

Boat Operators Of Kilim Geopark, Langkawi - Profiles, Business Practices And Perception Towards Tourists

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Geopark as a special tourism product has encouraged high-income economy with a lower impact on natural resources. Local community is becoming more involved and actively participating in the development of geopark, thereby taking the opportunity to enhance their social economic activities. The local community engagement and participation in tourism sector is crucial particularly to provide employment opportunities for local residents. Data for this study is gathered via questionnaire administered using census method conducted through postal services on 26 respondents selected from boat operators who registered under the cooperative community Kilim Village Langkawi Berhad in July 2012. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the profile information of boat operators in Kilim Geopark. Subsequent, this study was to examine the business details as well as to analyse the pattern of tourist arrivals at Kilim Geopark. Their involvement as boat operators is seen as a good way to raise living standards and thus reducing poverty among its population. The authorities should take the initiative in developing the tourism industry in the Kilim Geopark without prejudice to the adverse effects on the economy, society and environment. The finding showed the majority of 18 people (85.7%) of boat operators started the business with RM0 to RM75, 000. The study revealed that 10 people (47.6%) of boat operators earned RM1001 to RM2000 monthly income. According to the boat operators, the highest tourist visiting Kilim is in June and November. For the Arab countries, 47.6% of respondents expressed the highest visit in June while 19% of respondent state the highest number of European tourists recorded in January and June. This study also showed 10 people (47.6%) of respondents indicated the concentration of tourist visiting the Kilim Geopark during school holidays. This study concludes that the success of a program to encourage entrepreneurs to venture into business operations should be supported by strengthening the background and their identities, as well as business management skills and leadership.

Key words: tourism development, community involvement, boat operators

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Introduction

Tourism development has reached such a level that it is currently the third major sector in the Malaysia economy. This development is facilitated partly by the various assistances provided by the government. To further facilitate the development of tourism industry in Malaysia, the Tenth Malaysia Plan has also identified tourism as one of the twelve engines of growth for the Economic Transformation Plan (ETP) under the New Key Economic Areas (NKEA). According to Ahmad Shuib & Noor Aziz (1989), there are five main benefits derived from the development of the tourism industry, namely, its contribution to the balance of payments, the development of non-industrial areas, the creation of employment opportunities, the overall increase in revenue to the economy through the multiplier impact, and social development.

This sector continues to be a major source of foreign exchange contribution to the economy which subsequently affects economic growth, investment, and employment. The resilience of this sector is the result of active involvement of public and private sectors in the promotion and marketing, in market diversification and in improving competitiveness of tourism products that attract tourists to Malaysia (Rozniza Aznie et al. 2012). The main focuses of these efforts are to enhance the position of Malaysia as a leading global tourism destination and at the same time to promote domestic tourism. As this industry generates higher multiplier effects in various other sectors, tourism activities will provide a wider platform for linkages with other sectors in the economy (The Ninth Malaysia Plan, 2006-2010).

Continuous efforts have been made that are geared towards realizing the potential of the tourism sector in order to increase its contribution to the economy. From the planning perspectives, it is important to ensure that the ensuing benefits of tourism development contribute positively towards economic development of the country. In turn, the benefits enjoyed from the economic development have a substantial impact on the employment structure of the local communities (Cengiz et al. 2011; Lindberg & Sproule, 1996). To achieve this, a strategy has to be developed to ensure a sustainable tourism development programs that will not deplete nor degrade the various attractions that helps bring in tourists into the country. To achieve sustainable tourism, the local people must participate actively in the transformation process (Okazaki, 2008). According to Habibah Ahmad & Hamzah Jusoh (2008), the involvement of the local communities in the tourism sectors is also crucial to the improvements of the living standards of the local communities.

Langkawi Island has experienced rapid development in the past two decades. Its natural richness, unspoiled bio-diversity and pristine beaches coupled with the declaration of Langkawi as a duty free island in 1987 helps promote Langkawi as one of the leading island destination in the Asia Pacific region. Before 1990, the majority of local communities in Langkawi were employed in agriculture, fisheries, small-scale trade and civil services. Some portions of the society are self-employed especially in various business ventures. The development of the tourism industry and the declaration as a tax free zone status has generated new employment opportunities for the local community that leads to the structural changes in the employment patterns of the local communities which saw a huge number of the local communities involves in the hotel industry, tour guides, boat drivers for the island hopping, restaurant operators, travel agencies as well as car rentals and transportation.

