

Perception of Tourists on the Responsible Tourism Concept In Langkawi, Malaysia: Are We Up To It?

Vikneswaran Nair^{1*} and Reza Azmi²

¹Taylor's University College, Selangor, MALAYSIA; ²Wild Asia Sdn. Bhd, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

“Responsible Tourism” or “RT” in essence provides quality travel experience that promotes conservation of the natural environment and offers opportunities and benefits for local communities. RT is a tourism operation that is managed in such a way that it preserves the local environment and culture so that it can continue to deliver the benefits for years to come. Three important aspects of RT commitment are analysed in this research, namely the economic, socio-cultural and environmental responsibility. This research project was envisaged to provide support for an ongoing initiative to promote RT in Langkawi, one of the favourite tourist destinations in the northern part of Malaysia. The research focused on the tourist’s perception of RT in Langkawi. This study proposes to initiate a preliminary survey of understanding the perception of tourists on the attractions of the island as a tourism destination. The main aim of this research project is to study the understanding of the concept of RT among the tourists visiting Langkawi. Generally, the majority of the respondents are aware of what is important in RT practices. Among these factors, the environment is the most important factor which both the Malaysian and non-Malaysian tourists are concerned about; followed by socio-cultural and economic factors. The respondents’ perceptions of supporting RT is very favourable as the majority of the tourists are well aware of its importance but all these are merely “perceptions” and may not be their main intention of visiting Langkawi.

Key Words: responsible tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, Langkawi

Introduction

Several changes have occurred in the last two decades in the evolution of the ecotourism industry. As indicated by Wall (1994), there has been growth in visits to many natural areas, particularly in developing countries. Many economic development professionals have increasingly viewed natural-area visitation as a tool for providing employment in regions that have experienced decline, or lack development of other industries. On the other hand, many conservation and resource management professionals increasingly have viewed these ecological explorations as an avenue for enhancing natural area finance and providing conservation-related benefits, particularly to residents living near these areas. There has been increasing attention paid to improving the sustainability of all tourism activities, including those occurring in natural areas.

* Email: vicky.n@taylors.edu.my

Today, ecotourism, as a concept, has begun to enter a period of maturity (Lindberg *et al.*, 1997). With respect to visitor types and activities, a key consideration is the diversity within the ecotourism market. Ecotourists today may differ greatly in several aspects, such as distance travelled, length of stay, desired level of physical effort and comfort, importance of nature in trip motivation, level of learning desired, amount of spending, desired activities and personal demographics. In short, this new wave of tourists are saying “no” to mass tourism, irresponsible operators and resorts that are destroying the local environment (Wild Asia, 2006). These tourists want real quality experience. They want to know that the shower they are taking is not depriving a village of water, and that the hotel they are staying at is not robbing the locals of their livelihood, or that their very presence does not offend the local communities. Travel is about relaxation, rejuvenation, adventure, fulfilment, playfulness and sharing experiences rather than just 'places and things' (Francis, 2006). It certainly is not about being cooped up in a tourist compound! This is what “Responsible Tourism” or “RT” is all about.

RT in essence provides quality travel experience that promotes conservation of natural environment and offers opportunities and benefits for local communities (Wild Asia, 2006). RT pertains to, ideally, tourism operations that are managed in such a way that they preserve the local environment and culture so that they can continue to deliver the benefits for years to come. According to the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) (2006), RT ensures tourism that cares for the environment.

Three important aspects of RT responsibility will be analysed in this research, namely, (1) economic, (2) socio-cultural, and (3) environment. Economic responsibility in tourism is practised by showing commitment to cooperating with local communities and people in order to minimise the revenue that “leaks” out of the local area. Social responsibility is addressed by respecting the integrity of local cultures, preventing negative effects on social structures and conserving diverse cultural heritage. Environmental responsibility is practised by showing commitment to the conservation of biodiversity and natural heritage, the responsible use of natural resources, and the prevention of pollution and waste.

This research project was envisaged to provide support for an ongoing initiative to promote RT in Langkawi, one of the favourite tourist destinations in the northern part of Malaysia. Langkawi, a duty-free port, is an island of scenic, tranquil landscapes, and has become a favourite destination for local and international visitors alike. For 2004, Langkawi received 2.2 million tourist arrivals out of the 15.7 million received for Malaysia. The number dropped slightly in 2005 to 1.8 million due to the post tsunami impact (Tourism Malaysia, 2006 & LADA, 2006). Nonetheless, Langkawi remains as one of the top tourist destinations for Malaysia.

This research project will focus on the tourist perception of RT in Langkawi. Past tourism research on Langkawi has focused on the environment (e.g. geological landscape, water availability) and also on perception of tourism amongst local Malay communities. To date, there have been few consumer surveys to better understand the needs and wants of tourists currently visiting Langkawi. There has not been adequate focus on understanding the sustainability issues in Langkawi despite the island being rich in natural resources.

This study is proposed to initiate a preliminary survey of the feedback from the tourists on the attractions and the island as a tourism destination. The main aim of this research project is to study the understanding of the concept of “responsible tourism” among the locals and international tourists.

Therefore, the objective of the study is:

1. To investigate the level of sustainability of the tourism industry in Langkawi in terms of economic, socio-cultural and environment as per the RT concept.

2. To collect and document tourist feedback and perception on attractions and Langkawi as a premier tourist destination.
3. To study the level of acceptance on the concept of RT among the local and international tourists visiting Langkawi.

Responsible Tourism – The Global and Malaysian Scene

According to Goodwin (2005), the Director of International Centre for Responsible Tourism, University of Greenwich, RT provides more enjoyable and authentic holiday experiences that maximise the benefits of tourism to destinations and local people, whilst minimising any negative social or environmental impact of tourism. He believed that RT is being adopted by the wider tourism industry today. The standard of entries to the International RT Awards is getting higher than the previous years and demonstrates the advances being made by those at the forefront of responsible tourism. The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) defined RT as “ensuring tourism cares for the environment” (ABTA, 2006; Goodwin, 2001). Similarly, globally there are many organisations that introduce eco-labels and certification systems that capture the very essence of responsible tourism.

