

Profile and Characteristics of the Visits of International Visitors to the Kilim Karst Geoforest Park, Langkawi

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Abstract: Kilim Karst Geoforest Park (KKGPP) offers rural tourism attractions to visitors from various countries in the world. The information collected from visitors to the park allows categorization to be done on visitors, and such information can be utilized for marketing purposes. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to identify the profile and the characteristics of visits by international visitors. Structured questionnaire and face-to-face data collection method were employed to obtain primary data from 330 international visitors. The raw data is presented in a simpler form using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The findings suggest that majority of the respondents have high level of education, they earn less than RM 6,000 per month, they mainly originate from the European continent, and they work in the private sector. Next, 66% of the respondents did not use any tour package either from home or at Langkawi. The findings would be useful for the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) in marketing related planning.

Key words: Geoforest park, Langkawi, rural tourism, visitor characteristics, visitor profile

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Introduction

A geoforest park is a special conservation area within a Permanent Reserve Forest (PRF) with supreme geological and biological resources. Sustainability is a major concern in multi-disciplinary research in this area. One objective is to enrich community awareness towards the natural integration of various forest resources ((Shaharuddin, Komoo & Mohd Shafee, 2004). On 1 June 2007, the Langkawi Island was declared as the 52nd Global Network Geopark member by the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organizations (UNESCO) in 2007; the first in Southeast Asia (Othman & Rosli, 2011). The three geoparks in Langkawi are the Kilim Karst, Dayang Bunting Marble, and the Matchinchang Cambrian Geoforest Parks. Kilim Karst Geoforest Park (KKGPP) located in the north of Langkawi Island is surrounded by protected mangrove swamp with a length of 100sq km.

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The KKGK is situated at the oldest limestone area in the country. It consists of several elongated hills and islands with narrow valleys in between. The valleys are home to one of the best and unique limestone mangrove forest in the world. The availability of mangrove swamps and forest, narrow valleys, tunnels, variety of limestone caves, wildlife, etc are some of the tourism attractions there. Examples of wildlife in the park are belly sea eagles, brahminy kite eagles, brown winged kingfisher, monkeys, monitor lizards, swimming macaque, etc. Next, in the fish cage, there are fish, eels, crabs, mantis prawn, stingrays, and sea bass. The physical resources available at the park are boats, the Kilim jetty, a Surau and small restaurants. Rural tourism development in Kilim began since the formation of a cooperative named Koperasi Komuniti Kampung Kilim Langkawi Berhad in 2007 (Utusan Malaysia, 2012). The cooperative together with 53 members who were mostly fishermen is now managing 80 tourist boats for mangrove tours in the park (Utusan Malaysia, 2012).

Table 1 shows an increase in visitor arrivals, from 42,375 in 2006 to 273,450 in 2012. Nonetheless, the accuracy of the data shown in the table is questionable because the visitor arrivals data was only properly recorded beginning from 2011 (S. Siti, personal communication, March 29, 2012). Hence, since specific information on the number of international visitor arrivals to the park from 2006 to 2010 is unknown, therefore, based on the proportion in 2011 and 2012, an assumption is made that they constitute 50% of the total visitor arrivals recorded as shown in Table 2.

Problem Statement

Referring to Table 2, the increasing number of international arrivals to the park from 21,188 in 2006 to 126,982 in 2012 (about 83.3% increase) means that it is necessary to identify the profile and characteristics of visits of international visitors to the park. The purpose is to facilitate marketing planning. Limited studies were conducted on identifying profile and the characteristics of visits of international visitors to KKGK. Therefore, the study bridges the gap in terms of the lack of knowledge on the socio-demographic and characteristics of visits of international visitors to the park.

