

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**CRITERIA FOR ECOTOURISM
CERTIFICATION IN PENINSULAR
MALAYSIA**

MELLISSA ROBAT

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is one of the largest industry and the fastest growing business in the world which can bring huge benefits such as job opportunities, improvements to the infrastructure of the country and preserve natural resources but it has to be able to balance with the disadvantages that ecotourism brings. Due to this fact, an ecotourism certification needs to be implementing to assist in the sustainable management of ecotourism. This certification can help to improve environmental performance as well as preserving natural resources but most importantly can help to distinguish genuine ecotourism provider. The purpose of this study is to identify sustainability of ecotourism criteria and indicators to determine sustainable ecotourism development in Peninsular Malaysia. This was an attempt to develop a guideline for ecotourism certification as a sustainability measurement for the evaluation of ecotourism. The study addresses concentrating on three sections; analyses of travel agency's' background and their visitation; travel agency's understanding on ecotourism and certification; and their practices of ecotourism. A screening survey is the first round of survey to identify the actual ecotourism provider which the statistic is given by Ministry of Tourism before proceed to next round of evaluation. After screening a total of 204 travel agencies are identified as truly ecotourism provider and willing to participate to the next round of the survey. A questionnaire survey is used to gather the primary data which divided into three parts; demographic, perception on ecotourism, and ecotourism practice. The major question will be on ecotourism practice which is design based on existing criteria and indicators that used world widely in the sustainable tourism. The results found that most of travel agencies were only partially knowledgeable about the concept of sustainable tourism. It is also found that travel agency has lacking of information and the important to implement the ecotourism certification. Thus, it is important to have ecotourism certification as a guideline in providing ecotourism. This certification can help to control ecotourism sustainability and prevent 'green-washing'.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Ecotourism has been growing rapidly than the other tourism industry as a whole which also one of the largest industry that act as a major economic contributor in each country. Ecotourism is known as a tourism industry activity which based on nature or focus around environment, where tourism activity is developed by most Western country such as Britain, France, United State of America and South Africa. The concept of ecotourism is introduced to develop nature sites as a place for tourism attraction which, at the same time aims to preserve the ecosystem of the place. Theoretically, ecotourism is the alternative for mass tourism that endorses the goal of ecosystem symbiosis through integration of natural resources, environmental education and sustainable management (Bender, 2008).

In Malaysian context, ecotourism is defined as, 'travel and visitation that is environmentally responsible to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (including any accompanying cultural features; both past and present), promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations' (National Ecotourism Plan, 1996).

The tourism industry in Malaysia is rapidly growing until it becomes the second most important industry in generating the country's economy (Mohamed, 2002). In addition, tourism industry also contributes as the second largest foreign currency exchange in Malaysia based on Tourism Malaysia board on 2011. As stated by Borneo Post (2012), Malaysia recorded 24.7 million tourist arrivals in 2011, with tourism receipts climbing to RM58.3 billion, a remarkable notch over the previous years. One of the tourism sectors that generates influx of tourists is ecotourism sector, which has contributed approximately RM655 million per year (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2002) Malaysia. Besides, Vasanth (2005) also noted that ecotourism is the fastest growing tourism industry that helps generate Malaysia economy.

However, the growth of ecotourism development in Malaysia may affect the environment and social sector due to the lack of sensitivities on management and