Certification is the process of assuring consumers and industry that the company being assessed has met the standards set (Font, 2003). Ecolabels act as incentives to encourage business to achieve significant improvements in their environmental performance (Font and Buckley, 2001). Ecolabels define a product as adhering to pre-defined criteria. Font and Buckley referred to the term ecolabelling as a third party programme, which awards environmental logos to products determined to be environmentally preferable to others. Since these programmes only award labels to leading environmental performers, they are also commonly referred to as leadership programmes. Government agencies typically operate them. The objective of ecolabelling programmes is to identify environmentally preferable products for consumers. Font and Buckley (2001) compiled 73 ecolabelling bodies at all levels.

In the last ten years, these ecolabelling has moved on dramatically to become one of the buzzwords of sustainable tourism and ecotourism. Although RT is not considered an ecolabel or certification system, the main objective of the programme will be recognized by consumers or distribution channels, and considered as added value that leads to its acceptance in the marketplace and to support the marketing of companies that meet standards.

Both Font’s (2003) and WTO/OMT’s (2002) analysis also indicate that there are 7,000 tourism products certified worldwide, and 6000 of them are in Europe. 70 percent of the certification programmes are led by private tourism associations, NGOs and consultancies, whereas 30 percent are led by governmental organizations.

All the indicators used to measure standards also vary, not only in content but also in what is measured. The most popular distinction is between process and performance indicators (Honey & Stewart, 2002; Synergy, 2000). Process-based standards mean the company makes a commitment to improvement by putting in place management systems to ensure year-on-year progress. Progress-based standards mean that different companies could perform differently and still have the same certificate; hence they are not a guarantee of sustainability.

Besides these ecolabelling certification systems, various types of rating systems have been introduced in many parts of the world. Evaluation of destinations is an essential element in a comprehensive tourism rating system. According to Pearce (1997), the multi-faceted nature of tourism and tourist demand makes evaluation of destinations complex. Many different factors may influence where tourist development occurs. As tourist resources

do not occur evenly or randomly in space, developers and planners are faced with such practical questions as assessing the feasibility of developing a particular site. Therefore, from the evaluation of resources, an effective and realistic rating system can be structured for the hospitality industry, in particular the tourism sector (Ritchie & Goeldner, 1994).

In the tourism sector, a number of rating systems are used for accreditation of the site in terms of compliance with local code of practice. In 1995, the Alaskan Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association, USA emphasized the following 8 guidelines for the rating of tourism sites (AWRTA, 2001; AWRTA 1995):

1. Environmentally sustainable economic growth by minimising visitor impact on the wildlife, wild-land, native cultures and local communities.
2. Travel modes and facilities maintain low impact on the environment.
3. Businesses benefit directly the local economy and local inhabitants.
4. Business operation's effect on the environment is minimised.
5. All employees are educated on environmental impact.
6. Educational emphasis for tourists to learn.
7. Formula for the business and the guest to contribute to local non-profit effort for environmental protection.
8. Travel in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity.

In 1999, the Chinese National Tourism Administration (CNTA) classified and graded tourist attractions according to hygiene, communications, safety and environment (Huang and Xiao, 2000). In 1994, the Tourism Authority of Thailand developed a rating and ranking system for 109 tourism destinations using 5 criteria (TAT, 2002; SIRG, 1997):

1. Resource attraction
2. Susceptibility of impacts
3. Opportunity for developing interpretation and educational programmes
4. Diversity of ecotourist activity
5. Compatibility of ecotourism to other tourism activity.

The internationally recognised Blue-Flag criterion is another rating system widely used for beaches. The Blue-Flag criteria covers 5 major aspects of beach management, namely water quality, coastal quality, environmental education and information, environmental management and also safety and services (Font and Buckley, 2001).

Shores (1999) proposed another rating system for ecotourism scaling. He established a 0-5 scale to classify the stages of ecotourism. The proposed non-cumulative scaling system measures different attributes and at different levels.

Among the nations embarking on ecotourism, one of the pioneering and most successful ecotourism management programmes is administered in Costa Rica. According to Font and Buckley (2001), the Costa Rican Tourism Institute, which is regulated by the Costa Rican National Accreditation Commission, introduced the Certification in Sustainable Tourism (CST) in 1999. The CST was designed to differentiate tourism sector businesses based on the degree to which they comply with a sustainable model of natural, cultural and social resource management (Costa Rican Tourism Institute, 2001). A five-level scale is used for tourism based companies and hotels. For tourism companies, the four criteria evaluated include physical-biological parameters, infrastructure and services, external clients and the socio-economic environment. For hotels, evaluation focuses on physical-biological parameters, hotel facilities, customers, and socio-economic environment.

Similarly, in Australia, the National Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (NEAP) managed by the Ecotourism Association of Australia structured eight principles of ecotourism, which are applicable to tours, attractions and accommodation (Kalalu-Danza, 1999; Ecotourism Association of Australia, 2000). There are three levels of accreditation under this programme – Nature Tourism Accreditation, Ecotourism Accreditation (EA) and

Advanced Ecotourism Accreditation (EAA). To achieve the EA, operators must demonstrate that their products fulfill 100 percent of the applicable core principles. To achieve EAA, products must meet a further 80 percent of the applicable bonus criteria.

In summary, various eco-labels and ecocertification systems, in one way or another, have resulted in the birth of the RT concept in Malaysia and in Southeast Asia. As reported by Weaver (2001), with its tropical climate, rainforests, coastal coral reefs, mountain trekking, great variety of flora, fauna and ethnic cultures, developed and emerging destinations, and easy international access through the major international air hubs of Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, Southeast Asia has all the ingredients to keep it at the forefront of world ecotourism destinations.

