

Tourist Satisfaction in Tunku Abdul Rahman Park, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

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Abstract – *Tourist satisfaction is an important measure of success for any tourist destination. This is because satisfied tourists would revisit and recommend to others. When a tourist is satisfied, it shows the credibility of the tourist destination which mainly focuses on its product and its services. Destination image and attribute satisfaction explain tourist satisfaction in the context of this study. Based on existing literature, 8 destination image dimensions (travel environment, natural attractions, Environment and Events, Infrastructure, Accessibility to island, Relaxation, Outdoor Activities, and Price and value) and 7 attribute satisfaction dimensions (Shopping, Activities, Lodging, Accessibility to Jetty, cultural biodiversity attractions, social environment and Dining) in pre and post conditions is used to determine the satisfaction level of the visitors to TARP. In order for tourists to be satisfied, their expectations must be met by their experience. Hence, expectation and experiences score of 407 respondents are taken during their visit to TARP. Paired t-tests analysis is conducted to determine the mean difference between the variables tested. The study results show that the tourists were satisfied with 4 destination image variables and 4 attribute satisfaction variables during their visit. Overall results conclude that the respondents are satisfied with their visit to TARP. Copyright © 2016 Penerbit Akademia Baru - All rights reserved.*

Keywords: Tourist Satisfaction, Destination Image, Attribute Satisfaction, Paired T-Tests, Marine Park

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is known as one of the major generator for the global economy. This sector delivers 10.9% of world GDP in 1996 according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation [1]. Malaysia in particular had been ranked 9th in terms of tourist influx in year 2009 and 2010 [2]. The importance of tourism is known worldwide, which emphasises the need for this study to focus on tourist satisfaction because tourist satisfaction had become a benchmark in determining the success of tourism industry. Tourism has the potential to grow as one of the world's highest-priority sectors and employers in future [3].

The importance of tourist satisfaction has been stressed in former researches. Satisfied tourist tend to have positive post visit intention [4] such as buying intentions, word of mouth communications and price sensitivity [5]. This shows how crucial tourist satisfaction is in determining the choice of destination and decision to return for the tourists [6-7]. Based on these studies on tourist satisfaction, it is safe to conclude that tourist satisfaction holds the key to answering the needs of the tourism industry. Therefore in this study, tourist satisfaction is used to show its importance and as this purpose of the study stands, to determine the

satisfaction of visitors, given the fact that this is a way of assessing the perceptible quality of the services on offer in the areas in question [8].

In another nutshell, the global growth of Eco-Tourism has led to new business and tourism opportunities for the local and national economies [9]. This has contributed to the increase in number of visitors to tropical coastal and marine areas in recent years [10]. The ever-changing taste of tourists to love nature based tourism destinations and a well-managed marine park such as TARP has its positive and negative attributes from the managements view. Considered as reasonably priced tourism experience, TARP is highly popular with tourists. However, being a sought after place or tourist destination does have its problems which may reflect in the satisfaction of visitors. This is because, tourists tend to look for the best experience during their visit or stay in their search to fulfil and satisfy tourism needs. Negative influences may alter the tourists' experiences and effect their overall satisfaction.

However, this issue is less addressed in previous researches. Previous studies regarding satisfaction are done in different settings and fields which includes retail banking [11], leisure sport activities [12], national park [13], and city setting [14] web-based course/designing [15-17], service of low-cost airlines [18], shopping [4] and many more. This leaves a gap on how tourists in marine park setting react to their experience during their visit? Are they satisfied with their visit? Does their experience match their expectation regarding various dimensions of destination image and attribute satisfaction? These questions prompt this study to be carried out in Tunku Abdul Rahman Park where respondents' satisfaction is determined based on their expectation and experiences during their visit to TARP. This study's aim is to determine the satisfaction of visitors to TARP based on destination image and attribute satisfaction.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Area

Located 3 kilometres offshore from Kota Kinabalu town, Tunku Abdul Rahman Park is a state marine park located in the Gaya Bay of Sabah, Malaysia [19]. TARP comprises of 50km² with two thirds of sea area and the rest consisting of 5 islands and coral reefs [20-21]. These clusters of islands are made of Pulau Gaya, Pulau Sapi, Pulau Manukan, Pulau Mamutik and Pulau Suluq. Its location near to the capital of Sabah brings the comfort of easy access for local and international tourists from Kota Kinabalu. This has made it a highly sought tourist destination in Malaysia. Besides the overwhelming tourism status, Tunku Abdul Rahman Park (TARP) is also one of the well managed Marine Parks which acts as an attraction and also economic factor for Malaysia. The promotion of Eco-tourism mainly available in these marine parks is one of the sectors that already contribute or can support the growth of the regions surrounding it [8]. The total tourist arrival to the park has increased by about 400% from year 1997 to 2004 [20-21]. The popularity of the park have attracted high number of tourists per annum, hence it is important to know whether the tourist are satisfied with their visit.

