

ADVENTURE TOURISM IN KAMPAR, MALAYSIA: PROFILE AND VISIT CHARACTERISTICS OF DOMESTIC VISITORS

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ABSTRACT

There were 7.96 million domestic tourist arrivals to Perak in 2015, which marked an increase of 13.71 percent over the previous year. The arrival of domestic tourists to Perak in general and Kampar in particular have prompted a significant increase in demand for facilities and services for adventure tourism activities in Kampar, which is considered to be one of the icons of tourism in the state of Perak. However, a lack of information on the profile of visitors has hampered industry players in Kampar when it comes to identifying their target markets, marketing strategies, and added value products without losing sight of conservation priorities in Kampar. The aim of this study was to determine the profile and visit characteristics of visitors in Kampar from the perspective of adventure tourism. To achieve this objective, a study was conducted on domestic visitors who participated in the adventure tourism activities available in Kampar. On-site data from 102 visitors were collected. The results showed that adventure tourism in Kampar is comprised of visitors with an average age of 33 years and a mean monthly income of RM 3638.72. Most of them travel with friends and obtained the information about the destination through word of mouth and social media platforms. The findings of the study can be used by stakeholders to understand the characteristics and motivations of adventure tourists in order to plan the best approach for the promotion and marketing of adventure tourism to this segment.

Keywords: Adventure Tourism, White-Water Rafting, Caving, Visit Characteristics, Outdoor Recreation, Adventure Recreation, Word of Mouth (WOM), Gopeng, Kampar, Perak, Tourism Malaysia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Adventure tourism is a growing niche and is becoming a popular activity among tourists. This is because tourists are increasingly looking for new kinds of vacation experiences (Lötter, Geldenhuys,

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and Potgieter, 2012). There are three main components in adventure tourism, namely, challenging physical activities, engagement with nature, and cultural exchange (Adventure Travel and Trade Association, 2005). It is also associated with risky activities (Priest, 1993) full of 'rushes' and 'thrills' (Buckley, 2012), which are carried out by people to achieve self-satisfaction. Since adventure tourism activities use equipment that is specific to an activity, for example, white-water rafting, abseiling and adventure caving, therefore commercialised tours are needed to reduce the cost of purchasing equipment and the risk of injury during activities (Buckley, 2007). Adventure tourism can be divided into two categories, namely, 'soft' adventures, where the risk from the activities is low, and less skills and a lower level of physical fitness are required (Williams & Soutar, 2005), and 'hard' adventures, which are risky activities that are more demanding and require a higher level of physical fitness, such as white-water rafting (Hill's, 1995). In terms of the socio-demographics, adventure tourism participants differ from mass tourists as they belong to a more specialised segment (Nur Syuhada, Syamsul Herman and Zaiton, 2013). The study on adventure tourism market by Adventure Travel Trade Association (2013) showed that 57% of adventure visitors are males and 43% are females. The study also revealed that adventure visitors have a higher level of education and are also high-income earners, earning an average of USD 46,800 per year. The reasons for their engagement in adventure tourism activities are diverse, but their main motivations are to relax, explore a new destination, spend time with the family, and learn about different cultures (Kane & Tucker, 2010).

1.1. Adventure tourism attractions in Kampar District

Perak, Malaysia attracts both domestic and international tourists. In a 2015 report by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, domestic tourists to Perak increased by 13.71 percent, from 7.00 million in 2014 to 7.96 million in 2015. The state of Perak also recorded the highest domestic tourist arrivals at the national level from 2012 to 2014 (Ili Aqilah, 2015).

The state of Perak is rich in tropical natural resources as well as in its history and culture. As the second largest state in Peninsular Malaysia (21,035 km²), it is endowed with many natural tourist attractions like Gua Tempurung, the biggest limestone cave in Peninsular Malaysia; the Royal Belum State Park, one of the oldest virgin rainforests; Lenggong UNESCO World Heritage Site (Rasoolimanesh, Dahalan, & Jaafar, 2016); and Pangkor Island (Hamidah, 2012). Today, Perak continues its performance as one of the best tourist destinations in Malaysia. Subsequently, the reputable magazine, Lonely Planet, recognised Perak as among the top 10 in the "Best in Travel 2017" list (Nuradzimmah, 2016).

