

## **Sustainability of Ecotourism in Endau-Rompin National Park: The Awareness of Nature and Aboriginal Culture Conservation Among Tourists**

Lai Chee Sern, Mohd Salleh Kahirol, Mohamad Mohaffyza Mimi, Nor Lisa Sulaiman,  
Abdul Rasid Abdul Razzaq and Md Yunos Jailani  
Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia,  
86400 Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** The awareness of nature and aboriginal culture conservation among tourist is important in order to sustain ecotourism in Endau-Rompin National Park. This research was conducted to measure the awareness levels of tourists in terms of nature conservation, aboriginal culture conservation and social development. A set of questionnaire was developed for data collection. A total of 50 tourist were voluntarily participated in this research. The findings revealed that high levels of awareness in nature conservation, aboriginal culture conservation and social development among tourists in Endau-Rompin National Park have been observed. This result reflects that the ecotourism in Endau-Rompin National Park is sustainable because the tourists are aware of the importance of protecting and conserving the nature, environment and culture that lead to social development for themselves.

**Key words:** Eco-tourism, awareness, conservation, aboriginal culture, sustainability, social

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The growth of traditional tourism such as city and sun-and-beach tourism, is flat and mature and there is a growing market for ecotourism (Marker *et al.*, 2008). In general, ecotourism is a mode of tourism which is relatively friendlier to the environment because the tourists who join Eco tour usually aims at enjoying the beauty of nature without jeopardizing the ecosystem. In specific, ecotourism is defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education”. Education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests.

Malaysia is one of the most diversity areas in the world, blessed with various ecosystems such as rainforest, mountains, mangroves, swamps, coral reefs and caves. Therefore, Malaysia is recognized as one of the best destinations for ecotourism (Marker *et al.*, 2008). Ecotourism is getting more supports from government agencies and private tour companies because it contributes towards economic growth by generating more income and creating more jobs without ruining the nature and environment (WTO., 2015).

One of the ecotourism spots in Malaysia is Endau-Rompin National Park. Ecotourism in Endau-Rompin National Park brings about development that benefits the local community or indigenous

people. For instance, the local community may enjoy the facilities, such tarred road, electricity and clean water supply, developed by the government for tourism sector. In addition, the living standard of local community has been improved because local people have earned more income as they are employed by the resort or are hired as tour guides.

Ecotourism has brought many benefits to the nation and local community, however, it might also result in the negative impacts on environment and also on the local culture. These negative impacts could be due to over-development (e.g., construction of mega-size resort) and ill-management (e.g., overflow of tourists) in ecotourism (Shoo and Songorwa, 2013). Apart from that, not all tourists are aware of the importance of nature conservation. The flora and fauna, especially the endangered species, might be destroyed by the tourists either intentionally and unintentionally due to their excitement and curiosity about exotic flora and fauna. Pollution might occur if tourist throw rubbish everywhere in the national park.

Likewise, the culture of local or indigenous people might be influenced by the tourists as well if the tourists are not aware of the importance of protecting indigenous culture. Therefore, this research was conducted to investigate whether or not ecotourism is sustainable in Endau-Rompin National Park by examining the awareness level of tourists in terms of environmental conservation, aboriginal culture conservation and social development.

**Endau-Rompin National Park:** Endau-Rompin National Park is a protected tropical rainforest that has been gazetted as national park, since, 1993. Endau-Rompin National Park is situated in both states of Pahang and Johor covering approximate 870 km<sup>2</sup> of area and it is the second largest national park in Peninsula Malaysia after Taman Negara (Wikipedia). Endau-Rompin National Park is classified as lowland dipterocarp forest which located below 300 m altitude.

Endau-Rompin National Park is unique in several aspects. Firstly, it is one of the oldest tropical rainforest with some 248 mln. years old. It provides fabulous and endless nature and ecotourism experiences for those who love green, adventures and outdoors activities.

Secondly, Endau-Rompin National Park provides habitat for many exotic flora and fauna. For example, Northern Sumatran rhinoceros, tapirs, wild boars/swine, Malayan tiger and Asiatic elephants can be detected in Endau-Rompin National Park. Apart from wildlife, it offers variety of flora species. The most common flora species found in Endau-Rompin National Park are mainly Meranti, Balau and Kapur (Shoo and Songorwa, 2013).