2.2 Data Collection

A tourist satisfaction questionnaire was developed and distributed to the tourists of Tunku Abdul Rahman Park to determine the satisfaction levels of respondents who choose to visit the islands in Tunku Abdul Rahman Park. The field survey was conducted by convenience sampling technique using questionnaires in Jesselton Point (main Jetty to Tunku Abdul Rahman Park) to returning visitors from the islands of Tunku Abdul Rahman Park. The survey

was done from 1st of May 2014 to 10th of June 2014. A total of 407 structured questionnaires based on [22] had been distributed to tourists in who have endured the visit to the islands during the data collection period. The respondents of this study are chosen only after they have visited the Park. Data is taken and analysed using statistical analysis by SPSS.

2.3 Statistical Analysis

To determine the satisfaction of respondents, t-test analysis is used. T-tests is a statistical examination of two population means. Destination image and attribute satisfaction section from the questionnaire which contains the expectation and experience of the visitors are analyzed using paired-t tests to test the difference in the pre and post mean score of dimension contributing to destination image and attribute satisfaction. This analysis also determines which dimension has more effect towards the overall satisfaction of the tourists. Through the score of mean, the degree of effect are known and mean value of the highest shows the item which has the most effect towards the variables used. The “paired t-test” is used when each observation in one group is paired with a related observation in the other group. The mean score are analyzed to get negative or positive value to determine tourists are satisfied or not. In this study result, negative mean value shows that the respondents are satisfied with the variable while positive mean value shows that the respondents are not satisfied with the particular variable.

Each set of questions hence have two types of scores which are the expectation and the experience score which will be compared. In this part of paired t-test, expectation score is used as variable one and experience score is used as variable two. This gives the equation of expectation score minus experience score where expectation- experience=mean difference (refer Table 3). In this term of results, negative mean difference score shows that the respondents are satisfied because their experiences have better score than their expectation. In other words, their experiences have been beyond expectation. Meanwhile if the mean difference score is positive, it shows that the respondents are not satisfied with the attribute mentioned because their expectation was higher than the experience received. In addition, significant level (p) shows that whether the results of paired t-test are significant or not. Hence, a significant level of 0.05 and less are considered valid and shows that there is a significant level of difference between the pre and post values of scores.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Tourist Demographic Profiles

This study is done based on 407 respondents who took part in the questionnaire. The demographic profiles determined are gender, age group, nationality and marital status and income level of the respondents. Table 1.0 summarizes the breakdown of respondents ($n=407$) based on the demographic profiles mentioned. During this course of study, more females (55.5%) than males (44.5%) have participated in visiting TARP. This is consistent with [23] where in their study, females respondents were more. This shows that this tourist spot which situated in Malaysia have been a trusted form of place to visit for all gender types. In comparison, the [24] has pointed out that India being the number 1 dangerous country to be visited by female gender. This shows that in TARP, all genders are equally accepted and the place is ensured of its safety.

The age groups of respondent's show a different tourist profile studied. The age group of 19-30 dominate 77.6% of the respondents who are eager to travel to this place than other respondents (refer Table 1.0). This is particularly because TARP has a range of activities which are in demand for these age groups. This is consistent with [25] Adult Life Course Theory which states people with age range of 22-27 are eager to try new activities and indulge in adventurous activities. Normal recreational activities on the beach include sunbathing, beach volleyball, and sand digging, snorkelling, swimming and diving to observe the underwater marine life and habitat. In recent years, more adventurous activities such as deep sea diving, island to island zip line, banana boat, parasailing have been introduced in TARP. These types of activities have attracted this group to the islands which supports the respondents profile studied. This is also supported by [26] where in her studies found that middle age groups have tendency to be attracted for much adventurous activities. In term of nationality, this study has limited the number of local and foreign respondents who took part in the study. This is to follow the ratio of real time visitors to the island. In this study, 261 local tourist and 146 foreign tourists participated. TARP is also very well-known because of its affordable rates for visit. This explains why majority of the respondents have income level of less than RM 1400. This is because Tarp is affordable and also a very sought after tourist destination in Sabah.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of Respondents