Literature Review

Profiling of consumers in an academic research is important to identify what drives the consumers' behavior and to forecast their travel behavior (Jafar & Badaruddin, 2011). The

Table 1. Total visitor arrivals to the KKGK from (2006-2012)

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Visitors	42,375	78,145	167,142	115,660	117,931	321,325	273,450

Source: Komuniti Kampung Kilim Langkawi Berhad (2013)

Table 2. International visitor arrivals to the KKGK from (2006-2012)

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
International Visitors	21,188	39,073	83,571	57,830	58,966	168,528	126,982

way tourists behave depends on their attitudes towards a certain product and their response by making use of the product is the definition of travel behavior (George, 2004). Reasons motivating tourists to travel, attitude of tourists, various situational factors and environmental factors which influence the personal significance of the tourists are factors influencing travel behavior of tourists (Venkatesh, 2006). The choice of the destination offered very much depends on tourist behaviors; hence, it is crucial to have a better understanding of their behaviors (Leisen, 2001). Tourism products suppliers will have to enhance the ability of products/destinations so that they stand out from alternative products/destinations and hence basic motivational instincts in individuals to go on a holiday can be met (Ahmad, Salbiah & Norjumawati, 2010). However, tourism marketers find that understanding tourist behavior is a complex matter due to the heterogenous characteristics of tourists (Ahmad et al., 2010). Mohsin (2005) suggests that segmentation and market targeting are the appropriate approaches in identifying potential tourist behaviors towards the marketplace.

Segmentation is a process of dividing a total market (such as all tourists) into manageable sub-groups that enhances cost effective marketing, through the design, promotion, and delivery of specifically made products aimed at fulfilling the identified needs of target groups (Middleton, 1988). Similarly, according to Loker and Perdue (1992), "Operational data that are practical, usable, and readily translatable into strategy comes from substantial market segmentation research." Information on socio-demographic variables such as nationality, age, income, or education is very useful and they are identified as relevant determinants of tourist behavior (Kastenholz, 2002). Marketers are developing more sophisticated methods to identify and assess differences among segments of their visitor population, among other things, they seek to identify socio demographic factors that would influence future participation in a particular place visited (Chandler & Costello, 2002). Adaptation of product and promotional strategies to different expectations and requirements is plausible through well researched market segmentation. Thus, appropriate planning can be undertaken to meet consumer preferences, structuring of industry accordingly, and implementing effective anticipatory measures to avoid or minimize potentially adverse environmental impacts (Ahmad et al., 2010). Also, it provides useful insights in determining the types of facilities appropriate for the park (Syamsul Herman, 2010).

Methodology

Structured questionnaire and face-to-face data collection method were employed to obtain primary data from 330 international visitors using convenient sampling technique at the park from (9th – 23rd) November 2012. However, only 300 samples were used for further analysis due to inadequate or irrelevant information obtained from the respondents. Average time incurred for the survey is about 10 – 15 minutes. The designed questionnaire constitutes of four main elements, namely, (a) the record item; (b) travel information; (c) travel and on-site cost; and finally, (d) the socio-demographic details. The questionnaire was designed only in English although many of the visitors from China and Middle East Countries are not proficient in English. This is because English language is an internationally recognized language. Budget constraint was also an obstacle. Hence, it would be a good medium to obtain higher response rate from the respondents. The raw data accumulated from the survey was transformed into a simpler form using the descriptive analysis conducted using the Social Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 shows that the proportion of male visitors (70.7%) is larger than female visitors (29.3%). The possible explanation for the difference is that during data collection, only the heads of the families (fathers) were chosen as respondents, assuming that the heads of the families are in charge of the whole holiday trip (Ahmad, 1994). Besides, in the present study, an assumption has also been made that for all the groups of respondents, males are the head of the groups. Nonetheless, in case that the head of the family is not around, the mother or the eldest person in the family was chosen as the respondent (Syamsul Herman, 2010). Similarly, in the case of visitors who are couples, the male is chosen. On the other hand, for visitors in groups (e.g. from an institution, organization, or a group of friends) the respondents could be both male and female depending on who was responsible in organizing the holiday trip to the park. Next, the larger percentage of the respondents (73%) falls under the age group of 21 to 40 years-old. The findings of the cross tabulation between travel companions and age groups of respondents show that out of the 73%, 1.6% came alone, 1.6% came with school/