Methodology

Data collection was carried out and coordinated by 4 researchers and 22 research assistants (RAs) from Taylor's College, School of Hospitality and Management, Malaysia and Wild Asia, a Malaysian-based company that specialises in supporting conservation initiatives in Asia. Data collection was carried out for a period of 5 days, from 26 to 30 March 2006. Before the field survey was carried out, the researchers conducted a seminar and workshop on RT for all the research assistants and also developed the survey instrument used for the field survey.

To determine whether the content and the form of the survey questionnaires were valid, reliable and easily understood by the respondents, the questionnaires were pre-tested (pilot testing) by the research assistants in a simulated environment. Following the pre-testing, adjustments were made by eliminating or restructuring invalid and poorly structured questions. Before conducting the field survey, the data obtained from pre-testing was analysed by conducting a reliability test to evaluate the scale of measurement.

The final field survey was carried out at various tourism establishments in Langkawi, i.e. resorts, hotels, restaurants, major places of interest, shopping outlets and tourist entry and exit points. Before the survey was administered, the research assistants were informed about the purpose of the study, the use of the questionnaires and the procedure and ethics of interviewing. A selective random sampling approach was adopted in the data collection in order to ensure balanced and well spread data.

Various statistical tools were used to analyse the data. Initially, descriptive analyses were used to calculate the base data for frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Cross-tabulation and correlation tests were used to investigate further how respondents answered on two or more questions at the same time (comparing the independent variable with the dependent variable).

To obtain additional information and point of views regarding the tourist attractions and awareness on RT, short questions and answer sessions were conducted while the respondents were filling up the questionnaires. Questionnaires were formulated using close-ended and open-ended questions on tourist profile in Langkawi, their destination experience, choice and perception on supporting RT. A 3-point Likert-scale was used to rate the importance [most important (3) to not important (1)] and enjoyment level [definitely enjoy it (3) to never considered it (1)]. The answers to the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science).

Results and Analysis

The random sampling population were tourists in Langkawi which included Malaysians, Asians, Europeans, Australians, Americans and Africans. The sampling locations were

selected based on nature and tourist-generic places which included Pantai Chenang area, Kuah town, Langkawi Airport, Langkawi Craft Centre and the Langkawi Cable Car (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Sampling Location in Langkawi (A = Pantai Chenang, B = Cable Car, C = Airport, D = Craft Centre & E =Kuah Town)

With a near balance of male and female, most of the respondents were between the age of 25 to 35 years old and 36 to 45 years old (see Table 1 for details). The Europeans were the most travelled tourists in Langkawi during the period of the survey, followed by Malaysians and Asians. Langkawi seemed to be a preferred destination among the Europeans during the period of this survey in the second half of April 2006 due to the summer holidays in Europe. Beaches, hot climate and nature were their best preference. Hence, Langkawi was naturally their preferred choice. Besides, during the survey period, there was neither a school holiday nor a public holiday period during which Malaysians could travel. Thus, the percentage of Malaysians came second after the Europeans.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents (N=611)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	352	57.6
Female	259	42.4

Table 1: Profile of Respondents (N=611) (Contd.)

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 25 yrs old	61	10.0
25 to 35 yrs old	264	43.2
36 to 45 yrs old	141	23.1
46 to 55 yrs old	75	12.3
More than 56 yrs old	70	11.5

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Malaysians	186	30.4
Non-Malaysians	425	69.6
• Asians	117	19.1
• Europeans	220	36.0
• Australasian	62	10.1
• Africans	6	1.1
• Americans	20	3.3

Tables 2 and 3 compare the destination planning preference between the Malaysian and the non-Malaysian tourists. For the length of the stay, an obvious majority of the Malaysians tended to stay in Langkawi for a week or less. This can be explained by the proximity. Basically, Malaysians were “repeaters” who visited Langkawi frequently. There was high percentage of non-Malaysian repeaters who came to Langkawi more than 3 times. But for non-Malaysians the length is longer compared to Malaysians; the price is more attractive for a longer stay. Apart from that, the “first timers” needed more time to explore Langkawi. Moreover, non-Malaysians were able to afford a longer stay due to their higher disposable income. For method of booking, as expected the non-Malaysians tended to use travel agencies in their own countries for bookings to Malaysia, whereas Malaysians used local travel agencies or made self-tour arrangements.

Table 2: Destination Planning Experience of Malaysians & Non-Malaysians versus Number of Days Staying (N=610)

How travel arrangement was made			Malaysians	Non-Malaysians	Total	Percentage
Overseas Travel Agent	Number of days staying	less than 3 days	8	36	44	
		3 to 7 days	26	192	218	
		more than 7 days	4	88	92	
	Total		38	316	354	58.03
Local Travel Agent	Number of days staying	less than 3 days	26	5	31	
		3 to 7 days	40	26	66	
		more than 7 days	11	29	40	
	Total		77	60	137	22.46
On Your Own	Number of days staying	less than 3 days	17	8	25	
		3 to 7 days	31	7	38	
		more than 7 days	23	33	56	
	Total		71	48	119	19.51
Grand Total			186	424	610	100

Table 3: Destination Planning Experience of Malaysians & Non-Malaysians versus Frequency of Visits to Langkawi (N=609)

How travel arrangement was made			Malaysians	Non-Malaysians	Total	Percentage
Overseas Travel Agent	Frequency of visit to Langkawi	first time	1	58	59	
		1 to 3 times	2	5	7	
		more than 3 times	35	253	288	
	Total		38	316	354	58.13
Local Travel Agent	Frequency of visit to Langkawi	first time	11	14	25	
		1 to 3 times	0	0	0	
		more than 3 times	65	46	111	
	Total		76	60	136	22.33
On Your Own	Frequency of visit to Langkawi	first time	10	13	23	
		1 to 3 times	0	0	0	
		more than 3 times	61	35	96	
	Total		71	48	119	19.54
Grand Total			185	424	609	100

General Perception of Experience in Langkawi

The multiple responses received from an open ended question among the 611 respondents were analysed for tourists' best and bad experiences in Langkawi.