In 2006, Langkawi was accorded a Geopark status by UNESCO. For administrative purpose, the whole of Langkawi is divided into three areas – the Kilim Karst Geopark, the Machinchang Cambrian Geopark and the Dayang Bunting. The

Kilim Karst area is different from the other two areas due to its bio-diversity richness especially its mangrove forest which has several attractions such as eagle and bat caves. To access these attractions, tourists have to take a boat ride provided by the Kilim Community Cooperative Society (KCCS). This paper is intended to highlight the involvement of the tourist boat operators along the Kilim River. The discussion here includes the analysis of the profiles of the boat operators, profiles of their business activities and the tourists' behaviour based on the perception of the boat operators.

Local Community And The Development Of Tourism Activities

Local communities' participation is an important element of tourism development (Tosun, 2000). According to Brohman (1996), participation of local communities in tourism generally refers to empowering local residents to determine their own goals in development, and in consulting with the locals to determine their hopes and concerns in tourism activities. Increase in incomes, opportunities for employment, and education of locals are the most apparent ways in motivating community involvement in the tourism development (Cengiz et al. 2011; Norzaini Azman et al. 2011; Nurhafizah Yusoff & Rahimah Abdul Aziz, 2010; Tosun, 2000).

Tosun (2000), examined the limits to public participation in the decision-making process of tourism development in developing countries despite the benefits of public participation in tourism is not totally ignored although desirability and practicality of the participatory tourism development approach appear to be interrelated, it will become primarily focus on barriers to practicality of applying the community participation. Bahaire & Elliott-White (1999) summarize the various strategies for implementing community participatory approaches to tourism planning and development. It is suggested that community participation should be encouraged through, for example, the establishment of permanent tourism committees or forums, focus groups, attitudinal surveys of the community, the provision of educational materials and public hearings on key planning issues. While such strategies strive to provide inclusive approaches to tourism development, the issue of non-participation remains unresolved (Halimatun Saadiah Hashim et al. 2010).

Currently, the contribution of the tourism industry in Langkawi reaches approximately 11% of the Kedah GDP and contributing 30% of the workforce in Langkawi. Most of them are employed in hotels, motels and chalets that are abundant in Langkawi while 30% are estimated to be working in the business or employment associated with tourism activities such as restaurants, transport providers, tour guides and retail (Langkawi Development Authority, 2012).

Seasonal factors often influence tourist arrivals to an island destination; for example, tourists will refrain from visiting an island during the monsoon season or during extreme temperatures. In this case, Langkawi are geographically protected from the worst monsoon because of its strategic location in the Andaman Sea (Langkawi Development Authority, 2012).

Langkawi natural richness is a major factor that attract tourist to the islands. In addition to the natural richness, Langkawi has also managed to diversify its attraction. This includes the Mount Machinchang cable car, Underwater World, Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA) events and shopping as well as dines at the various restaurants in Pantai Cenang and Prime Quay. All these have enables Langkawi to collect RM1.9 billion from tourism revenues and at the same time attracting approximately 2.5 million visitors comprises of two million

tourists and 0.5 million daily visitors. The majority of tourists came from Europe and Asia; among the largest concentration were from United Kingdom, Australia, Saudi Arabia, China and India. Figure 1 below shows the arrivals of international and domestic of tourists' to Langkawi with the month of January to September. The highest number of tourist arrivals was in June, with a total of 289,568 tourists (Langkawi Development Authority, 2012).

