

TOURIST PERCEPTION TOWARDS RECREATION CENTRE IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: Recreation centre become one of the centres for a family to bring their children for recreation and leisure activity. Moreover, the recreation centre is the place for education, research, and awareness to the public. The main objective of this study is to investigate factors that relate to tourist perception in their reference to their interest, expectations, satisfaction, and a general understanding of the recreation centre. The antecedent factors are awareness of the surrounding environment, visitor experiences, and destination image. This research using a quantitative method via a survey questionnaire and a domestic tourist as a sample. A sample is consist of 384 respondent of domestic tourists who visited the recreation centre in Malaysia. This survey has been done in Zoo Negara, Aquaria KLCC, and FRIM, Kepong. The results show the majority of respondents are female, age below 26 years old, single, obtained higher education, working, and had an income below RM1000. The respondents are mostly from Selangor and their purpose of visit to the recreation centre is for leisure and recreation. The major source of information to visit the recreation centre was from the internet. There were have a significant relationship between an antecedent factor with tourist perception towards the recreation centre in Malaysia. The result of this study will help marketers and management of recreation centres to understand the perceptions of their future visitors. Based on the study, it is should be used as an initial benchmark for the future study, however, they may execute a depth analysis on the tourism that related to the recreation centre in Malaysia.

Keywords: Tourist perception, recreation centre, environmental awareness, visitor experiences, destination image

Introduction

The recreation centre has become one of the major attractions for the local community and visitors alike. Dalgarn (2001) mentioned that the recreation centre is more than just a place to exercise, the recreation centre also serves as a venue for education to develop positive self-esteem, enhance social relationships, and improve interpersonal skills. The recreation centre provides a unique site for programs and activities aimed at meeting the needs, interests, and expectations of a diverse community. According to Collins (2018), the recreation centre is a facility that opens to the public for leisure and recreation activities such as amusement parks, aquaria, zoo, and national parks. Quite a number of the recreation centre establishments in the country have existed for a long time ago. For example, according to Wikipedia (2020), the

oldest zoo in Malaysia and Asia is Zoo Johor, Johor Bahru was established in 1928 by the late Johor King, Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Abu Bakar and opened to the public on 1962. Meanwhile, Zoo Taiping also known as Zoo Taiping and Night Safari were established in 1961, it could be considered as one of the oldest zoos in Malaysia (Wijnen, 2001) together with the Zoo Negara that was opened to the public in 1962 (Mansor, 2019). Besides, Taman Negara in Pahang is the oldest national park in Malaysia that established in 1938 and it was the largest national park in Malaysia (Boy, 2017). Besides, the first aquarium centre is Aquarium Tunku Abdul Rahman (AquaTAR) or also known as Penang Aquarium that located in Gelugor, Penang was established on 1968 (Tye's, 2005) and the first theme park in Malaysia is Miniature Land or known as Mimaland that located in Gombak, Selangor was opened to the public on

1971 but it was closed to the public on May 1994 after several accidents happened (Wikipedia, 2019). The recreation centre can be divided into two main areas namely outdoor and indoor. Recreation centre can be divided into two main areas namely outdoor and indoor.

According to Anuar and Muhamadan (2018), public parks are considered as one of the outdoor recreation centres which include botanical gardens, urban forest, and other public parks for recreational purposes. These areas fall under the supervision of local authorities, such as national parks, district parks, urban parks, local parks, and neighbourhood parks. City Hall Kuala Lumpur (2018) reported although there are neighbourhood and local parks, children's playgrounds, soccer fields, public swimming pools, and tennis courts in all strategic zones, they are not distributed evenly according to population distribution. In many cases, community facilities are adequately provided but underutilized. This situation has arisen due to inadequate maintenance, vandalism, and poor accessibility and has particularly affected some children's playgrounds, soccer fields, and sports facilities. And some existing recreational venues serve the community as a whole but do not specifically cater to the needs of young people.