Thirdly, apart from enjoying the flora and fauna and adventurous activities, the visitors may have chance to experience the aboriginal culture in Endau-Rompin National Park because Jakun tribe village is just situated next to the national park resort (Aminah and Wee, 2014).

**Jakun tribe's culture:** Jakun is recognised as indigenous ethnic group in Malaysia who are mostly living in the jungle of Southern part of Peninsula Malaysia (Southern part of Pahang state and Northern part of Johor State). In the modern age, Jakun tribe is no more living in a nomadic lifestyle but staying in permanent villages in the jungle.

Kampung Peta or Peta Village is one of the Jakun settlements which is located by the Endau-Rompin National Park. Jakun people are mainly practicing agriculture but they will enter the jungle to collect forest products such as cane, herbs and wildlife, on a seasonal basis. Since, Kampung Peta is located so closed to the Endau-Rompin National Park Resort, many Jakun people are now working in tourism sector. Some of them work for the national park resort, some of them work as tour guide, boatman and some are involved in small scale business by selling aboriginal handicrafts such as blowpipes, fish/bird traps and musical instruments or traditional food caterer and village-stay.

Tourists visited to Kampung Peta are able to understand the history and belief of Jakun by listening to their story from the old generation of Jakun people. In addition, Jakun's culture can be experienced by staying at the chalet in the village because visitors may have chance to taste the traditional Jakun food and learn to make handicrafts from Jakun people.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Sampling:** Self-selected sampling method was used in this research. Tourists who were interested in participating in this research would fill in the questionnaire placed at the receptionist counter of the national park resort.

We collected 50 questionnaires. Of the total, 25 respondents were male and another 25 respondents were female. Majority of respondents were below 20 years old. Table 1 shows the distribution of age of the respondents.

**Instrument:** A set of questionnaire was designed and developed to measure the awareness of three elements, namely, nature conservation, aboriginal culture conservation and social development. The questionnaire was composed of 15 items all together (Table 2). In specific, 5 items were developed to measure the awareness of nature conservation. Example of item is "I am aware that I am not allowed to pluck/cut down plants Endau Rompin National Park".

Another 5 items were developed to measure aboriginal culture conservation. Example of item is "I appreciate aboriginal culture more after participating eco-tourism". The last five items were designed for measuring social development. Example of item is "My

Table 1: Age group of respondents

Age group (years)	Frequency
Below 20	23
20-29	15
30-39	10
40-49	1
Above 50	1

Table 2: Awareness of elements through questionnaire

Items	Explanation
1	I am aware that I am not allowed to pluck/cut down plants in endau-rompin national park
2	I am aware that hunting/killing/disturbing wildlife are not allowed in endau-rompin national park
3	I am aware that I am not allowed to take away natural resources in endau-rompin national park
4	I am aware that open burning is not allowed in endau-rompin national park
5	I am aware that littering is not allowed in endau-rompin national park
6	I appreciate aboriginal culture more after participating ecotourism
7	I understand better concerning the taboos of aborigines through ecotourism
8	I understand better the life of aborigines through ecotourism
9	I find that the existence of tourists might influence the appearance of younger generation of aborigines
10	I find that the tourists might influence the way aborigines communicate
11	Ecotourism participation enhances my awareness toward nature conservation
12	I gain new knowledge through ecotourism activities
13	I know that I can play a bigger part in environmental protection after joining ecotourism
14	My experiences in endau-rompin national park can be applied in my daily life
15	I will share my knowledge and experiences gained from endau-rompin national park with others

experiences in Endau Rompin National Park can be applied in my daily life". Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and to 5 = strongly agree was used for every item. The questionnaire has yielded sufficient level of reliability,  $\alpha = 0.851$ .

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Awareness of nature conservation:** Table 3 shows the awareness level of nature conservation among tourists in Endau Rompin National Park. In general, the results indicate that majority of respondents had agreed or strongly agreed with all items related to nature conservation (overall mean score = 4.90). This results reflected that the participating tourist had high level of awareness of nature conservation.

**Awareness of aboriginal culture conservation:** Table 4 shows the awareness level of aboriginal culture conservation among tourists who visited Endau Rompin National Park. All in all, the findings reveal that a big number of respondents had agreed or strongly agreed (overall mean score = 4.30) with all items related to aboriginal culture conservation. Only minority of respondents disagreed or neutral with the items (Table 5). This results mean that the eco-tourist at Endau Rompin National Park had high level of awareness of aboriginal culture conservation.