Table 3. Socio-demographic information of the respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	212	70.7
Female	88	29.3
Age (groups)		
Less than 21	3	1.0
21 – 30	111	37.0
31 – 40	109	36.3
41 – 50	38	12.7
Greater than 50	39	13.0
Educational level (groups)		
No formal education	2	0.7
First school leaving certificate (Primary school)	5	1.7
General certificate of Education (GCE), Ordinary/ Advanced level (Secondary/High School education)	55	18.3
Undergraduates (Associate degree/ Diploma/ Degree)	153	51.0
Postgraduates	85	28.3
Occupation		
Unemployed	10	3.3
Student	20	6.7
Self employed	25	8.3
Retiree	16	5.3
Private sector employees	172	57.3
Homemaker	5	1.7
Government servants	52	17.3
Gross monthly income		
(Less than RM 2,000)	40	7.6
(RM 2,000 – RM 6,000)	88	16.7
(RM 6,004 – RM 16,000)	151	29.0
(Above RM 16,000)	21	4.0
Non-response	128	42.7

institution, 2.1% with organization, 15.5% with family, 37.2% with spouse, 42% with friends. This is followed by 27% of the visitors who fall in the age group of more than 41 years-old.

Majority of the respondents (79.3%) obtained tertiary level education. Second largest percentage of respondents (20%) at least attained primary and secondary education. Finally, 0.7% of the respondents have no formal educations. Based on Table 3, majority of the respondents (74.6%) are private and government employees. This is because these groups of visitors earn sufficient salary that enables them to go for a holiday. Furthermore, they can use their annual leave or paid leave for travelling purposes.

In terms of the income level of the respondents, out of the total sample of 300, 42.7% of them refused to reveal their income on the basis that such information is confidential. Euro currency is chosen to standardize the currency measure for the income of all the respondents who originate from various countries of the world. This is because the biggest proportions of the respondents (43.7%) came from the European countries. Nonetheless, as shown in the Table 3 for the gross monthly income, the Euro has been converted into Ringgit Malaysia (RM) using the universal exchange rate calculator (XE) to show the values in the Malaysian currency. Table 3 shows that the larger percentage of the respondents (57.3%) earn more than RM 6,000 per month, followed by 29.3% of respondents who earn between the range of RM 2,000 and RM 6,000 and 13.3% of them who earn less than RM 2,000 per month. The findings are consistent with findings from the cross tabulation between countries that the respondents came from and their income that shows that 70% of the arrivals are from developed countries. Income of the respondents from developed countries in RM is higher because their exchange rate is higher than of developing countries. The highest income found in the data set is RM 40,000 whereas the lowest is RM 450. The mean gross monthly income is RM 13,375, median, RM 6,400, and the mode RM 2,005.

Referring to Table 4, out of 300 respondents, only 8.7% of them went to Langkawi using tour packages for their overall holiday trip. For these respondents, tour agents would guide them throughout the holiday trip. Besides that, the tour agents book all the flight tickets and plans the itinerary of the holiday trip for them. Twenty five percent (25%) of them bought a tour package only at Langkawi because it is cheaper to visit the attractions available in Langkawi using the tour package. Furthermore, it is more convenient for the visitors because the tour agents in Langkawi will fetch the visitors from their respective hotels to the attractions offered in the packages. On the other hand, 66.3% of the respondents did not use any tour package probably because they prefer to plan their itinerary of the holiday trip on their own.

Next, the main purpose of international visitors visiting Langkawi is for holiday (94%). This is because Langkawi offers leisure and many attractions; for instance beautiful beaches, underwater world, Mahsuri's tomb, cable car and sky bridge, oriental village, Galeria Perdana, waterfall, Langkawi bird paradise and Wildlife Park, five star hotels, shopping complexes, Dataran Lang, etc. Besides that, Langkawi is a tax free zone. With this, the visitors can buy chocolates, cigarettes, and alcoholic drinks at a much lower price as compared to other places in Malaysia.

Majority of the visitors to the park were accompanied by their friends (47.3%), followed by their spouses (33.4%) and family (16.3%). By contrast, very few visitors went in groups belonging to school/institution (1%) and organization (2%). The disparity in percentage could be due to the fact that even if a large group of visitors from an organization visits Langkawi, only the leader/planner of the holiday was interviewed. The cross tabulation between spouses and the purpose of their visit to Langkawi, shows that all of them went to Langkawi for a