The indoor recreation centre is one of the destinations for tourists to visit for recreation and leisure activity. Moreover, the recreation centre is the place for leisure, education, research, and awareness to the public. Indoor recreation centre such as Aquaria KLCC (an aquarium built inside a building) is animal-based theme parks and other knowledge-based theme parks such as Petrosains and Kidzania are the centre for leisure and entertainment activities. However, recreation centre management has to improve the facilities and strengthen security for tourists. The management of the recreation centre also needs to improve its environment to avoid unintended consequences for tourists. Finally, a certain recreation centre needs to improve its capacity area to avoid the congestion of visitors.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate tourist perceptions of the recreation centre in Malaysia. This study was conducted to find out the perception of visitors who visited the recreation centre and to provide insights into the visitor's knowledge of what recreation centre is currently doing for conservation in Malaysia. In so doing, three antecedent factors are hypothetically related to tourist perceptions i.e. environmental awareness, tourist experience, and destination image. The number of visitors who came to Zoo Negara in 2015 is around 535,000 while in 2014 is 780,000 (Naim, 2016) and it is because of an environmental problem that happened during that year which is due to the weather condition in Malaysia. According to that, related institutions or agencies need to give awareness to visitors about conservation activities and programs to attract them to visit the recreation centre. Besides, with the public spending looking at exhibits, complex designs could speak volumes to visitors who may not read signage, making the part of the exhibit of the educational landscape (Moss & Esson, 2010). This was related to visitor's perceptions, environmental awareness, experience, and destination image of recreation centres that will be giving an impact to the numbers of the visitors who visited the recreation centre.

Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting motivations into a meaningful and rational representation (Gnanapala, 2015). When consuming products and services, tourists compare the actual situation with their buying expectations. Tourists perceived travel experience through their five senses and their perceptions may be different from one another. Perceptions of tourism destinations have been researched for many years to help vacation areas improve their image to attract more tourists (Hugo & Nyaupane, 2016). Perceptions of destinations by travelers are so important in the destination selection process as it can affect the viability of the destination (Pike *et al.*, 2018). One of the choices of the major destination for travellers is the recreation centre.

Environmental awareness is a concept that links tourism to the sustainability of travel offerings of natural features, physical attributes, management initiatives, and/or governance policies that influence environmental conservation and protection of ecological and cultural environments (McNicol & Rettie, 2018). Tourists who aware of their responsibility towards keeping the environment ecologically clean and safe will eventually increase the sustainability of the environment. This will associate with the tourist experience as well.

Marques, Mohsin, and Lengler (2018) suggested that perceptions and previous travel experiences influence travel motives to a destination. Hence, assessing perceptions about destinations, touristic attractions/activities, trends, and specific interests of traveller is of both factual and commercial benefits. Theoretically, there have been explorations of the nature of tourist experience of landscape, its relationship with an authentic experience, the identity of particular locations is promoted and constructed through tourism, and issues of destination images (Fairweather & Swaffield, 2002).

It is very essential to determine the destination image while taking decisions for the strategic marketing of tourism destinations (Rajesh, 2013). Valek and Williams (2018) stated that destination image has been extensively studied and researchers have found that image influences tourists' choice and intent to visit a destination. In other words, the destination image is as important as tangible destination features.

Materials and Methods

Research Method

A quantitative method was adopted to investigate the tourist perception of the recreation centre. Quantitative research is employed strategies of inquiry such as experimental and surveys and collect data on predetermined instruments that provide statistical data (Creswell, 2014). The data collection instrument was selected

based on these conditions for this study which is a questionnaire. In this research, descriptive statistic used to test characteristics of demographic that have chosen such as gender, religious, marital status, educational level, income status, the purpose of visit and source of information as well as respondent's purpose of visit and source of information that respondent's got to visit the recreation centre. Besides, the inferential statistic used to describe the relationship between variables. Correlation test is a test to measure the relationship between two variables and to study the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables which is the Pearson method is used to study the relationship between tourist perception, environmental awareness, destination image, and experience.

A survey was used as the data collection method with a simple random sample of 384 domestic tourist's are selected as participants in the study. This study survey for measuring the perception of tourists who visit the recreation centre was identified and the respondents are required to select the level of agreement with perception using a 5 Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" which is '1-5". The questionnaire was adapted from a previous study titled "Manila Zoological & Botanical Garden: An Assessment of Facilities and Services", (Acio *et al.*, 2015) and "Visit from Action: How Zoo Visitor Characteristics Influence Environmentally Responsible Behavior" (Joseph, 2008). The dependent and independent variables which are tourist perception, environmental awareness, destination image, and experience were taken from the questionnaire form and the structure of the questionnaire was also modified according to the relevance of the study.