The Kampar district in Perak can be considered as a one-stop destination for adventure tourism activities in Perak (Gough, 2012). Kampar is located approximately 20 km south of Ipoh, and it can be reached from Ipoh within 30 minutes, and from Kuala Lumpur within approximately 2 hours. It is surrounded by natural resources such limestone hills, clear rivers and rainforests. Kampar is now becoming a preferred destination for eco-adventure lovers. For instance, in 2013, 98,000 tourists to Gua Tempurung participated in caving activities. This number increased by 19.4% in 2014 (117,032). This is mainly due to the abundance of resources that promote adventure tourism activities in Kampar. Among these activities are adventure caving at Gua Tempurung and Gua Kandu, white-water rafting, kayaking and tubing in Sungai Kampar, and waterfall abseiling in Ulu Geruntum (Gough, 2012). The Perak State Exco for Tourism announced that Kampar can promote itself as a standalone adventure tourism destination, and this might attract the corporate sector to participate in team-building activities throughout the year (Gough, 2014).

More than ten small eco-resorts have been established in Kampar to cater to the needs of visitors. In addition to resort accommodation, Kampar also provides 49 homestays located in 3 adjacent villages (Ministry of Tourism & Culture, 2015). To explore and experience the activities, visitors can choose from among more than ten tour operators in Kampar, who offer adventure tourism packages such as white-water rafting, waterfall abseiling, adventure caving and river kayaking. In addition, there are other options such as trekking to view the Rafflesia flower in Ulu Geroh and Rajah Brooke's butterfly, to experience the Sahom Farm Retreat, the Gaharu Tea Valley or to explore the Mountain School at Nomad Adventure. A study on adventure tourism into the natural resources in Kampar is imperative as little attention has been given to this niche. It is of utmost importance because this niche utilizes sensitive natural resources (Siow, Ramachandran, Shuib, et al. 2013) that involve risks, which a managing agency should be able to monitor.

1.2. Profile and Characteristics of Visitors

The profiling of adventure tourism visitors and their characteristics are essential, not only for academic research, but also for tourism marketing. The movement of visitors to any tourist destination, regardless of whether they are domestic or international visitors, not only increases the tourism receipts for stakeholders but also varies types of expenditures, thereby revealing the behaviour of the visitors (Syamsul Herman, Nur A'in, Ahmad and Ramachandran, 2014). The demographics of visitors can reveal what drives them, and hence, travel patterns can be forecasted (Jafar & Badaruddin, 2011). Information on the backgrounds of tourists is valuable, especially in sensitive areas, such as nature-based tourism destinations (Nurul Hikmah, Syamsul Herman, Zaiton and Ahmad, 2013). In Malaysia currently, due to the rising demand for adventure tourism, the backgrounds of tourists can directly determine the strategic direction for promotion (Shuib, Edman, & Yaakub, 2013). It is also comprehensible that the profile of visitors and their characteristics have an influence on the selection and purchase of tourism packages (Kane & Tucker, 2010).

With this in mind, the aim of this study was to classify the profile and visit characteristics of adventure tourism visitors in Kampar, Perak. This information is urgently needed, especially since adventure tourism in Malaysia nowadays is considered to be an important tourism sector that is growing rapidly. This baseline information will provide ways to strategically direct promotions, and will assist policy makers, such as the Perak State Tourism Council and the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board to develop the best marketing strategies to increase the number of visitors, particularly for the adventure tourism segment, in Kampar, Malaysia. Therefore; the present study employed a site survey to gather information about the profile and characteristics of visitors.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study sample comprised of domestic visitors who participated in selected adventure tourism activities in Kampar, namely, adventure caving in Gua Tempurung, white-water rafting and river kayaking in Kampar River, and waterfall abseiling at Ulu Geruntum. The data was collected in the month of September 2016. Face-to-face interview sessions were conducted at 3 locations using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, six questions were developed to capture the socio-demographic characteristics of the visitors, which included their gender, age, income, education level and occupation. In the next section, the visitors were asked about the purpose of their visit, the frequency of their visits to adventure tourism sites, the duration of their

trip, their travel companions, travel information and factors that influenced their trip to Kampar. The questionnaire was presented in both Malay and English to cater to domestic visitors.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristic

The socio-demographic characteristics are summarised in Table 1. From the survey, the gap between the male and female participants in adventure tourism was not too obvious, where 56.9% of the participants were males and 43.1% were women. A study by McKay (2014) also found that adult women are less experienced and skilled than men in adventure activities. Also, women seem to face high-risk obstacles and expect failure more often than men. Therefore, adventure tour operators need to pay more attention to women participants, especially in activities that involve risk and safety.