**Awareness of social development:** The results for the awareness of social development are displayed in Table 5. The outcomes indicated that many respondents had shown high level of agreement with items related to

social development (overall mean score = 4.70). This result showed that the awareness on social development among tourists was very encouraging.

Endau-Rompin is one of the major tourist spots in Johor State that has been given emphasis by the local government organisations as well as private tour agencies. A big sum of money has been invested in developing Endau-Rompin especially in Eco-tourism.

Eco-tourism is type of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism is important to make sure that the sight-seeing spots are managed properly and effectively. Nevertheless, the sustainability of eco-tourism is largely dependent on the awareness of nature conservation, aboriginal culture conservation and social development of tourists. In the aspect of nature conservation, the present research findings revealed that the tourists of Endau-Rompin National Park had high level awareness.

Tourists are aware of that they are not allowed to do anything harmful to flora and fauna. The harmful acts include disturbing, hunting, poaching, killing of animals and cutting plants. In addition, tourists also realised that littering and open burning in National Park are illegal. Nature conservation is a crucial element that determine whether eco-tourism can be sustained in the long run (Aminah and Wee, 2014). The high level of awareness of nature conservation among tourists in Endau-Rompin reflects the fact that eco-tourism is sustainable because the tourists tend to protect the nature.

The high level of awareness among tourists was not only found in the aspect of nature conservation but also in aboriginal culture protection. Many tourists have realised that they may play a bigger part in conserving the culture of aborigines who live by the National Park area. Eco tourists understand better concerning the living style and taboos of aborigines who reside in Endau Rompin Region because the tourists have the chance to interact with aboriginal people who work in ecotourism sector. Nevertheless, the tourists will inevitably influence the

Table 3: Awareness of nature conservation

Items	Percentage of respondents (%) (Likert scale)					Mean score	Level of agreement
	1	2	3	4	5		
1	2	-	-	8	90	4.84	Strongly agree
2	-	-	-	6	94	4.94	Strongly agree
3	-	-	-	8	92	4.92	Strongly agree
4	-	2	2	8	88	4.82	Strongly agree
5	-	2	2	8	88	4.90	Strongly agree
Overall mean score	-	-	-	-	-	4.90	Strongly agree

Table 4: Awareness of aboriginal culture

Items	Percentage of respondents (%) (Likert scale)					Mean score	Level of agreement
	1	2	3	4	5		
6	-	-	2	28	70	4.68	Strongly agree
7	-	2	22	20	56	4.30	Agree
8	-	6	24	24	46	4.10	Agree
9	2	4	14	34	46	4.18	Agree
10	-	6	4	38	52	4.36	Agree
Overall mean score	-	-	-	-	-	4.30	Agree

Table 5: Awareness of social development

Items	Percentage of respondents (%) (Likert scale)					Mean score	Level of agreement
	1	2	3	4	5		
11	-	-	2	12	86	4.84	Strongly agree
12	-	-	-	28	72	4.72	Strongly agree
13	-	-	2	26	72	4.70	Strongly agree
14	-	-	18	22	60	4.42	Agree
15	-	-	-	20	80	4.80	Strongly agree
Overall mean score	-	-	-	-	-	4.70	Strongly agree

aboriginal people in several ways such as how they communicate and how they wear in their daily life. For instance, the younger generation of aboriginal people tend to use English terminologies more frequently in daily conversation with their peers. In terms of social development awareness, eco tourists who participated in ecotourism activities in Endau-Rompin National Park have gained valuable knowledge pertaining to nature and environmental protection. The impact of ecotourism is even greater when eco tourists share their experiences with their friends and practice what they have learned in Endau-Rompin National Park in their daily life.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the nutshell, ecotourism in Endau-Rompin National Park is sustainable due to high awareness level among tourists in the aspect of nature conservation, aboriginal culture conservation and social development. Nevertheless, this was just a small scale investigation and it only involved tourist in Endau-Rompin National Park, therefore, the findings might not be generalizable to ecotourism in other national parks in Malaysia.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

For future research, bigger sample size and more national parks should be involved in order to produce a highly representative and more reliable research outcome.

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