This study is used one set questionnaire that contains 47 items and consist of three sections which are Section A, Section B, and Section C. Section A is demographic information of respondent, Section B is Tourist Perception towards Recreation Centre and Section C contains 3 part of questions which is environmental

awareness, experience, and destination image. Demographic factors such as the age of visitors who visited the recreation centre are important factors as they can also influence the tourist's perception of the recreation centre. According to Ros, *et al.* (2012), tourists who visited FELDA Residence Hot Springs, Sungai Klah comprised of tourists from the middle ages of 20 to 40 years and Kaylene *et al.* (2010) reported that this generation gives greater importance in maintaining a balance of work and always looking for a balance between their families, lives, and jobs. Therefore, they will not sacrifice their free time for the weekend as it is not an option to be considered by them because the weekend is their best time to do activities with family and very strict demand shown when they are a problem affecting their lives. According to that, this generation will give a contribution to the recreation centre in Malaysia by visiting and spend time with families during their free time also they want to maintain their lifestyles.

In this study, the 384 random samples of domestic tourists who visited three (3) recreation centres in Malaysia which is Zoo Negara, Aquaria KLCC, and FRIM, Kepong were the respondents for this study. A complete set of elements which is for persons or object that possess some common characteristics defined by sampling criteria established by the researcher. The target population for this study defined to include the domestic tourist who visits the recreation centre in Malaysia, while the accessible population is the tourist who visited Zoo Negara, Aquaria KLCC, and FRIM.

Results and Discussion

384 questionnaires were distributed to 3 recreation centres, 200 respondents from Zoo Negara, 80 respondents from Aquaria KLCC, 50 respondents are visitors at Forest Research Institutes (FRIM) while the rest were covered via the google form method that is distributed through media social sites. A sample profile indicates that out of the 150 respondents from Selangor whose average age was below 26 years old (48.4%), female (71.9%) and religious

was Islam (83.1%). The finding indicates that the respondents mostly have a degree (40.4%) and the majority was single (50.8%). Their employment status is mostly working (59.6%) and their total income was below RM1000 (37.5%). The respondent's purpose of the visit is mostly for leisure and recreation (74.7%) and the internet is the majority for the source of information which is 54.9% respondents. Table 1 shows the respondent's residential table and Table 2 is the respondent demographic.

Table 1: Respondent's Residential (n=384)

| Residential | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Sabah | 9 | 2.3 |
| Sarawak | 6 | 1.6 |
| Johor | 24 | 6.2 |
| Melaka | 17 | 4.4 |
| Negeri Sembilan | 16 | 4.2 |
| Selangor | 150 | 39.1 |
| Kuala Lumpur | 37 | 9.6 |
| Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya | 1 | 0.3 |
| Pahang | 32 | 8.3 |
| Terengganu | 21 | 5.5 |
| Kelantan | 15 | 3.9 |
| Perlis | 1 | 0.3 |
| Kedah | 15 | 3.9 |
| Pulau Pinang | 12 | 3.1 |
| Perak | 28 | 7.3 |

Table 2: Respondent Demographic (n=384)

| Demographic | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Gender: | | |
| Male | 108 | 28.1 |
| Female | 276 | 71.9 |
| Religious: | | |
| Islam | 319 | 83.1 |
| Buddha | 26 | 6.8 |
| Hindu | 22 | 5.7 |
| Christian | 14 | 3.6 |
| Others | 3 | 0.8 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----|------|---|-----|------|
| Age: | | | Seeing animals | 130 | 33.9 |
| Below 26 years old | 186 | 48.4 | Entertainment | 105 | 27.3 |
| 27-47 years old | 176 | 45.8 | Others | | |
| 48-71 years old | 22 | 5.7 | - Bring childrens | 1 | 0.3 |
| Marital Status: | | | - Bring guest | 1 | 0.3 |
| Single | 195 | 50.8 | - Honeymoon | 1 | 0.3 |
| Married | 182 | 47.4 | - Interest to travel | 1 | 0.3 |
| Widow/Widower | 6 | 1.6 | - Spent time with family | 2 | 0.5 |
| Widow | 1 | 0.3 | - Tadabbur alam | 1 | 0.3 |
| Level of Education: | | | - Team building | 5 | 1.3 |
| Degree | 155 | 40.4 | - To teach childrens | 1 | 0.3 |
| Certificate/Diploma | 138 | 35.9 | - Volunteer | 3 | 0.8 |
| Secondary School | 66 | 17.2 | - Volunteer programmes | 2 | 0.5 |
| Master | 12 | 3.1 | Source of information | | |
| Ph.D. | 7 | 1.8 | Internet | 211 | 54.9 |
| Primary School | 6 | 1.6 | Friends and relatives | 207 | 53.9 |
| Employment Status: | | | Mass media | 164 | 42.7 |
| Working | 229 | 59.6 | Published sources | 65 | 16.9 |
| Student | 107 | 27.9 | Others | | |
| Self-employed | 29 | 7.6 | - Ticked | 1 | 0.3 |
| Housewife | 9 | 2.3 | - Have visited Aquaria KLCC in the past | 1 | 0.3 |
| Retiree | 8 | 2.1 | - Long-time didn't visit the Zoo | 1 | 0.3 |
| Not working | 2 | 0.5 | - Near to the house | 1 | 0.3 |
| Income: | | | - Nearby home | 1 | 0.3 |
| Below RM1000 | 144 | 37.5 | - Previous experience | 1 | 0.3 |
| RM1001-2000 | 89 | 23.2 | | | |
| RM2001-3000 | 82 | 21.4 | | | |
| Over RM3001 | 69 | 18.0 | | | |
| Purpose of visit | | | | | |
| Leisure and recreation | 287 | 74.7 | | | |
| Nature education | 84 | 21.9 | | | |

