Sustainability in Tourist Attractions in Malaysia

[1]Hamimah Hassan, [1]Norsyafina Mahat, [1]Mass Hareeza Ali, [2]Nawal Hanim Abdullah and [3]Muhammad Shahrim Abdul Karim

[1]Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.
[2]Faculty of Forestry, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.
[3]Faculty of Food Science and Technology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Tourist attraction is a core component in tourism system and the main purpose why visitors travel to a destination. This paper discusses the roles of sustainable development practices in four tourist attractions in Melaka, Malaysia. The main purpose of the research is to examine how does the public and private owned tourist attractions survive over the years, that has led them to sustain and still offering their products to the visitors. Results revealed various strategies that were implemented and these strategies are in line with sustainable tourism concept and also focused strategies with regards to operation management of the tourism sites. The sustainable tourism concept reveals that tourism has the characteristics to improve quality of life of the host community, provide quality experience to the visitors and maintain quality environment for usage of both tourist and the host community. Therefore, a comprehensive dimension in sustainable tourism for managing tourism attractions is proposed.

INTRODUCTION

The core function of tourist attractions is attracting tourists to the destination. Attractions serve two key functions in the tourism system; they play role as a stimulator of interest in travel to a destination, and they act as providers to visitors visit satisfaction. Garrod, Leaskand and Fyal (2007) adopted the English Tourism Council to describe attraction as a permanently established excursion destination, with primary purpose toallow public access for entertainment, interest or education, rather than being principally a retail outlet or venue forsporting, theatrical or film performance. Attraction must be open to the public without prior booking for published periods of the year, and it should also be capable of attracting tourists or day visitors as well as local residents. In addition, attraction must be a single business, under a single management, and must be receiving revenue directly from visitors (English Tourism Council). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine four tourist attractions in Melaka, with the main purpose to examine how does the public and private owned tourist attractions survive over the years, that has led them to sustain and still offering their products to the visitors.

In 2013, Malaysia received a total of 25 million international tourists. Melaka is one of the most prominent states that attract tourists into Malaysia. The state represents Malaysia's tourist and heritage industries as the place `where it all began' (Worden, 2001). Melaka was granted the status as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008and play roles as the birth of the country, considering the many prominent historical are located in Melaka. The state also has the most number of museums in Malaysia, with 20museums and galleries and among the well-known tourist attractions are the Museum of the Sultanate Palace, Museum of History and Ethnography and The Stadthuys Museum. Melaka with a slogan "Visit Historic Melaka Means Visit Malaysia" was able to give overview of the tourism product that is served to tourists, tourism themed historical and cultural heritage communities (Choy, 2013)

Literature Review:

Academic research into sustainability and tourist attraction management has been conducted, however very fewer researches have focused on the view of the tourists. The measurements used in sustainable tourism have also focused largely on environmental practices, particularly in the hotel sector. Tourism sustainabilitiy in this paper refers to a commitment made by a tourist attraction manager to incorporate the three pillars of sustainable

Corresponding Author: Hamimah Hassan, Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

development (environmental, economic and social) and attraction management strategies into its management process. The World TourismOrganization(WTO, 2004) states that: "Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and that, a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability". Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world (WTO, 2004). The industry however depends heavily on environmental resources which include: pristine beaches, warm climate, clean air, and landscape formation among others (Mensah, 2006 and Bhatiah, 2006). However, lack of proper management of these resources may lead to environmental inefficiency Mensah, 2006). As such, sustainability in tourism attractions is the major focus of this paper and given the significance of the roles of attractions in tourism, researchers have started to categorised tourism attractions. Weaver (2005) suggested two core criteria on ecotourism based on the level of sustainability outcomes.Garrod, Leask and Fyal (2007) found that attractions operators need to handle are minimum boundary between nature and culture, the provision of learning opportunities, and, the effectiveness of interpretation.

Methodology:

The attractions operators were contacted by letter and telephone and they have agreed for the interviews to share their experience in running the tourism sites. Operators were asked core question related to how their tourist sites have sustained throughout the years. Other questions include:

- How do you maintain the quality of the attraction site to ensure increasing number of visitors?
- Do you conduct visitors' survey?
- Do you conduct any of these following environmental practices? Waste/water/energy management?
- Do you emphasized in hiring and training the local people for employment?
- Do you provide opportunities to small suppliers to supply their products/services to your place?
- Do you emphasized in organizing cultural related eventsto increase your tourism product uniqueness?