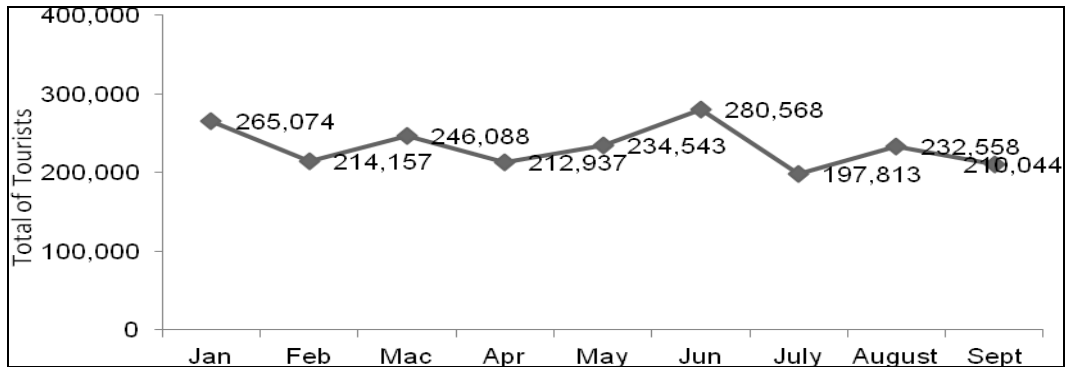


Figure 1. The arrivals of international and domestic tourists, 2012

Source: Langkawi Development Authority, 2012

Small and Medium Industries (SMIs) are among the major catalyst for economic growth in Malaysia. Almost 99.2% of the total entrepreneurs in Malaysia are Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) contributing 32% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Muhammad Ari & Zaimah Darawi, 2012). Recognizing the importance and significant contribution of SMEs to the national economy and in accordance with the government goal to achieve high income status by 2020, the government has provided various supports and assistance to encourage further development of SMEs. These support and assistance provide opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship among the local communities.

In the case of Langkawi, the development of tourism industry has provided an avenue for the development of SMEs among the local entrepreneurships. Being a major tourist attraction in this country coupled with its duty-free status, opportunities are abundance for the local communities in Langkawi to engage in business endeavors either in tourism-related activities or in trade. As local entrepreneurs, they are very well equipped with local knowledge, culture as well as its geographical attractions and heritage. According to Ishak Yussof et al (2011), local participation in the national economy has always been the focus of the national development plan. Policies and strategies were put in place to ensure that local residents are not left behind in the nation's development, particularly in the tourism sector.

The government has given special attention to the Langkawi Island as a leading tourism destination in Malaysia (Halimaton Saadiah Hashim et al., 2010). In addition to its sandy beaches, Langkawi was also bestowed with some unspoilt natural endowment. In view of the sensitive nature of these natural endowments, the Langkawi Global Geopark concept was promoted as a model for sustainable tourism development (Ibrahim Komoo, 2010).

Methodology

This study focuses on boat operators in Kilim as they involved directly in the tourism sector. Data were collected through questionnaires handed out to all 44 boat operators

who are members of the Kilim Community Cooperative Society in July 2012. Out of a total of 44 questionnaires, the researchers received back 21 responses.

The questionnaire consists of three parts namely Part A, B and C. Part A contains questions related to the respondents' personal background. Part B consists of questions associated with their business. Part C is developed to gauge their perceptions of the tourists that visited Kilim Geopark.

Results And Discussions

Results from the above questionnaires is divided into three sections namely (a) the respondents' profile (b) the business profiles (c) the pattern of tourist arrivals in Kilim geopark.

(a) The Respondents' Profiles

Table 1 report four respondents' profiles, namely, age, level of education, the number of children within the family and marital status.

Table 1: Profile of 21 sample respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15-24	1	4.8
25-44	17	81.0
45-54	1	4.8
55-64	2	9.5
	21	100.0
Level of education		
Primary school	6	28.6
Secondary school	12	57.1
Other	3	14.3
	21	100.0
The number of children within family		
1-3	11	68.8
4-6	4	25.0
7-9	1	6.3
	16	100.0
Marital status		
Single	3	14.3
Married	18	85.7
	21	100.0

As shown in Table 1, 100% of the respondents are man. 81% were in the age group 25 to 44 year old. 12% of the respondents had attended at least the secondary school level, while 6% had completed only the primary education. 68.8% has between 1-3 children and 85.7% had been married.

(b) The Business Profiles

i. No. of boats

The study found that 10 people (47.6%) had operated tour boat operations within the period 2006 to 2010 (Table 2), 6 people (28.6%) started in the period 1996-2000, 4 people (19.0%) started in the period 2001-2005 and only 1 person started in 2011 or later

Table 2: Starting Boat Operations

Years	Frequency	Percentage
1996 - 2000	6	28.6
2001 - 2005	4	19.0
2006 - 2010	10	47.6
2011 or later	1	4.8
Total	21	100.0

In the first year of operations, 20 operators (95.2%) had only one to start with only one respondent (4.8%) started with two boats. Currently, 9 respondents (42.9%) have between 2 to 5 tour boats and one respondent have 14 tour boats as shown in Figure 2.