Generally, the tourists' best experiences were classified into various categories which included nature, weather, atmosphere, food, socio-cultural aspects, hotel service and facilities, shopping, water sports, themed attractions and other attractions (see Figure 2).

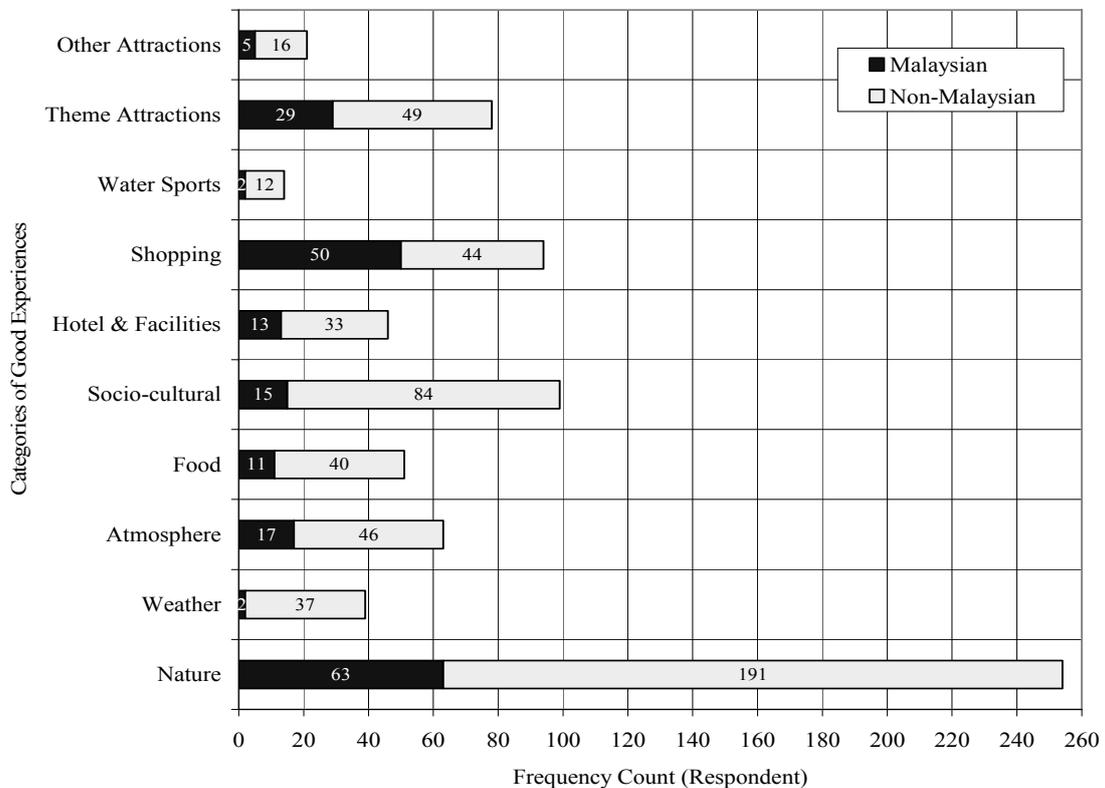


Figure 2: Tourists' Best Experiences in Langkawi

The three best experiences for the tourists in Langkawi were as follows:

- Nature - Langkawi is a well-known ecotourism destination in Malaysia. This category groups all the flora and fauna aspects such as the unique wildlife and also the natural landmarks namely the mangroves, beaches and the coral reefs for scuba diving and snorkelling.
- Socio-cultural - tourists are attracted to the historical places in Langkawi such as the Makam Mahsuri and the Langkawi Cultural Village. In addition, tourists appreciated the warm hospitality and also the friendliness of the local people.
- Shopping – with its duty-free shopping status, Langkawi is able to capture not only the foreign tourists but also the local tourists. Major shopping areas available in Langkawi are in the vicinity of Kuah town, roadside small establishments in Pantai Chenang and shopping outlets within some of the main attractive premises such as the “Oriental Village” near the Langkawi Cable Car.

As for the bad experiences, they were grouped into different categories which included weather, water visibility, waste, language barrier, attractions, food attractions, tourist behaviour, behaviour of locals, hotel service and facilities, night entertainment, shopping, transport issues, public amenities, accessibility (see Figure 3).