The interviews were conducted in May 2014, with each interviews lasted for about 2 hour 30 minutes. The informants, as shown in Table 1, are key persons in running the tourist attractions. They have years of experience and directly involved in decision making. The answers were recorded, scripted and analyzed and common themes are compiled. The interviews provide deeper insights into sustainable indicators for tourism attractions as reveal in the findings.

Findings:

Background of the respondents and operators

The background of the attractios are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The attractions

Attractions	Ownership type	Inception year	Informers	No of staff	No of visitors 2013
Sultanate Palace Museum	Owned and operated by PERZIM	1986	Museum Curator	134 (PERZIM)	100,455
Samudera Museum	Owned and operated by PERZIM	1990	Museum Curator		Not available
Crocodile Park	Owned and operated by a private firm	1980s	Operations Manager	27	153,342
Taming Sari Tower	Privatised by the state government, Fully operated by private firm	2008	Marketing Manager	41	675,435

The Sultanate Palace Museum is located next to the A Famosa (another famous landmark, which was built in 1511 by the Portuguese)and was built in 1986, in the early years where Malaysia was serious in developing its tourism industry. This museum is regarded as the reference center of history of Melaka and displaying superior and uniqueness of Malay architecture. Similarly owned by Perbadanan Muzium Melaka (PERZIM), a corporation set up under the state government of Melaka, the Samudera Museum is also a major tourist attraction. In addition to the variety of marine historical facts displayed by the Samudera Museum, in 1994, Flor de La Mar was opened to the public. Flor de La Mar, is a large ship replica, offering theme attraction about the history of seafaring as well as the spread of the Melaka's commercial influence during the Melaka Sultanate, right up to the colonization eras of Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. In 2013, PERZIM which operate 20 museums and 11 galleries received 782,689 total visitors.

Other than the established historical sites, the Taming Sari Tower and the Crocodile Park of Melaka are also very popular among tourists. The Taming Sari Tower offers ride experience, where from a height of 80 meters, the spectacular and panoramic view of Melaka can be enjoyed. Watching a variety of crocodile species is the

center attraction in Crocodile Park. As such, Melaka is not only offering historical sites, but also ecotourism sites such as the Crocodile Park and Melaka Zoo. Privately owned, the park in its early years as a research center has only 8 crocodiles and currently as a tourist attraction, the parks has 100 crocodiles from various species.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following common themes among the respondents are discussed as follows.

Economy:

Economy sustainable indicators are to monitor the quantity and quality of tourist services that include accommodation, restaurant, ecotourism activities, and others. Hence, the results can contribute to efforts towards maintenance and long-term improvement of a diverse and ability to offer high-quality tourism, while at the same time increase the attractiveness of the destination (Blancas *et al.*, 2011). In this study, the museum operators, have admitted that the income from site rentals and entrance fees charged can be used for conservation work, maintenance and cleaning the display items etc. PERZIM realized the importance of attracting more people to visit museums in Melaka. There are many ways used by PERZIM in promoting their attraction, such as they send pamphlets and brochures to hotels for distribution to the hotel guests.

PERZIM is also very concerned with the satisfaction of tourists and they have a system called E-complaint to get feedback from tourist visiting the museum. Taming Sari operator has also admitted that their sales are satisfactory. In 2013, Taming Sari successfully collected a total of RM7.2 million and their sales usually increase by 5% every year. In fact, the tower operator had already recovered the RM24 million invested into building the tower after six years its operations. The cost of maintenance however is considerably high for Taming Sari, thus it is very challenging for the operators to improve sales efforts. Facilities and services in tourism areas contribute to personal income or tax revenues that are given a chance for residents to get involve in employment industries (Angelkova *et al.*, 2012).