Variable	Frequency (n=407)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	181	44.5
Female	226	55.5
Age Group		
≤18	7	1.7
19-30	316	77.6
31-40	57	14.0
41-50	20	4.9
≥51	7	1.7
Nationality		
Malaysian	261	64.1
Foreigners	146	35.9
Income Level (RM)		
<1400	278	68.3
1400-3499	38	9.3
3500-5000	43	10.6
5001-8999	18	4.4
9000-10000	13	3.2
10001-19999	10	2.5
≥20000	7	1.7
Marital Status		
Married	96	23.6
Single	311	76.4

Respondents were also analysed based on their marital status. Majority of the respondents were single, where only certain percentages were married (refer Table 1.0). This corresponds with the findings of [26] and [27]. This is probably because married visitors prefer a less crowded place for some privacy while single visitors have less preference on the issue. In other studies however this result contradicts where [28] found that married persons dominate the sample size in a study in wetland. This contradiction shows that participation according to marital status varies by type of tourism [26].

3.2 Recreation Pattern of Tourists

The recreation pattern of the respondents discusses their purpose of visit, length of stay and also the islands visited. Table 2 summarizes the recreation pattern of the respondents ($n=407$) based on purpose of visit, length of stay and also the islands visited. Majority of the respondents visited TARP for vacation purposes. This underlines the credibility of TARP as a well-known tourist spot in the eyes of local and foreign tourists. The respondents are also aware of TARP's status as a well-known marine park and as a major vacation area promoted by Sabah Tourism Board. Majority of the respondents prefer a day trip than an overnight stay (refer Table 2). This is because of limited facilities of accommodation in the area of islands and prices of the accommodation are expensive. A night stay at hotel on Manukan Island starts from RM 700.00 [29] which is deemed expensive for the respondents' who are mainly from low income group. Hence it is easily perceived that they are not able to afford overnight stays at the islands and prefer a day trip to TARP. This also shows that there are no cheaper alternative for the respondents to stay at the islands.

During this study period, Sapi Island has the highest number of respondents with 231 visitors followed by Manukan (227), Mamutik (177), Gaya (53), and Suluq (13) (refer Table 2). On site judgement by the researcher shows that Sapi Island and Manukan island have all major facilities and activities while the Gaya Island and Suluq Island have only some resulting on higher number tourist influx to Sapi, Manukan and Mamutik islands. Some of the visitors also tend to visit more than one island which explains the redundant count in total no of visitors to each island.

Table 2: Recreation Pattern of Tourists

Variable	Frequency (n=407)	Percentage (%)
Purpose of Visit		
Vacation	305	74.9
Visiting Relatives And Families	61	15.0
Business Reasons	13	3.2
Attending An Educational Program	19	4.7
Others	9	2.2
Length of Stay		
Vacation	305	74.9
Day Trip	321	78.9
Overnight Stay	86	21.1
Islands of Visit		
Manukan	227	55.8
Mamutik	177	43.5
Sapi	231	56.8
Suluq	13	3.2
Gaya	53	13.0

3.3 Determining Tourist Satisfaction Based On Destination Image and Attribute Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction is determined based on destination image and attribute satisfaction. In order to determine objective one of the study, paired t-test is used in this part. The paired t-tests were done to 8 destination image dimensions from [30] which are travel environment, natural attractions, Environment and Events, Infrastructure, Accessibility to island, Relaxation, Outdoor Activities, and Price and value, and 7 attribute satisfaction dimensions from [30] which are Shopping, Activities, Lodging, Accessibility to Jetty, cultural biodiversity

attractions, social environment and Dining in pre and post satisfaction conditions of the visitors to TARP. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Paired T-Tests Results For Destination Image And Attribute Satisfaction Based On Pre and Post Score

Item code	Item title	Mean Differences	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Destination Image	Travel environment	-0.12	1.30	-1.84	0.07
	Natural attractions	-0.14	1.30	-2.14	0.03*
	Environment and events	0.06	1.11	1.12	0.27
	Infrastructure	0.33	1.48	4.47	0.00**
	Accessibility to island	0.04	1.24	0.60	0.55
	Relaxation	-0.22	1.27	-3.48	0.00**
	Outdoor activities	-0.19	1.21	-3.13	0.00**
	Price and value	0.09	1.35	1.41	0.16
Attribute Satisfaction	Shopping	0.21	1.25	3.30	0.00**
	Activities	0.00	1.49	0.00	1.00
	Lodging	-0.01	1.17	-0.22	0.83
	Accessibility to Jetty	-0.10	1.20	-1.68	0.10
	Cultural Biodiversity Attractions	-0.25	1.32	-3.78	0.00**
	Social Environment	-0.24	1.12	-4.34	0.00**
	Dining	0.16	1.16	2.75	0.01*