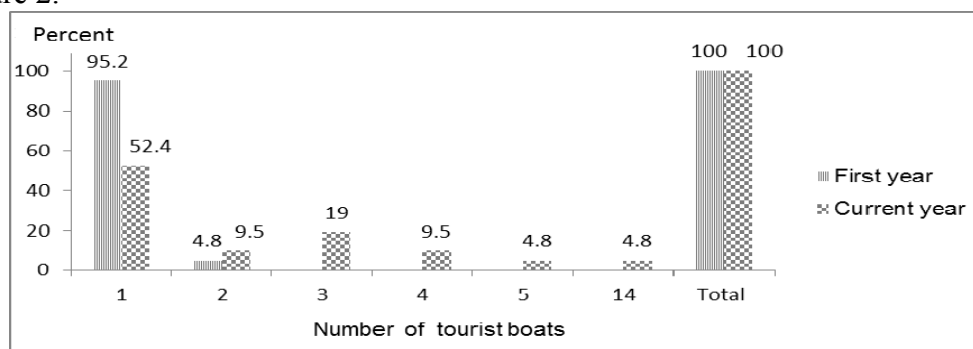


Figure 2. No of boats in the first year and current year

ii. No. of employees

Based on Table 3, a total of 6 respondents (28.6%) operate the boat services by themselves, i.e. they do not employ any assistance. 7 respondents (33.3%) have at least one employee. Two each of the respondents have 2, 3, 4 or 5 and more employees.

Table 3: The number of employees

	Frequency	Percent
No employees	6	28.6
1	7	33.3
2	2	9.5
3	2	9.5
4	2	9.5
5 persons and over	2	9.5
Total	21	100

iii. Involvement of children

Based on Table 4 three respondents (14.3%) involve their children to work with them. This would allow the continuation of the operations in the future.

Table 4: Involvement of children

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	16.7
No	15	83.3
Total	18	100

iv. Start-up capital

Capital is indeed one of the most important things in any business endeavors. In this study, 18 respondents (85.7%) started the business with the capital of up to RM75,000. Three respondents (14.3%) started a capital of RM75,000 to RM100,000 (Table 5).

Table 5: Start-up capital

Capital	Frequency	Percentage
RM 0 - RM 75,000	18	85.7
RM 75,000 - RM 100,000	3	14.3
Total	21	100

v. Sources of capital

Based on Table 6 below, only three respondents began the business with their personal savings while the majority started the operation with loans either from family/relative or other agencies. 4 respondents borrowed from family or relatives; 3 from Maybank; 4 from Bank Pertanian; 1 from Bank Islam; 4 from TEKUN and 2 from Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia.

Table 6: Sources of capital

Sources of capital	Frequency	Percent
Saving	3	14.3
Family or relative loan	4	19.0
Maybank	3	14.3
Bank Pertanian	4	19.0
Bank Islam / Bank Muamalat	1	4.8
Tabung Ekonomi Kumpulan Usaha Niaga (TEKUN)	4	19.0
Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM)	2	9.5
Total	21	100.0

vi. Monthly income

The questionnaire also reveals that 10 (47.6%) of the boat operators earned between RM1001 to RM2000 monthly income. Six (28.6%) boat operators earned RM2001 to RM3000 per month; 3 (14.3%) earned monthly income of RM4001 and above (Table 7).

Table 7: Monthly income

Monthly income		Frequency	Percent
1000 and below	(Very Low Income)	1	4.8
1001 – 2000	(Low Income)	10	47.6
2001 – 3000	(Low Medium Income)	6	28.6
3001 – 4000	(Medium Incme)	1	4.8
4001 and above	(High Income)	3	14.3
Total		21	100.0

(c) Pattern of Tourist Arrivals

The beautiful nature of the Kilim Geopark has been the major attraction for tourist visiting the area. The Kilim Community Cooperative Society provided several packages for the tourist to choose. The longer the duration, the more place can be visited by the tourists. Based on this, Table 12 and 13 provided the boat operators observations of the likelihood of the tourist nationality to take either a one hour trip or a three hour trip.