Social:

In sustainable tourism, the achievement of social structure is a very important indicator. Tourist experiences are enhanced when knowing about employment opportunity for the locals and the interactive experience with the locals. If tourism brought in positive lifestyle and changes to the local community, sustainable tourism has been taken care. For instance, locals will learn to speak a foreign language because of the arrival of foreign tourists and the increasing and improvement of facilities and structures such as restaurants, resorts, hotels, and souvenir shop. Besides, there will be reasons to increase of the traditional ceremonies and culture activity to attract more visitors and tourists(Ahn *et al.*, 2002).

All the operators interviewed provide local residents withjob opportunities. As shown in Table 1, a sizable number of employees are hired to take care of the sites. In fact, all operators admitted the importance of training to equip their workers with the appropriate skills. The Crocodile Park for instance, also offer internships to college students and the manager has no problem in hiring new staffs to work for the park. Cultural shows are also performed alongsidechildren activity during specific hour of the day in the park.

Environment:

Providing high quality environment quality would ensure the environmental sustainability of the resource and promote positive image (Hu and Wall, 2008). As such the reputation as attraction needs to be maintained because this is part of routine activities to develop competitive edge, and this becomes the reason why people travel to a destination (Larsen, 2007 and Hassan, 2000).In addition, improvement or deterioration in the sustainability of the target destination can be determined by positive and negative indicators.

Generally, the state of Melaka adopts good environmental practice. The museums in Melaka including the Sultanate Museum and Samudera Museum adopt green technology system and organized "Malacca smoke-free" campaign. In addition, they also provide many mini gardens surrounding the tourist attractions and these gardens offers great sceneries for the city of Melaka. In addition, to the many trees and flowers planted in the park and the operator uses recyclable goods such as tires and bottles. The local government of Malacca is responsible for ensuring the cleanliness and beauty of these parks, therefore historical sites in Melaka that are spread all over the city are getting great advantage from the efforts done by the local municipality.

As for Taming Sari, they conducted a Go Green Unit that recently won an award. Taming Sari operator applies several ways to makes sure the program is successful such as encouraging employees to ride bicycle, using rain-water catchment, planting flowers around Taming Sari, and minimizing usage of lighting in offices. This can lead to the sustainability in tourism which reduced pollution, congestion, and energy used.

Collaboration:

Based on the interview findings, the operators consistently, work along with other parties in conducting their activities. PERZIM for instance incorporate with the schools and the Ministry of Education to attract more school children to visit museums in Melaka. PERZIM also work closely with the Department of Tourism Services of Melaka State Government, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Malaysia and Tourism Malaysia, and a promotional agency under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture such as Department of Culture and Tourism Financing and sponsorship from the Ministry of Malacca. As a result many events and activities were created although as a nonprofit agency PERZIM are facing the budget constraint to upgrade and maintenance for the museum, and to do promotion.

Leadership:

Melaka has 20 museums and 11 galleries. One of the museums is the Submarine Museum. A submarine replica which used to be a vessel used to train Malaysian navy was acquired by Melaka. The effort was led by the former Chief Minister of Malacca Dato Mohd Ali Rustam, who was quick to make a proposed to the federal government. The Chief Minister also came up with an idea to build the Taming Sari Tower, back in 2008, before privatizing the tower. As such, leadership is identified as a factor that has contributed to tourism sustainability in Melaka.

Interpretation:

Environmental interpretation gives the tourist awareness about the advantages in protected environmental areas as well as in helping to manage negative impacts of tourism development. In consequence, tourists or visitors try to avoid inappropriate activities such as littering, damaging crops, exploitation of preserve area, and others (Kuo, 2002). Effectiveness and attractiveness in delivering the interpretation are among the tools that lead to attraction sustainability in tourism attractions literature.

The Sultanate Museum operator admitted they need to improve on signage and explanation about the display items in the museums. Of all the 20 museums owned by PERZIM, only the Hang Tuah Centre has the animation technology. The Sultanate Museum uses a system called QR code software which serves as a tool that can link directly with Facebook accounts for information about the museum. However, the user needs to install this application in their mobile phone, and then connect their phone with QR code software in the museum.