Tourist Perception Level towards Recreation Centre in Malaysia based on Selected Demographic Factor

i. Differences between Tourist Perception Level based on Selected Demographic Factor

Table 3: Differences between Tourist Perception Level based on selected Demographic Factor

| Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | df | t value | Sig. (P) |
|--------|-----|-------|----------------|-----|---------|----------|
| Male | 108 | 3.709 | 0.656 | 382 | -0.932 | 0.936 |
| Female | 276 | 3.776 | 0.627 | | | |

Based on table 3 above, there is t value = -0.932 and Sig=0.936 where Sig value > 0.05. This shows there is no differences significant between gender factor and tourist perception level. In conclusion, the results show that there are no differences in tourist perception levels

between male and female respondents who visit the recreation centre. Results analysis is not supporting hypothesis H¹ that describes there is a difference between tourist perception level towards recreation centre in Malaysia based on demographic factors.

ii. Relationship between Environmental Awareness and Tourist Perception

Table 4: Relationship Between Environmental Awareness and Tourist Perception

| | | Environmental awareness | Tourist perception |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Environmental awareness | Pearson Correlation | .544** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2 -tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 384 | 384 |
| Tourist Perception | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .544** |
| | Sig. (2 -tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 384 | 384 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The table above shows that the test results that Pearson’s correlation value (r) is 0.544, and the p-value is <0.01. The result indicates

is moderate, there is a significant relationship towards environmental awareness and tourist perception (r=0.544, p<0.01), H² is accepted.

iii. Relationship between Experiences and Tourist Perception

Table 5: Relationship Between Experiences and Tourist Perception

| | | Experiences | Tourist Perception |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Experiences | Pearson Correlation | .653** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2 -tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 384 | 384 |
| Tourist Perception | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .653** |
| | Sig. (2 -tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 384 | 384 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The table above shows the Pearson correlation value (r) is 0.653 and the p -value is <0.01 . The result shown is moderate which is there is a

significant relationship towards experiences and tourist perception ($r=0.653$, $p<0.01$). The hypothesis in H^3 is accepted.

iv. Relationship between Destination Image and Tourist Perception

Table 6: Relationship Between Experiences and Tourist Perception

| | | Destination Image | Tourist Perception |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Destination Image | Pearson Correlation | .653** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2 -tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 384 | 384 |
| Tourist Perception | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .653** |
| | Sig. (2 -tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 384 | 384 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

On the table above shows, the Pearson's correlation value (r) is 0.653 while p -value is <0.01 . The result indicates is moderates and there is a significant relationship towards destination image and tourist perception ($r=0.653$, $p=<0.01$). The hypothesis for H^4 is accepted.

