air quality is visible through these irresponsible actions by the locals.

Technology has provided many positives to Taman Negara especially in its promotional activities, as well as providing business opportunities. However, technology has also introduced socially ill activities to the local community.

On the political, governance and legal front, the locals are not active participants, especially in politics. In general the locals abide by the legal system in place. Relationship with the governing body is found to be good. However, the role of NGO needs to increase and improve as it appears to be less prominent at present. Overall stakeholder relationship is in peaceful state, maybe with the exception of resort operators as they are seen as invaders of the local economy.

Knowledge Interest – Study Potential

The purpose of this exercise is theory building. This can be achieved due the nature of in-depth interview and discourse analysis. The outcome of this study should be viewed as an exploratory process in understanding “Responsible Tourism”.

Successful planning and development of responsible tourism provides benefits to stakeholders within the tourism system. This includes:

- Enhancing a country’s image as a tourism destination
- Improving the livelihood of local communities
- Stimulating sustainable economic growth
- Increasing investment potentials
- Creating business opportunities

This study will benefit stakeholders within the responsible tourism framework. The broad community that will utilise the findings of this research includes residents of host communities, natives, industry experts, governmental planners, policy makers, corporate sectors, academicians and non-governmental organisations.

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