The survey revealed that the majority of the adventure visitors (80.4%) were aged between 21-40 years. This result was supported by the finding of the Adventure Tourism Market Report, (2010), which stated that the average age of the adventure tourist is 35 years. Currently, the activities offered by tour operators in Kampar, Perak are suitable for most age groups. Nevertheless, for the development of future packages, this information is useful for industry players in designing or improving any adventure package, especially for younger adults.

From Table 1, it is evident that as the age increased, there was an obvious decline in participation in adventure tourism activities. The same result was also obtained by Nur Syuhada et al. (2013), where mountain biker participation fell as age increased. The negative relationship between age and participation in extreme activities is expected as strength declines with age and recovery from injuries is slow. Most of the participants were also concerned about the possibility of injuries. With decreasing participation among older visitors, there is a need to develop specialised, 'soft' adventure packages for those aged 40 and above. Specialized programmes will encourage the elderly to participate as these programs are less vigorous and have low physical impact, thus reducing the risk of injuries (Boyles, 2009)

From the standpoint of ethnicity, Malay participation was more dominant (67.7%) followed by the Chinese (24.5%) and Indians (3.9%). The marital status of the visitors indicated that the majority of them were single (56.9%), followed by married (42.2%) and divorced (1.0). The singles participated more in outdoor activities compared to the married participants because they had more leisure time, and thus, they could have longer stays (Syamsul Herman, Ahmad, Ramachandran and Rusli, 2012).

The occupations of the respondents illustrated that the majority (46.1%) were private sector employees, followed by government sector employees (28.4%) and those who were running their own businesses (21.6%). The high number from the private sector may have been due to their higher income level, thus leaving them with a higher disposable income to participate in costly leisure activities such as white-water rafting. The sizeable group of government servants indicated that there is a demand from the public sector for outdoor recreational programmes. As Kampar is well known for its recreational natural resources, it is a suitable venue for team building courses for organizations, where several adventure activities can be incorporated into the programme. Government agencies have been a significant contributor to the tourism business worldwide (Turner, 2017). The introduction of discounted government packages is expected to increase the participation of the public

sector. In tapping business from the public sector, the collaborative efforts of all the recreational operators and accommodation providers in Kampar are needed to establish packages exclusively for the government sector, especially during low seasons and weekdays.

The individual monthly income was measured in Ringgit Malaysia. According to Table 1, the income of 53.9% of the respondents ranged between RM1001-RM3000, followed by 27.5% with incomes of RM3001-RM6000, and 10.8% with incomes of RM6000 and above. The middle-income respondents dominated the participation in adventure tourism in Kampar. This finding was consistent with a study by Thalani (2013), where it was found that as the level of the visitor's income increases, the participation in recreational activities also rises. Generally, as income escalates, so does purchasing power, thereby enabling a person to engage more frequently in recreational activities (Syamsul Herman, Ahmad, Ramachandran and Rusli, 2012)

The majority of the respondents (60.8%) were educated up to tertiary education level (diploma or first degree). The positive correlation between recreational activities and education level has been observed in many studies (Herman, Nur A'in, Ahmad and Ramachandran, 2014; Nurul Hikmah et al., 2013; Nur Syuhada et al., 2013; Zaiton, Syamsul Herman, Alias and Rusli, 2012). The result was also supported by the fact that almost half of the respondents were in the middle-income group. The Adventure Tourism Market Study (2013) also found that 37% of adventure tourists are first degree graduates, while 11% are holders of professional degrees.

The majority of the adventure visitors travelled between 1-7days in a year (42.2%), followed by 8-15 days (30.4%), 16-23 days (14.7%) and 24-31 days (6.9%). From the sample we know that the majority of the adventure visitors were working for private companies. Most private company employees have limited annual leave (in general, between 7-14 days annually) compared to government servants in Malaysia (approximately 30 days annually). Hence, it was assumed that the annual leave could have influenced the days spent on recreation in a year.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of the Visitors (N=102)

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	58	56.9
	Female	43	43.1
Age	below 20	3	2.9
	21-30	44	43.1
	31-40	38	37.3
	41-50	13	12.7
	61 or above	4	3.9
Race	Malay	69	67.6
	Chinese	25	24.5
	Indian	4	3.9
	Others	4	3.9
Marital Status	Single	58	56.9
	Married	43	42.2
	Divorced	1	1.0
Occupation	Government servant	29	28.4
	Private sector	47	46.1
	Own Business	22	21.6
	Unemployed	4	3.9

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of the Visitors (N=102) (cont.)