Note: Significant levels: **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Mean difference:

Expectation Mean – Experiences Mean = (Negative Mean Difference: Satisfied, Positive Mean Difference: Not Satisfied)

The overall survey items (64) are grouped into 8 destination attribute items and 7 attribute satisfaction dimensions according to [30]. Mean score for each dimension are quantified by transforming the questions score to average scores according to existing literature. Paired t-tests is used to compare the Expectation and Experience mean score from the survey questionnaire.

Based on paired t-test results in Table 3, 7 dimensions (travel environment, environment and events, accessibility to island, price and value, activities, lodging, accessibility to jetty) have concluded in no significant difference in the mean differences score between experience and expectation while 8 dimensions (natural attractions, infrastructure, relaxation, outdoor activities, shopping, cultural biodiversity, social environment, dining, attractions) have shown there is significant difference in the mean differences score of the items. Items which have shown significance difference are discussed below.

Natural environments are the core product of TARP. Respondents who visited TARP were relatively satisfied with their visit. Paired t-test results show that there is a significant difference in the scores for natural attractions (expectation) ($M=5.07$, $SD=1.17$) and natural attractions (experience) ($M=5.21$, $SD=0.99$) conditions ($t(407) = -2.14$, $p = 0.03$). The mean difference score shows negative amount which concluded that the natural environments of TARP have exceeded the expectation of the visitors during their visit. This is because; TARP is richly blessed with natural beauty which corresponds to the result from the study.

Infrastructure has been also given importance by the tourists during their visit. The infrastructures in TARP have been poor and did not manage to satisfy the respondents. Paired t-tests results show significance difference for the score of infrastructure (expectation)

($M=4.80$, $SD=1.19$) and infrastructure (experience) ($M=4.48$, $SD=1.30$) at conditions; ($t(407) = 4.47$, $p=0.00$). The mean difference shows positive amount which concludes that the infrastructure in the islands have fall short from the expected level of the visitors. The infrastructures in TARP are very basic and tourists are seen to be sharing tables and infrastructures at most of the time of their visit. However, cleanliness of the place is well maintained by the management as garbage bins are placed in strategic places helped by the tourist to keep the areas clean with constant sight of signboard reminding the importance of keeping the beach clean. In a similar case study at Pahang, the infrastructure was also found to be poor in cleanliness and created dissatisfaction among the visitors [31].

The islands of TARP are full of relaxing aura for the visitors to enjoy. This is proven by the respondents who enjoyed the islands natural relaxing environment. The relaxation item studied shows significant difference in the pre and post scores where relaxation (expectation) ($M=5.05$, $SD=1.16$) and relaxation (experience) ($M=5.26$, $SD=1.12$) at conditions ($t(407) = -3.48$, $p=0.00$). The mean difference show negative value which means that visitors have found the island more relaxing than their expected levels. The islands are richly blessed with windy nature and dry weather which is ideal for relaxing tourists who explains the high level of relaxation in the islands. In Pulau Mamutik, massage services are also provided for visitors with a minimal fee which could have increased the level of relaxation of the visitors.

Activities are the main attraction to some tourist destinations. In TARP, the outdoor activities available are a satisfactory for the respondents. Outdoor activities show significant difference in the paired t-test where outdoor activities (expectation) ($M=5.08$, $SD=1.06$) and outdoor activities (experience) ($M=5.27$, $SD=1.07$) at conditions ($t(407) = -3.13$, $p=0.00$). The mean difference shows negative value which means that visitors are satisfied with the outdoor activities at the islands of Tunku Abdul Rahman Park. The park management have increased the amount of activities such as Stand up Paddle (SUP), Banana Boat, Worlds longest island to island Zip line, diving, jungle trekking, and others which explains tourist's satisfaction in the outdoor activities [19].