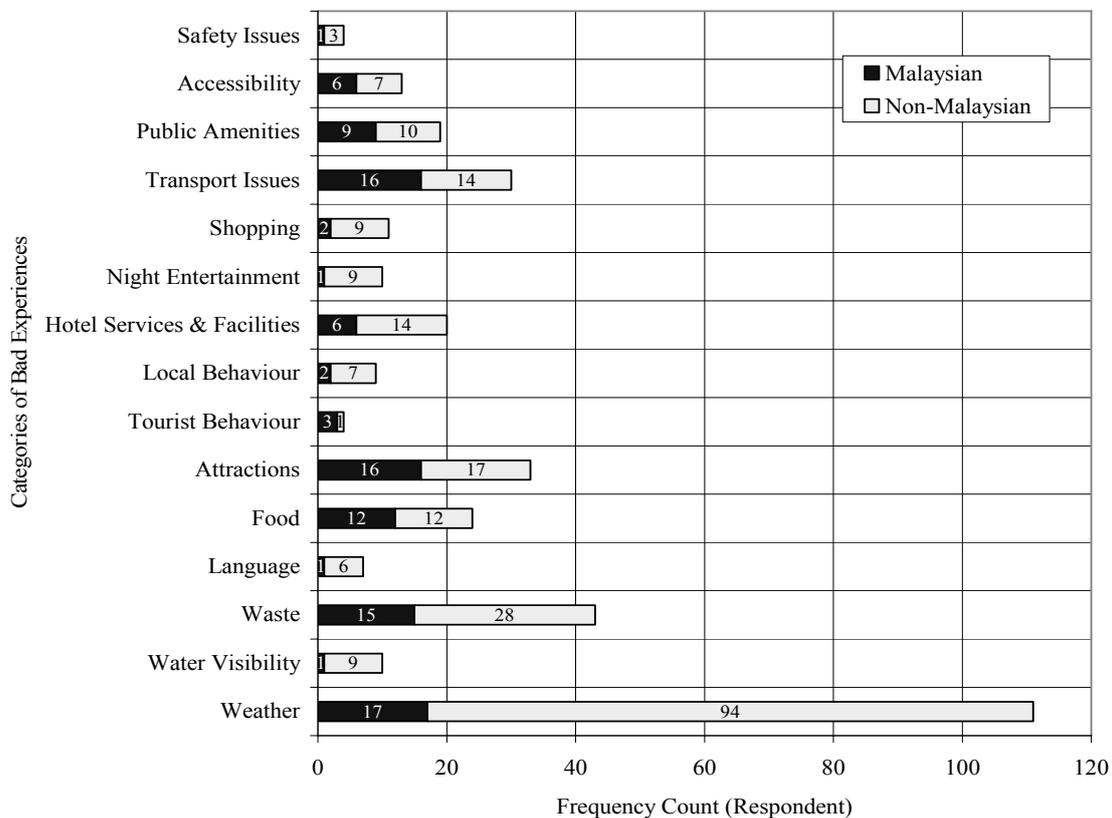


Figure 3: Tourists’ Bad Experiences in Langkawi

The three common bad categories experienced by most tourists in Langkawi were as follows:

- Weather - most of the foreign tourists highlighted the unpredictable tropical weather in Langkawi. The rain and thunderstorm seemed unpredictable as there seemed to be a drastic change in the weather pattern. As a result, tourists were unable to fully enjoy the beaches and all the outdoor activities which included the Langkawi Cable Car and Island Hopping.

- Waste - majority of the respondents said that Langkawi had serious waste and rubbish management problems. Rubbish seemed to be scattered everywhere, particularly in the beach front and in the sea. In some areas, the local council was not clearing the rubbish as frequently as they should. There also seemed to be many illegal dumpsites. Due to the inappropriate ways of managing the waste and the lack of consistent enforcement, much of the drainage in Langkawi was sub-standard, resulting in unwanted stench.
- Attractions - majority of the foreign tourists complained about the overpricing practice in some of the tourist attractions. The foreign tourists were being charged on a higher entrance fee as compared to the locals. The foreign tourists also responded that the lack of management and poor information of these attractions caused dissatisfaction. Apart from that, the tourists felt cheated due to the untruthful marketing practiced by some of the local tour establishments.

Enjoyable Level of Attractions

Table 4 and Figure 4 show the attractions enjoyed by Malaysian and non-Malaysian tourists. Results clearly show that the beaches were the most enjoyed destination for both Malaysians and non-Malaysians. The beaches are the main pull factor which attracts tourists to visit destinations like Langkawi for the purpose of relaxation. Majority of the tourists also enjoyed staying in luxurious resorts as the tourists were looking for high comfort level accommodation and quality services. Home stays and campsites were the least popular attractions among the tourists, especially that of non-Malaysians. This is possible due to the groups of Malaysians who were generally not of the adventurous type and did not feel a need to understand local culture. On the other hand, non-Malaysians sought relaxation and therefore homestays and campsite facilities did not meet their needs.

Table 4: Enjoyable Level of Attractions in General

Attractions Enjoyed	N	Percentage (%)			Missing Value
		Definitely Not Enjoy It	Never Considered It	Definitely Enjoy It	
Beaches	611	3.1	6.1	90.8	
Luxurious resort	610	9.0	20.3	70.5	0.2
Mountains	608	7.9	30.0	61.7	0.5
Cities	611	10.6	35.4	54.0	
Wilderness lodges	608	14.2	40.8	44.5	0.5
Homestays	608	18.5	47.1	33.4	0.5
Campsites	606	29.8	48.3	21.1	0.8