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Income	Below RM 1000	8	7.8
	RM 1001-RM3000	55	53.9
	RM 3001-RM6000	28	27.5
	RM6001 or above	11	10.8
Education levels	Not attending school	1	1.0
	Secondary school	19	18.6
	Certificate	8	7.8
	Diploma	20	19.6
	Degree	42	41.2
	Master	10	9.8
	PHD	2	2.0
No of Holiday in 1 year (days)	1-7 days	43	42.2
	8-15 days	31	30.4
	16-23 days	15	14.7
	24-31 days	7	6.9
	32 days >	6	5.9

3.2. *Visit Characteristics*

Table 2 describes the visit characteristics of the adventure visitors to Kampar. The main motives for visiting Kampar were to experience adventure caving at Gua Tempurung (64.7%), followed by white-water rafting (51%), with waterfall abseiling ranking as third (18.6 %), and the least being river kayaking (15.7%). Caving and white-water rafting are the most popular activities, especially as these are part of team-building programmes. As mentioned earlier, the Perak State Exco for Tourism stated that Kampar is the preferred choice of private companies for their team-building programmes throughout the year. River kayaking ranked the lowest among the activities due to the technicality of the activity. Technical knowledge and experience in kayaking as well as physical fitness are needed due to the high-risk nature of the activity (Mckay, 2014). While most kayakers prefer to use their own personal kayak, the high price of kayaks contributes to the low participation in kayaking in Kampar. On the contrary, adventure caving at Gua Tempurung is more popular due to the affordable ticket prices, which start at RM8.00 per person. Even though the cost of white-water rafting is higher (RM 160 inclusive of lunch and insurance per person), tourists still prefer this activity because of the satisfaction, interaction with nature and refreshing recreational experience (Wu and Liang, 2010).

The frequency of visits to Kampar showed that those respondents who were there for the second time were the highest (47.1%), while 29% were first-timers, and 10.8% were visiting for the third time in a year. Usually, in general, visitors only visit any destination only once in their lifetime unless there are memories that can make them repeat the visit (Sapari, Ahmad, Ramachandran, Syamsul Herman, 2013). The repeated visits to Kampar suggest that adventure tourism in Kampar provides enjoyable adventure experiences. Although this study did not include the perceptions of the tourists, it is suggested that a study on tourist satisfaction should be carried out to understand the quality of the adventure tourism experience of each attraction. Another factor is that Kampar is centrally located between Kuala Lumpur and Penang, making it much easier to access the sites.

To experience adventure tourism in Kampar, the visitor can either make a day trip or stay overnight. The length of stay at Kampar for the participants varied from a one-day trip to overnight stays, with two days one-night stays ranking as the highest (38.2%), while the day trips came in second (35.3%),

followed by three days two-night stays (26.5%). The day trip was possible since most of the activities could be done within 8-9 hours. The cost of accommodation was affordable for a 2 or 3-day stay. Apart from the costs incurred during the stay, the variety of activities and facilities could also have influenced the length of stay. The variety of choices complement the main attractions on the site, especially if the travel party consists of multiple demographics, for instance children, elderly people, etc (Syamsul Herman et al., 2012). In addition, the availability of affordable accommodation plays a significant role in promoting longer stays. In the case of Kampar, the major attractions are focused on adventure tourism. Nevertheless, less vigorous programmes might be promoted for the secondary market, such as for the elderly and children. By doing so, Kampar will be able to attract visitors for longer stays by catering to the demands of families instead of depending on adventure tourists. Currently, the other activities at adjacent areas are caving at Gua Kandu and sunset hiking to the top of the Bukit Batu Putih Sahom Farm Retreat, Gaharu Tea Valley and the Sungai Salu waterfall, which are still suitable only for middle-aged tourists.

In terms of travel companions, most of the visitors travelled in groups, either with family members, friends or on company outings. Travelling with friends ranked the highest (45.1%), followed by family and groups (32.4%), and travelling alone (2%). In a study by Lou (2014), friends are the first choice for travel companions, especially on adventure trips. The fact that adventure tourism requires the individual to have a certain knowledge and fascination, a companion would be someone of similar leisure pursuits. While not all family members would have the same interest, adventurers have friends, beyond family and relatives, who share the same interest. This is especially so when they are members of a particular club and association (Lou, 2014).