It shows that (52.4%) of the respondents indicated that tourists from Thailand will normally took the basic 1 hour package, while 7 respondents (33.3%) stated that local (Malaysia) tourist took the same package at the moderate level. For the fewer tourists who take the basic package, only 6 respondents (28.6%) indicated that it consists of Singapore tourist. The basic one-hour package includes bat cave, floating fish farm and eagle feeding.

Table 12: Tourists who take the basic package (1 hour)

Countries	Highest		Moderate		Fewer	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Europe	2	9.5	2	9.5	1	4.8
Arab	0	0	1	4.8	1	4.8
China	2	9.5	3	14.3	2	9.5
Japan	1	4.8	2	9.5	3	14.3
Thailand	11	52.4	3	14.3	3	14.3
Singapore	0	0	3	14.3	6	28.6
Malaysia	5	23.8	7	33.3	5	23.8
Total	21	100	21	100	21	100

For the Kilim Geopark tour, 57.1% of respondents stated that the basic package (3 hour) often taken by European tourists of the Kilim Geopark mangrove tour, while 38.1% of respondents indicated the package was taken by tourists from Arab. 42.9% of respondents also said tourists from China also took the same package (Table 13). Most of the tourists prefer to choose the basic package (3 hour) because it includes bat cave, mangrove swamps, floating fish farm, eagle feeding, crocodile cave, Andaman Sea and round shoe island Dangli Island.

Table 13: Tourists who take the basic package (3 hour)

Countries	Highest		Moderate		Less	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Europe	12	57.1	5	23.8	1	4.8
Arab	8	38.1	8	38.1	1	4.8
China	0	0	1	4.8	9	42.9

Japan	1	4.8	6	28.6	5	23.8
Thailand	0	0			2	9.5
Singapore	0	0	1	4.8	2	9.5
Malaysia	0	0			1	4.8
Total	21	100	21	100	21	100

Preservation of the environment is very important to ensure sustainability of the Kilim Geopark. Table 14 provides the boat operators perception of tourists' consciousness towards the environmental issues. From the boat operators' perspective, 85.7% of European respondents are very concerned about the environmental preservation. While 38.1% respondents stated the Singapore tourists protect the environment at a moderate level and 85.7% of respondents stated the Arab tourists were less concerned about environmental preservation. Boat operators should educate the visitors in respect of preservation and conservation to when visiting the Kilim Geopark. This is important to ensure that eco tourism in the area continues to be preserved without any threat to the environment.

Table 14: The level of tourists environmental concern to Kilim Geopark

Countries	Highest		Medium		Less	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Arab	0	0	0	0	18	85.7
Europe	18	85.7	1	4.8	1	4.8
China	0	0	2	9.5	0	0
Japan	2	9.5	4	19.0	0	0
Thailand	1	4.8	2	9.5	2	9.5
Singapore	0	0	8	38.1	0	0
Malaysia	0	0	4	19.0	0	0
Total	21	100	21	100	21	100

Conclusion

The involvement of boat operators showed a good shift in the tourism sector in Kilim Geopark. An effective communication between the tourist boat operators is one of the factors that attract tourists to visit the Kilim. Besides that, they need to explore new tourism products that can be highlighted as well as an aggressive promotion to attract tourists coming to the Kilim and to revive the present economic activities with diversified concepts that are appropriate for the local community.

In terms of carrying capacity, the number of boat operators should be controlled in line with the environment carrying capacity. It is crucial to give emphasis for the natural resources around the Kilim Geopark and avoid from any degradation. If the environment collapses, then the level of visitor satisfaction will be declined and will result in negative effects on the source of income among the boat operators in the Kilim Geopark.

The background of the boat operators should be supported by both business management and leadership skills. In this context, government and the private sector need to provide the training opportunities and skills to enhance their knowledge and skills in the field of business. In terms of the operators themselves, they need to continuously improve their own attitude in managing the business as well as to enhance efforts to develop their businesses. Government and the private sector need to explore new tourism products that can be highlighted as well as an aggressive

promotion to attract tourists coming to the Kilim and to revive the present economic activities with diversified concepts that are appropriate for the local community.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge the financial help from the LRGS grants schemes and STRC that allows this research to be carried out.

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