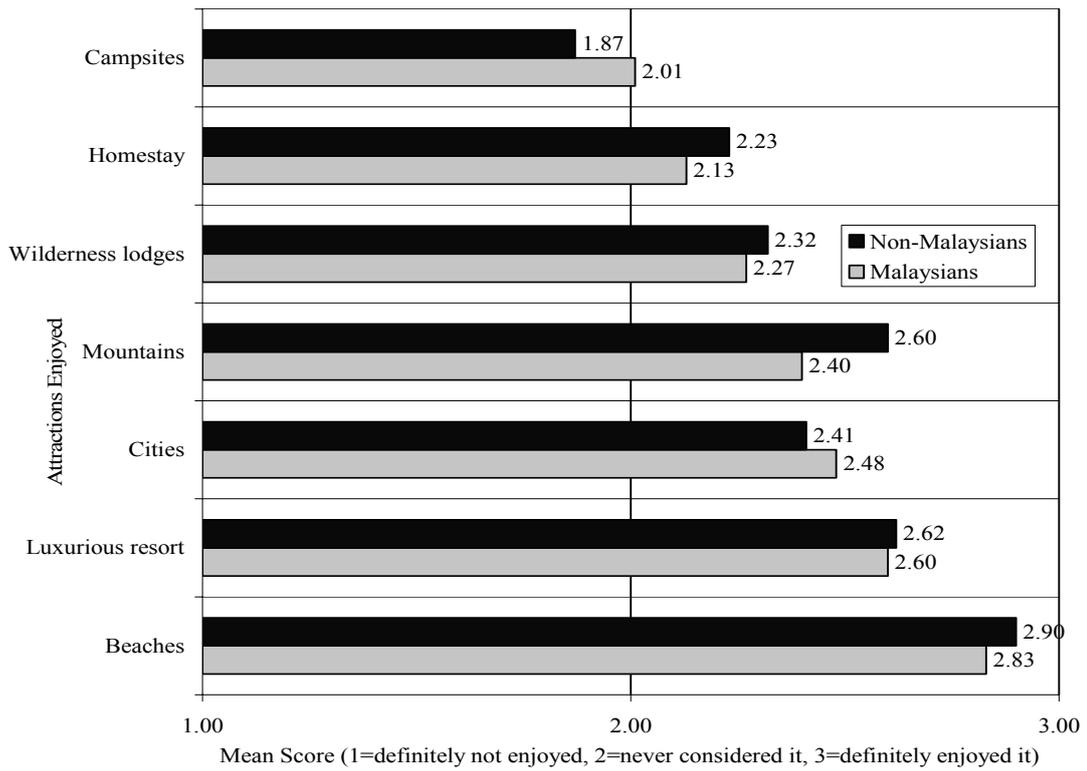


Figure 4: Mean Score of Attractions Enjoyed by Tourists in General

Expectation of Tours

Table 5 and Figure 5 illustrate the important factors tourists expect out of tours. Generally, both the Malaysian and non-Malaysian tourists seek relaxation as their main expectation of tours in destinations like Langkawi. Most respondents wanted to get away from their normal routine life; therefore beach destinations were the most ideal for them. One of the main differences between Malaysians and non-Malaysians was that the former were more price sensitive than the latter. This was due to the lower levels of income earned by Malaysians compared to non-Malaysians such as Europeans, Americans, Japanese and Australians. On the other hand, Malaysians sought the usual attractions rather than going off the beaten track and extreme adventures. However, the non-Malaysians would prefer to rough out in nature in order to avoid crowded places but they were not adventurous enough to participate in extreme adventures.

Table 5: Expectation of Tours in Langkawi

Expectation During Tour	N	Percentage (%)			Missing Value
		Not Important	Never Considered It	Very Important	
Simply relaxing	607	5.1	13.3	81.0	0.7
Price	611	7.4	17.7	75.0	
Learning about local culture	609	7.2	24.9	67.6	0.3
Learning about native wildlife	610	10.1	29.0	60.7	0.2
Shopping	610	23.1	24.1	52.7	0.2

Going to places “off the beaten track”	609	17.0	41.7	40.9	0,3
Meeting other travellers	610	25.7	37.5	36.7	0,2
Extreme adventure activities	607	25.7	29.9	33.7	0.7

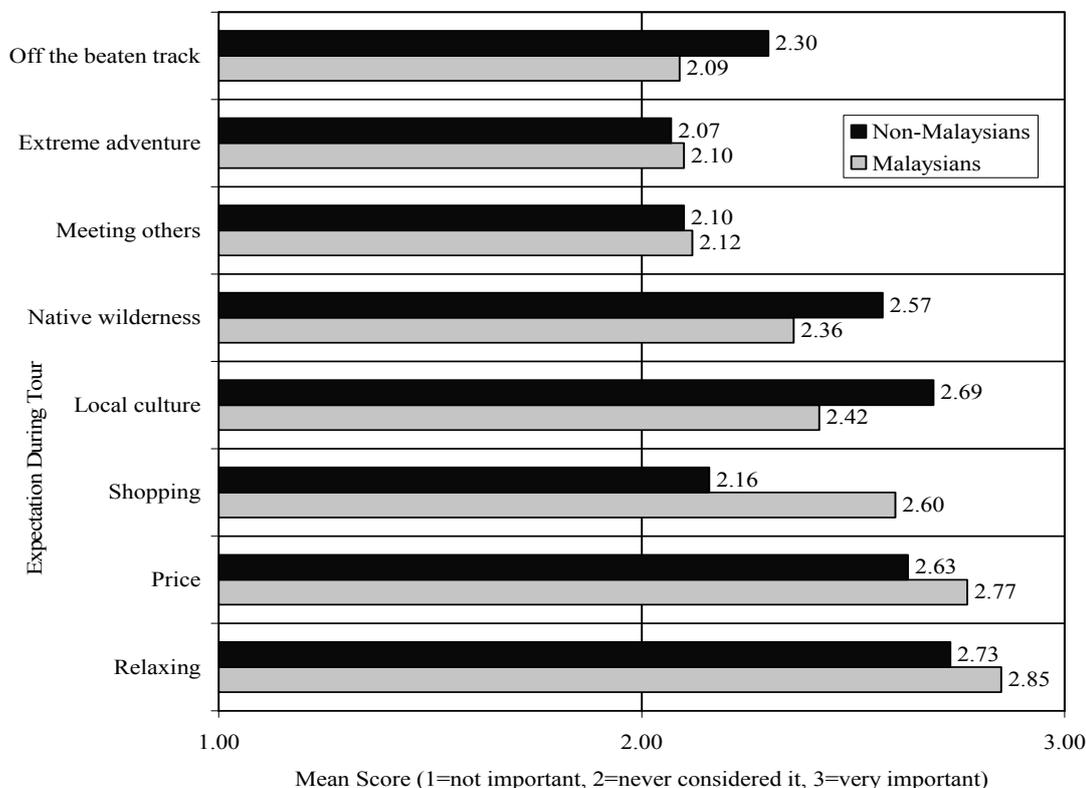


Figure 5: Mean Score of Expectation of Tourists during Tour in General

Expectation of Accommodation

Table 6 and Figure 6 show that both Malaysian and non-Malaysian tourists strongly agreed that cleanliness was the most important criteria when choosing accommodation in any destination. The price factor was still an important factor taken into consideration by Malaysians. Non-Malaysians were more focused on the location and accessibility of the accommodations. In choosing the accommodation, both types of respondents relied more on the recommendations from relatives and friends compared to advertisements shown or published by the hotels. This may be due to the ineffective publicity of destinations like Langkawi as a tourist destination abroad.