From Table 2, information on adventure tourism in Kampar is disseminated mainly through word of mouth (52.9%). It has been shown that the excellent services provided by tour operators resulted in good feedback from the visitors, and this should be maintained to encourage visitors to make repeat visits and to attract new visitors. Internet browsing (33.3%) and social media such as Facebook (34.3%), Instagram (13.7%) and blogs (11.8%) had a significant impact on promotions. Nowadays, all tour operators and accommodation provider either resorts or homestays should make more efforts to do online promotions as the age of the visitors is mostly around 20-40 years. Many businesses now follow and adapt to technological developments in the field of communication, with a high percentage of the information being transmitted through the web and mobile applications as well as links to social media channels. Today, the Internet and social media have emerged as channels and powerful promotion tools in the tourism industry (Gulbahara, and Yildirim, 2015). The Adventure Travel Trade Association (2013) stated that the percentage of adventure tourists using Facebook more than doubled between 2010 and 2013.

Lastly, the finding showed that 63.7% of the respondents expressed that the main factor that motivated them to visit Kampar was an interest in adventure tourism activities. This was followed by recreation and sightseeing (55.9%), fascination with nature (46.1%) and lastly, the good services provided by tour operators, and resort and tour guides (13.7%). A study by Giddy & Webb (2017) stated that the motivating factors are different from the types of activities. Activities that involve greater interaction with the environment and are physically challenging, such as white-water rafting, are often associated with environmental motivations. Kampar is very suitable for first-timers who want to experience adventure tourism activities. Services from industry players in Kampar need to be maintained and improved to ensure that visitors disseminate good feedback during their visit.

Table 2: Visit Characteristics of the respondents (N=102)

	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Motives	White water rafting	52	51.0	
	River Kayaking	16	15.7	
	Waterfall Abseiling	19	18.6	
	Gua Tempurung (adventure caving)	66	64.7	
Frequency of visit (last 1 year)	0	30	29.4	
	1	48	47.1	
	2	11	10.8	
	3	6	5.9	
	4 >	7	7.0	
On-Site Time	Day trips	36	35.3	
	2D1N	39	38.2	
	3D2N	27	26.5	
Travel Companion	Alone	2	2.0	
	Friends	46	45.1	
	Family	33	32.4	
	Group	33	32.4	
	Information Sources	Live near to location	14	13.7
		Brochure	7	6.9
Tourism Malaysia promotion		12	11.8	
Perak Tourism promotion		7	6.9	
Words of mouth		54	52.9	
Travel agent		6	5.9	
Electronic & print media		24	23.5	
Internet search		34	33.3	
Facebook		35	34.3	
Instagram		14	13.7	
Blog		12	11.8	
YouTube		5	4.9	
Factor Influence	Interest in Adventure Activity	65	63.7	
	Recreation& Sightseeing	57	55.9	
	Fascinated by nature	47	46.1	
	Good service from tour operator, resort, guide	14	13.7	

4. CONCLUSION

This study brings about an interesting basis for discussion about visitors and the visit characteristics of adventure tourism visitors in Kampar. Based on the level of education of the visitors, most of them came from a university background and were within the age range of 20-40 years. The results of this study also showed that caving at Gua Tempurung and white-water rafting in the Kampar River are the main attractions for visitors to Kampar.

Most visitors get information about these activities through word of mouth, social media, and electronic and print media. These results prove that promotions on websites have been successful. To further increase tourist arrivals to Kampar, promotional activities such as familiarisation programs

for travel agents, bloggers, the print media and TV crews, either domestic or international, to visit and experience adventure activities in Kampar need to be conducted more frequently.

There needs to be stronger cooperation between industry players in Kampar, Perak the State Tourism and Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board (Tourism Malaysia) to ensure that the marketing of adventure tourism is in line with the government's promotion campaign. Besides that, the Perak State Tourism and Tourism Malaysia should take advantage of the recognition given to Perak by the world-established magazine, Lonely Planet, as the "Best in Travel in 2017".

Also, all the industry players in Kampar need to ensure that the quality and services offered are of the highest level so that the experience will spread more extensively to first-hand visitors and will keep visitors coming back to Kampar.

Other than that, the management and industry players in Kampar should address any negative images in an appropriate and effective way to reduce the decline in terms of tourist arrivals because the power of dissemination by word of mouth is very high.

Regarding services and facilities provided in Kampar, it is extremely important to identify the characteristics of visitors because it will affect the satisfaction of the visitors. Further research is needed to identify the factors that affect customer satisfaction. In conclusion, to develop an effective marketing strategy to promote Kampar as the best adventure tourism destination in Malaysia, it is necessary to have a better understanding of the visitors in all aspects and not only what has been discussed above. Other researches need to focus on aspects such as the economic value of adventure tourism, willingness to pay, how to get repeat customers, and visitor's satisfaction. All the findings as described above are very useful for all industry players who are involved in promoting adventure tourism in Kampar.

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