Chapter 5

The Trend of Youth Visitations at Kilim Geopark in Langkawi Islands, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides insights on youth visitation to KILIM Geopark in relation to tourism activities, hospitality services expectation, and three visitation characteristics. Within a two-month data gathering period, 142 respondents from youths aged 18 to 30 of various nationalities were collected. As geopark tourism activity is a relatively new trend of the nature-based tourism industry, it is assumed the populace will look forward to a distinctively novel tourism experience, and thus, views tourism from a new perspective. Additionally, the populace is determined as the targeted group given the widely known tradition of this group’s road trip patterns and engagement. When analyzing the data by means of one-way ANOVA, T-test, Correlation, Regression, and Correspondence analyses, interesting results were observed with regard to visitation characteristics, environmental attitudes, and attractions management aspects. Considering the results presented, practical and sensible solutions are discussed in relation to how youths perceived KILIM Geopark.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the inconsistent ideas and differences in penetration level, the tourism industry in Malaysia has gained in importance and popularity since the 1990s. The industry’s growth is also leveraging the steadily incomes where since 2012, the tourist population in Southeast Asia has become impressive in size reaching to 100 million (Corben, 2017). This has propelled the improvement and expansion of tourism infrastructure to cope with the increasing number of users, which indirectly driven the birth of...
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new tourism destination in Southeast Asia region. According to Victor (2018), tourism attractions in the Southeast Asia region (and in Malaysia especially) is a melting pot of multicultural variables (society, heritage and recreational values) that contributed USD 119.7 billion in 2016 and forecasted to bring in USD 222.8 billion in 2027. In a report by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (Lotha, 2018), tourism arrivals to Southeast Asia has recorded a significant growth of 10% for the first four months in 2018, exceeding the international average growth of 6%. In the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016-2025, the region had clearly stated that ‘...by 2025, ASEAN will be a quality tourism destination offering a unique, diverse ASEAN experience, and will be committed to responsible, sustainable, inclusive and balanced tourism development, so as to contribute significantly to the socioeconomic well-being of ASEAN people’ (Victor, 2018).

Considering this situation, immense efforts and significant funds have been allocated for tourism development which in turn, has brought remarkable benefits (both physically and psychologically) throughout the nation. Of importance, the tourism industry’s success in the development of a tourism attraction is attributable to its exclusive tourism products. In the case of KILIM Geopark, situated in the Langkawi Island of the state of Kedah, (see Figure 1), other than famous for its duty-free zone status effective since 1987 (Othman & Mohd Rosli, 2011), KILIM Geopark was established for its valuable nature-based tourism potential. More specifically, the notion of positioning KILIM Geopark within the tourism market is to describe the uniqueness possessed by Langkawi in relation to complete geological record where “…Langkawi has undergone various geological processes, within different environments, resulting in numerous types of sedimentary rocks with interesting and unique structures, and containing a likewise variegated assortment of fossil types” (Langkawi Geopark, 2019). In terms of existing limestone caves, for example, KILIM Geopark is comparable with the more famous Batu Caves situated in the Selangor state. However, when focusing on quality and historical considerations, the limestone resources in KILIM Geopark is invaluable as it may be viewed as the complete archipelago (Leman et al., 2008).

The idea of branding and promoting this unique archipelago, consisting of 99 picturesquely scenic small islands (comprising limestone rock formation, lagoons, beaches, fossils and mangrove), is also to educate and deepen the understanding on the importance of sustainability development (Huang, 2010). Specifically, this action is congruent with the conservation movement aimed at the protection of cultural and natural architectural heritages and sites, which was first initiated in the late 20th century (Ahmad, 2006). Simply stated, this directly suggests the signification of KILIM Geopark as ‘…an outstanding universal value for humanity’ (Elliot & Schmutz, 2012, p. 256).

KILIM Geopark was designated as the 52nd Global Geopark by UNESCO in 2007, and the first in Malaysia and Southeast Asia (Azman et al., 2011). It has revolutionized the tourism industry generally and Langkawi Island specifically, precipitating the transition process of the ‘...primarily agricultural and fisheries-based economy [towards] local entrepreneurship and recreational and nature-oriented tourism activities’ (Abdul Halim et al., 2011, p. 95). This could be seen from the activities listed in the calendar of Langkawi Geopark 2019 where throughout the year, a number of recreational-and-education based events (for example Langkawi Fossil Day, Earth Day, World Ocean Day, Langkawi Geopark Day and World Tsunami Awareness Day) and education-based events (such as Asia Pasific Geopark Network Symposium and Regional Course on UNESCO Global Geopark) are planned with the purpose of educating and promoting sustainable and responsible tourism (Langkawi Geopark, 2019). Though attention is now focused towards KILIM Geopark’s growth and progress, efforts and considerations towards agriculture-based and fisheries-based economy continues, with the aim towards conserving fishing villages to be an exclusive tourism asset of Langkawi Island (Azman et al., 2011).
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