Table 6: Tourist Expectation of Accommodation

Expectation of Accommodation	N	Percentage (%)			Missing Value
		Not Important	Never Considered It	Very Important	
Cleanliness	607	2.6	11.5	85.3	0.7
Price	611	5.9	17.3	76.8	
Amenities or facilities	610	6.4	17.8	75.6	0.2
Access or location	610	5.4	19.0	75.5	0.2

Recommendation	611	8.2	18.7	73.2	
Reputation or rating	608	6.7	25.0	67.8	0.5
Advertisement	610	20	32.6	47.3	0.2

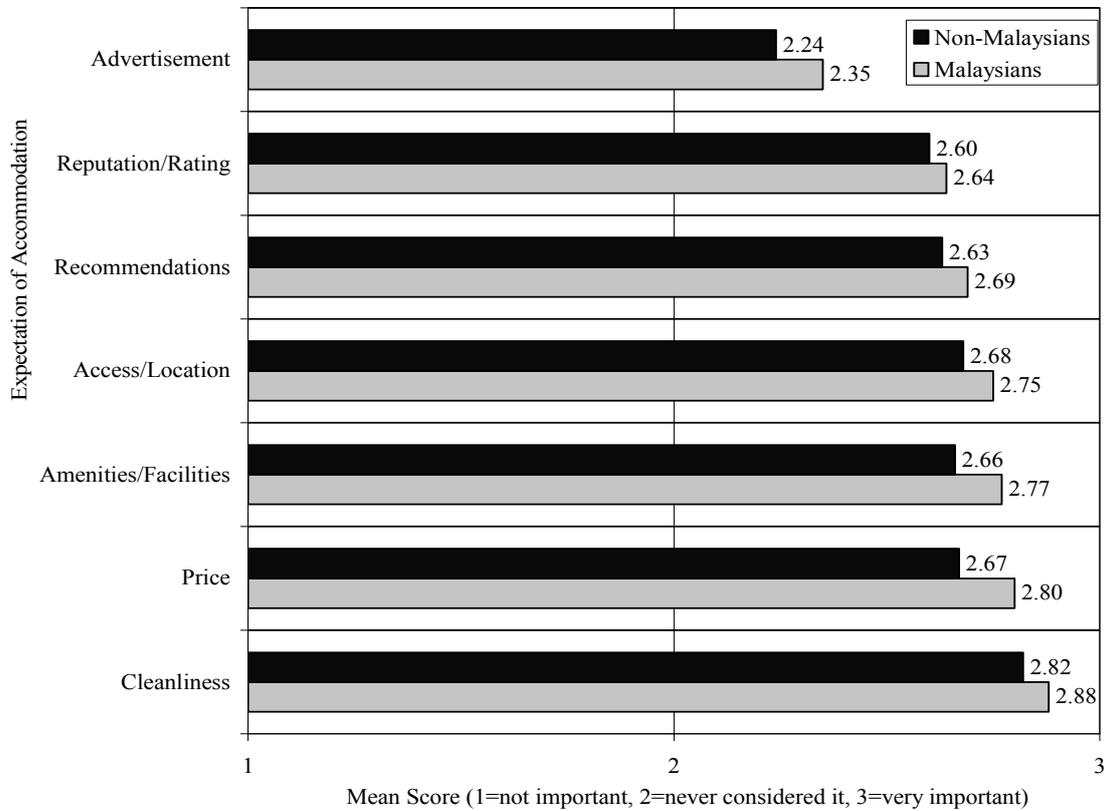


Figure 6: Mean Score of Tourist Expectation of Accommodation

Supporting Responsible Tourism (RT)

The main elements to support RT principles can be categorised under economic, environment and socio-cultural factors. Generally, both Malaysian and non-Malaysian tourists rated highly the importance of practicing RT (see Table 7, Table 8 and Table 9). High mean score with acceptable standard deviation (below 0.75) is captured in the table.

Table 7: Mean Score on the Importance of Various Factors in Supporting RT (Malaysians)
 [1=not important, 2=no preference, 3=very important]

Importance of Socio-cultural practice in supporting RT	
	Malaysians
Promote authentic culture	2.88
Respect local culture	2.84
Teaching local cultures	2.80
Displace local people	2.78

Table 7: Mean Score on the Importance of Various Factors in Supporting RT (Malaysians)
(Contd.)

Importance of Environmental practice in supporting RT	
	Malaysians
Reducing waste	3.00
No impact on natural environment	2.90
Disposing waste properly	2.88
Minimal visitors impact	2.85
Reducing water & energy usage	2.76

Importance of Economical practice in supporting RT	
	Malaysians
Employ & train local staff	2.85
Purchase local goods & services	2.81
Encourage customer spend locally	2.74
Book holidays locally	2.69

Table 8: Mean Score on the Importance of Various Factors in Supporting RT (Non-Malaysians)

[1= not important, 2=no preference, 3=very important]

Importance of Socio-cultural practice in supporting RT	
	Non-Malaysians
Respect local culture	2.84
Displace local people	2.80
Promote authentic culture	2.73
Teaching local cultures	2.69

Importance of Environmental practice in supporting RT	
	Non-Malaysians
Disposing waste properly	2.89
Minimal visitors impact	2.83
Reducing waste	2.81
No impact on natural environment	2.81
Reducing water & energy usage	2.81

Importance of Economical practice in supporting RT	
	Non-Malaysians
Employ & train local staff	2.84
Encourage customer spend locally	2.74
Purchase local goods & services	2.73
Book holidays locally	2.53

For the economic factors, employing and training local staff is the best way to support the local community. Purchasing local goods and services and encouraging customers to spend locally would directly benefit the locals. For the environmental factors, reducing waste appeared to be an important factor for Malaysians and non-Malaysians. Malaysians generally care for the impact on the natural environment caused by tourism development. Socio-cultural factors showed that Malaysian and non-Malaysian tourists had different perceptions whereby the Malaysians perceived that promoting authentic culture was the best way to

support RT. In contrast, non-Malaysians felt that RT practices should not displace local people. However, both types of respondents strongly agreed that to support RT, individuals must respect the local culture.