Antecedent Factors that have a Significant Relationship with Tourist Perception towards Recreation Centre

The secondary objectives are to investigate antecedent factors that have a significant relationship with tourist perception towards recreation centre following by the variables selected which is environmental awareness, experiences, and destination image.

i) Relationship between Environmental Awareness and Tourist Perception

There is have a significant relationship between environmental awareness and tourist perception ($r=0.544$, $p<0.01$). As a result, environmental awareness can affect tourist perception about safety, attractions, and destination seasonality (Martin, 2005). According to Kempton, Booster, & Hartley (1995), studies show that higher environmental awareness will show a high perception of tourist to the environment.

ii) Relationship between Experiences and Tourist Perception

There is a significant relationship between experiences and tourist perception ($r=0.653$, $p<0.01$). According to Chheang (2011), assessed the perception and experience of tourists was positive and it was based on the facilities and services provided by a destination. Tourist perception is important in shaping experiences as it involves all the active processes aimed at creating rather than recording reality (Curry, Meyer, & McKinney, 2006).

iii) Relationship between Destination Image and Tourist Perception

There is a significant relationship between destination image and tourist perception ($r=0.653$, $p=<0.01$). According to Echtner and Ritchie (2003), the destination image is a major marketing tool that can have a strong influence on tourists' perceptions about a destination. Therefore, this study investigated tourist perception towards recreation centre management, facility, and service as a man-made recreation centre of the tourism destination. First, recreation centre managers need to be improving the facilities and strengthen security for tourists also suitable exhibition space for animals. Next, the management of recreation

centres needs to improve their environment to avoid unintended consequences for tourists. Besides, coordinate entrance fees according to the services provided such as existing facilities and maintenance have been made. Moreover, management must conduct a program, especially for zookeepers, and volunteer to improve their skills in communication and how to handle the animals. Finally, certain recreation centres management needs to improve their capacity area to avoid the congestion of visitors coming to that place at one time.

Conclusion

This research had elaborated on the discussion of overall findings on tourist perception towards the recreation centre in Malaysia. From the findings, we will know the tourist perception level towards recreation centres in Malaysia based on Demographic factors in Malaysia and antecedent factors that have a significant relationship with tourist perception towards recreation centre in Malaysia which is environmental awareness, experiences, and destination image.

The demographic factor is important between tourist perception to know which types of gender are always visiting the recreation centre in Malaysia. Through this study, different gender will give implications for statistics on the number of tourists arriving at a recreation centre. From this study, it is shown that female is the highest number of respondents visiting the recreation centre while the male is the lowest gender visiting the recreation centre.

As the recreation centre is one of the tourist destinations for the public, the importance of tourist perceptions of recreation centres to improve the quality of service provided by the management. From the result analysis, tourist perception mean is the highest value and supported by the result. Tourist will be giving their perception and giving implications to the management in the recreation centre to improving the services. Tourists should give chances to the management to solve the problem

without interference from other parties. This study, it is proving that tourist perception has an influence on the management in the recreation centre. Management in the recreation centre will know what they should improve in their services, activities, exhibition, entertainment, and admission fees because it will increase the number of tourists who visit the recreation centre in the future.

Environmental awareness is one of the important because it will be giving awareness to the tourist, especially in nature and ecotourism. Environmental awareness is to influence tourism activities for tourists who come to the recreation centre. Tourists or visitors should know about environmental awareness to improving their knowledge and awareness about environmental especially in tourism that will be giving implication to the recreation centre such as it will increase the number of tourists visiting the recreation centre. Moreover, the recreation centre should create more programs and activities that involve the environment in creating more awareness for tourists. Other than that, tourists should be more involved in activities organized by the recreation centre in creating more awareness.

Experiences are the behaviour that gives memorable to the tourist and giving influenced to the tourist or visitors who come in recreation centre where the service and activities provide by management will be giving influenced to them who come to the recreation centre. Management should take action to improve the quality of services and activities providers to attract more tourists or visitors to come to the recreation centre. Besides, agencies related such as the Ministry of Tourism, Art, and Culture (MOTAC) should provide a contribution to the recreation centre in improving service quality. Lastly, tourists and visitors can give ideas to the management in the recreation centre which is to provide more activities to give better memorable experiences and intention to revisit the recreation centre.

Destination image is the image for their place to attract more tourist to come to the recreation

centre and destination image is important to management in the recreation centre. It is because giving the implication to tourist who visits the recreation centre which is giving the repeaters tourist that have visited the recreation centre before. This will be giving improvement to the quality of facilities maintenance in the recreation centre that will be giving implication to the management. The quality of destination image such as the maintenance of facilities, parking and more need to improve in future to get more tourist to come to the recreation centre.

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