Table 4. Characteristic of visits of the respondents

Characteristics of visits	Frequency	Percent (%)
Tour package		
Do not use any tour package	199	66.3
Tour package for overall trip/from home	26	8.7
Tour package at Langkawi only	75	25.0
Main purpose of visit to Langkawi		
Leisure/holiday	282	94.0
Business and professional	15	5.0
Conference	3	1.0
Travel companions to Langkawi		
Alone	5	1.7
Friends	142	47.3
Spouse	95	31.7
Family	49	16.3
School/Institution	3	1.0
Organization	6	2.0
On-site time (hours)/ On-site cost per person (RM)		
1/ 21	40	13.3
2/ 30	102	34.0
3/ 38	85	28.3
4/ 42	73	24.3
Origin of the respondents by world continents		
Africa	26	8.7
Asia	102	34.0
Europe	131	43.7
Oceania	24	8.0
North America	17	5.6
South America	0	0

holiday. This could be for a honeymoon. Next, Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents were first time visitors (95.7%). One of the possible reasons for the very few (4.3%) repeating visitors is the nature of international visitors who wish to travel to other parts of the world rather than returning to a place which they have visited before. With this, LADA should target first time visitors.

The number of hours spent at the mangrove tour package offered by Kilim Cooperative was assumed to be the on-site time spent by the respondents. This is because as soon as they arrive from the mangrove tour they will walk towards the taxi, tour van or bus in which they came with and go to other destinations or probably back to the hotel. Visitors who went by taxi to the park would be charged RM 25 for 1 hour of waiting, followed by an increase of RM 5 for subsequent hours of waiting. A. N. Salim (Personal communication, November 19, 2012). Besides that, the earlier assumption was made to standardize the differences in the mangrove tour fee paid by both visitors who visited the park using tour package (33.7%) and those who did not (66.3%). This is because visitors who use the tour package from home or at Langkawi may spend more time in the park with a lower cost than those without a tour package. For instance, those who use tour package may spend 4 hours at the park and they have to pay only RM 400, whereas those who buy directly from Kilim cooperative would have

to pay (RM 500). With this, the longest time the respondents spent at the park was for 2 hours (34%) followed by 3 hours (28.3%), followed by 4 hours (24.3%) and finally (13.3%) of the respondents spent 1 hour at the park. Based on this information, the management of the park should give more emphasis on the 2 hours to 4 hours package. Consistent with the on-site time, only the cost per person based on hours spent for the mangrove tour at the park were assumed as the on-site cost incurred by the respondents. The cost per person was determined by assuming that each boat is allowed to carry a maximum of 12 passengers. Table 4 shows that the largest proportion of visitors incur an on-site cost of RM 30 per person for 2 hours at the park (34%), followed by RM 38 per person for 3 hours (28.3%), RM 42 per person for 4 hours (24.3%) and RM 21 per person for 1 hour (13.3%).

Lastly, in terms of the origin of visitors, largest proportions of visitors originate from the European continent (131 or 43.7%). Based on the descriptive frequency analysis conducted using the SPSS software, among countries from that continent that recorded highest numbers of visitation are from the United Kingdom (37), Germany (26), Netherlands (14), and Russia (11). Next, the second largest numbers of visitors came from Asia (102 or 13.4%). Countries with the largest number of visitor arrivals from that continent were Indonesia (15), India (12), China (12), and Saudi Arabia (12) followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (7) and Iraq (5). This is followed by the visitation from the continent of Africa which amounted to (26 or 8.7%) out of the total number of respondents. The country with the largest number of visitor arrivals from the continent was Sudan (21 or 80%) of the 26.

Conclusion

The main objective of the study is to identify the profile and the characteristics of the visits of the international visitors to one of the three geoforest parks in Langkawi that offers mangrove tour around the park. The findings suggest that most of the respondents earn less than RM 6,000, have high level of education, fall in the age groups of 21- 40, and work in the private sector. Besides that, they originate from the European continent, do not use any tour package, are accompanied to the park either by their friends or spouse and prefer the mangrove tour package above one hour. A good understanding of the profile and experience gained by visitors to a particular site that would influence their decision for future visitation would be a good guideline for the planning of marketing campaigns. The study hopes that the findings would be useful for Kilim Cooperative, LADA and the stakeholders of the park. By identifying KKGPs clientele and their travel behavior, these agencies and stakeholders can develop successful tourism related programs and facilities in the park. Finally, the findings from this article are useful for an economic valuation of the KKGPs.

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