Generally, the mean score with low standard deviation (2.79) for RT Awareness among the tourists in Langkawi (see Table 10) showed a high level of awareness of concern for the environment, economics and local communities amongst tourists. This is an important consideration as it shows that the majority of tourists will be receptive to support programmes that promote conservation or benefits to local communities.

Table 10: Mean Score on the Importance of Various Factors in Supporting RT (Summary)
[1= not important, 2=no preference, 3=very important]

Importance of Socio-cultural practice in supporting RT	
1. Respect local culture	2.84
2. Promote authentic culture	2.81
3. Displace local people	2.79
4. Teaching local cultures	2.74

Importance of Environmental practice in supporting RT	
1. Reducing waste	2.91
2. Disposing waste properly	2.89
3. No impact on natural environment	2.86
4. Minimal visitors impact	2.84
5. Reducing water & energy usage	2.79

Importance of Economical practice in supporting RT	
1. Employ & train local staff	2.85
2. Purchase local goods & services	2.77
3. Encourage customer spend locally	2.74
4. Book holidays locally	2.61

Malaysians	2.82
Importance of Environmental practice in supporting RT	2.83
Importance of Socio-cultural practice in supporting RT	2.85
Importance of Economical practice in supporting RT	2.77

Non-Malaysians	2.76
Importance of Environmental practice in supporting RT	2.82
Importance of Socio-cultural practice in supporting RT	2.77
Importance of Economical practice in supporting RT	2.71
GENERAL MEAN SCORE	2.79

On the whole, the study also showed that the majority of the respondents would support RT if given an option to do so (67%) as indicated in Figure 7. In principle, most tourists understand the importance of practicing RT although there are no specific indications of RT tour operators available in Malaysia. Only 23% of them would exclusively support RT while 10% of the respondents felt that this would not affect their choices made for travelling. Positive differentiation (e.g. eco-labels) could provide a market-driven incentive for sustainable tourism.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, it has been encouraging to see the application of the principles and good practices of ecotourism to more mainstream sectors of the tourism industry (Honey, 2008). Similarly in Malaysia, the tourism industry is evolving and has become one of the fastest growing and one of the most important industries especially over the past several decades. All the tourism stakeholders in Malaysia have to realise that uncontrolled development at the expense of the natural resources under the name of tourism development will kill the goose that is laying the golden eggs. Development that does not meet the demands of the present tourists and which does not protect and enhance opportunity for the future generations must be checked. RT is a concept of developing quality travelling experience through preserving the local environment and culture. A successful RT implementation helps to boost a country's business growth and creates opportunities for local communities.

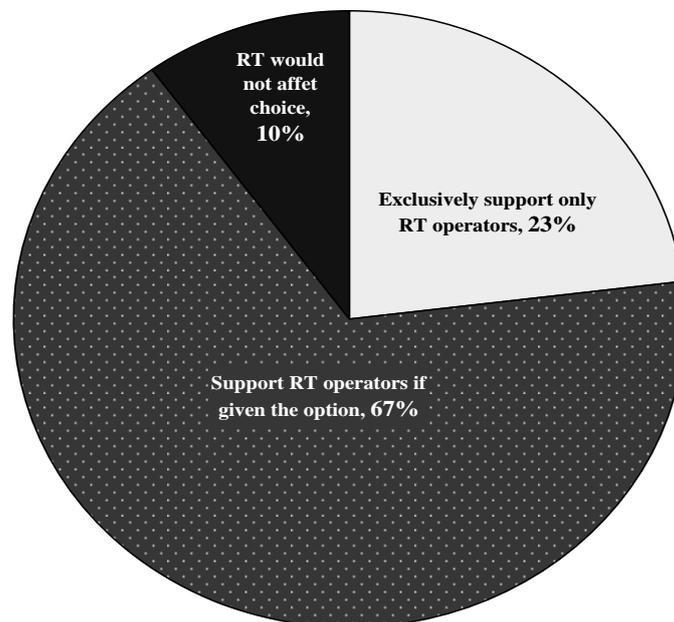


Figure 7: Level of Supporting RT

The research studied the tourists' profile, expectations and motivations for visiting Langkawi and the impact of RT on their decisions. The results of this research showed that the main purpose for tourists visiting Langkawi was to have a simply relaxing holiday. Among all the tourists, more than half of them were of the opinion that cleanliness and accommodation prices were the main considerations for their travelling. They placed more importance on valuable and reasonably clean resorts. The mouth-watering nature and beaches of Langkawi have seduced tourists from around the world, and its beautiful beaches and duty-free shopping have boosted the island's economy and tourism industry.

The fast development of tourism in Langkawi, hotels and resort constructions, and the increasing population in Langkawi today may bring negative impact to Langkawi in the future if the principles of RT are not adopted. Through the research, we can conclude that most tourists will avoid irresponsible tourism activities which are provided by the tour operators, resorts and hotel, and tourism agents. RT is still not commonly practised in Langkawi by both local communities and tourists, especially the westerners. However, there is a good indication that the majority of tourists will support RT if there is an option given to them. Conversely, some of the tourists may not avoid irresponsible tourism although they

understand the importance of the economy, socio-cultural elements and the environmental factors.

What Langkawi needs to focus on is finding solutions and support to solve the environmental problems on the island. All the good practices already being practised on the island must be highlighted. Incentives can be given to low-star and budget-end of the operators to reach minimum RT standards of operation. With these standards in place, Langkawi can use its key selling points, namely its natural environment (i.e. the beaches, the wildlife, the forest and the reefs) and the local people (the real character of Langkawi) to further increase the number of responsible tourists to the destination.

In order to practise RT effectively, the government, non-government and private sectors in the tourism industry should cooperate to deliver RT to the public. Last but not least, RT should be emphasised and be carried out in all aspects of the tourism industry in order to have 'a better tourism for tomorrow'. It is envisaged that this preliminary study will provide guidance to tourism operators and local authorities on the sustainability issues in Langkawi. The research output will guide tourism development in Langkawi using the "consumer" as the incentive for change towards RT.

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