This is for sure every visitor easy to get information about the museum without having tourist guide to explain for them. Availability of signage in the Crocodile Farm is also at satisfactory level. However, the manager admitted that improvement is also needed to make interpretations about the park more interesting.Currently there are staffs available to provide explanation to visitors. Xu, Cui, Ballantyne, and Packer (2013) state that interpretations used by park administrators are to inform visitors about park attractions, regulations, policies, and management information. This is to ensure visitors follow the rules without doing inappropriate activities during they visit at the destination area. As such, interpretation includes in environment term for improving tourists' gratitude of the natural environment, rising their environmental attitudes, and sensitivity behavior towards environment (Xu etal., 2013).

Authenticity:

Sometimes tourist is also concerned about the authenticity of the product by looking at the uniqueness and originality to make sure the functionality and useful for them (Chhabra, 2007).Heritage tourism literature often categorizes heritage attractions as tangible and intangible attractions. In Melaka, the tangible products such as the artefacts and artwork are displayed in various museums. Based on survey made by the Sultanate Palace Museum, there are visitors who were not satisfied with by looking replicas on display items. Instead they want to see the original materials, artefacts or artwork.

The intangible heritage which refers to the intrinsic value for national identity that society needs to conserve, interpret, and educate about heritage, are also in abundance in Melaka. Melaka represents the original history of Malaysia, beginning with the rise of sultanate of the state, and the arrivals of foreigners into the country, as far back as 1511. Chhabra (2010) emphasized that authenticity maintains the legitimacy of the original history of a place. Therefore, community stakeholder plays an important role to maintain and preserve of culture by consensus on policy, planning, conservation and preservation for tourist consumption (Debes, 2011and Richins, 2008).

Lindholm (2008) defined authenticity as original, real, pure, and true which also means that existence cannot be denied and it is valid. Authenticity is always associated with heritage tourism; however the role of authenticity in destinationsustainability in other tourism products should also be investigated. In the case of the crocodile park, the manager explained about a complaint from a group of international tourists who claimed that the crocodiles in the park were fake, simply because the crocodile does not move. The manager instructed his staff to use a stick and make the crocodile to move and this is done in front of the tourist. As such, not only in

heritage tourism, in a farm such as the crocodile farm tourist demand to see real product to fulfill their experience and curiosity.

Service delivery:

Research in tourism facilities in tourist areas have emphasized on both the types of services available and the quality of services delivered. For instance, components of service delivery for a museum may comprised of education, accessibility, safety, cleanliness, provision of information facilities for disabled visitors and communication (Blancas *et al*., 2011).Others are such as toilets, sitting places, gift shops, and coffee shop/restaurant facilities that should be provided as well as well managed. Besides that, information and history of the site/building, free maps and pamphlets of the site, and personalized tour for small groups should also be given.

Furthermore, all the staff of the site should wear uniform for the ease of identification and ease of seeking help by visitors when needed. The Crocodile Park was first set up for research purposes in 1980s with only 8 crocodiles and facilities were very minimal. Nowadays the crocodile park has reached to more than 100 crocodiles. Other facilities are also been developed along, such as roads, mini playground, fishing pond, swimming pool and rabbit cage, while the size of the park increased to 23 acres.Events are also held to meet demand for school outing, corporate and family day, birthday party, government group. The events are such as crocodile explore race, tele match, magic show and traditional / modern dances show. If visitors are satisfied and the experiences fulfill their needs, the possibility is their (tourists') returning or recommending the site to others is higher (Liza, Mustika, Birtles, Everingham, and Marsh, 2013).

Having discussed previous research, this paper proposed that sustainability for tourism attractions should not just be environmentally, economically and socially strong, but also other dimensions that maximize tourists' or visitors' experience (interpretation, authenticity and service delivery). In addition, this paper suggests a new indicator; collaboration, that bring the link between the attractions operators and the external world.

Conclusion:

Tourist attraction is a core component in tourism system. This paper discusses the roles of sustainable development concept in managing tourism organisations. The sustainable tourism concept reveals that tourism has the characteristics to improve quality of life of the host community, provide quality experience to the visitors and maintain quality environment for usage of both tourist and the host community (WTO 1993). Sustainable tourism indicators for tourist attractions, therefore, should comprised of economic, social, environment, service delivery, authenticity, interpretation, leadership and collaboration.

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