The image of a natural area does not support TARP's cause for shopping. The respondents think that shopping have not been up to their expectation, hence making them dissatisfied with shopping on TARP. There is a significant difference between shopping (expectation) ($M=4.67$, $SD=1.05$) and shopping (experience) ($M=4.47$, $SD=1.15$) at conditions ($t(407) = 3.30$, $p=0.00$). The mean difference show positive which shows that shopping have not been up to the expectations of the visitors to TARP. Based on observation, shops are limited in every island, hence making tourist unable to compare things to buy or have limited choices of things to buy which could have upset the tourists. There is a significant difference in the scores for Cultural Biodiversity Attractions (expectation) ($M=4.98$, $SD=1.12$) and Cultural Biodiversity Attractions (experience) ($M=5.23$, $SD=1.12$) conditions; ($t(407) = -3.78$, $p=0.00$). The mean difference score shows negative amount which concluded that the Cultural Biodiversity Attractions of TARP have exceeded the expectation of the visitors during their visit. Sabah which is blessed with different cultural and natural biodiversity seems to have sit well with the view of harmony in the eyes of tourists which could have created a much more friendly and homely feeling for visitors to TARP.

Social Environment plays a big part in the overall satisfaction of the visitors where this variable measures the social aspect of the services provided such as friendliness of staff, fellow visitors and others. Friendliness of staff and other visitors as well as locals in TARP have made the respondents very much happy with the social environment of the place during their visit. The

score shows significance difference for the score of Social Environment (expectation) ($M=5.03$, $SD=1.02$) and Social Environment (experience) ($M=5.27$, $SD=1.05$) at conditions; ($t(407) = -4.34$, $p=0.00$). The mean difference shows negative amount which concludes that the social environment have managed to give the visitors a more than expected value in their judgment. This is supported by [32-33] where service quality is said to be a major factor related to satisfaction creation.

Dining is a must for any tourist destination. Tourists not only come for the attractions but also for the destinations foods. In this study, TARP has fall short in satisfying the respondents through their dining choices. Dining items show significant difference in the paired t-test where Dining (expectation) ($M=4.94$, $SD=1.02$) and Dining (experience) ($M=4.78$, $SD=1.12$) at conditions ($t(407) = -2.75$, $p=0.01$). However the mean differences show positive value which means that visitors are not satisfied with the dining availability and choices at the islands of TARP. Through observation, limited amount of shops or diners are available at the islands of TARP. Prices of food are also much higher than in the mainland and choices of food could also have upset the tourist regarding the issue.

3.4 Determining the overall Tourist Satisfaction

This part determines the overall satisfaction of the respondents who took part in the survey. Average mean score of destination image and attribute satisfaction is used to make comparison of pre and post mean value to determine overall tourist satisfaction. The results are shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Paired T-Tests Results for Overall satisfaction

Item title	Mean (pre-post)	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Destination image	-0.04	0.90	-0.80	0.43
Attribute satisfaction	-0.02	0.81	-0.56	0.57
Overall Satisfaction	-0.03	0.79	-0.75	0.45

Note: Significant levels: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Based on the results form Table 4, it shows that there is no significant difference in the mean score of experience and expectation score for overall satisfaction ($M=0.45$), overall destination image ($M=0.43$) and overall attribute satisfaction ($M=0.57$). According to the table, all paired t-test analysis show that the pairs have no significant differences that can be seen in comparison on the both. However all three mean differences show negative amount which shows that the visitors are satisfied with their visit to the islands. This is because tourists evaluated higher post value regarding TARP rather than pre value.

The mean score of overall destination image and attribute satisfaction is 5.02 and 4.83 respectively. This shows that destination image have a higher influence on determining the overall satisfaction of visitors to the island of Tunku Abdul Rahman Park. The natural image of TARP could have been the more attractive part of TARP rather than other attributes such as the service. Findings of [34-38] also support this where destination image is accepted as an important aspect in successful tourism development and destination marketing. Tourists are seen to be more focused on the image of TARP rather than the services provided at the place. This can also be seen in the higher score of mean difference for destination image rather than attribute satisfaction. This corresponds with the study of [30] where findings conclude that

overall satisfaction is made of destination image and attribute satisfaction which prompted this study to include the variables to determine tourist satisfaction.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the results it can be concluded that tourists are satisfied with their visit to Tunku Abdul Rahman Park. Even though some pre and post scores have shown no significance difference, a negative amount of difference in mean shows that their experience score is greater than the expectation. The differences show that expectations of these group of visitors are met which results in conclusion that the visitors are satisfied when their experience which are on par with their expectation in their visit to TARP. Destination image have been stronger issue in determining tourist satisfaction rather than attribute satisfaction for TARP. Destination image which is made out of more nature elements and sights is proven to be more important for the island rather than the attribute satisfaction which is more to the service and man-made contribution to the island visitors. The visitors tend to focus more to the natural part of their visit and have given less intention towards attribute satisfaction even though they are satisfied with the items. TARP which is a National Park shows its credibility of being one natural place in the heart of visitors.

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