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The Relationship of Ecotourism Development towards Ecotourism Destination Competitiveness. A Case Study in Kelantan

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Abstract. It has been demonstrated that one of the most important variables in accomplishing national travel industry goals is the competitiveness of tourism destinations. In this study, the competitiveness of Kelantan as an ecotourism destination was compared to the rise of ecotourism. The data were drawn from a sample of 227 respondents using a straightforward random sampling approach. The data were examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The questionnaire was distributed through online questionnaires. The findings show a strong correlation between Kelantan's competitiveness as an ecotourism destination and the natural resources, cultural heritage, and unique events that meet the criteria for ecotourism development. As a developing tourism destination, many tactics should be considered in order to boost destination competitiveness while sustaining long-term development of ecotourism locations in Kelantan.

1. Introduction

People are eagerly anticipating re-establishing contact with nature after the pandemic covid-19. They are seeking for domestic tourist destinations that are competitive. The abundance of domestic tourism resources has helped ecotourism develop into one of Malaysia's fastest-growing sectors. Domestic and foreign travellers alike are increasingly drawn to ecotourism, or sustainable tourism, which frequently occurs in natural settings. Due to the fact that, ecotourism typically focuses on nature, education, and sustainability, it is a sustainable form of travel that benefits both the environment and local communities. Ecotourism combines social, economic, and environmental interests. In terms of international travel, ecotourism, and travel for the arts, culture, and history. Kelantan has the potential to entice more tourists, especially foreign ones, with its "Experiential Tourism" offerings. The distinct cultural traditions, heritage, and values retained by the locals coexist in Kelantan's natural resources. Kelantan serves as the primary entry point for the region. Thanks to its advantageous location on the border between Thailand and Indochina. Kota Bharu City Centre will become one of the tourist destinations in Kelantan because of improved accessibility brought about by the development of LPT3, while Tumpat currently serves as the starting point for the Tourism Trail in Kelantan offering tourist attractions with the development of Kampung Laut Heritage Village. The stunning waterfalls and other natural attractions of Gua Musang, an easily accessible ecotourism location, will appeal to fans of the outdoors. Rafflesia Conservation Park in Lojing Highlands, Stong State Park in Kuala Krai, and Taman Negara are connected to the ecotourism trail between Kelantan and Pahang by the ecotourism gateway of Gua Musang. The Rafflesia Kerri, a type of palm flower plant and the largest flower in the world, is one of the special attractions of the Lojing Highlands. In an effort to make Kelantan a top ecotourism



destination in Malaysia and an international-standard R&D centre for the Rafflesia plant species, the Rafflesia Conservation Park will be created as part of the Rafflesia conservation programme. Another top ecotourism location for lovers of environment is the stunning Stong State Park. The magnificent seven-tiered Jelawang Waterfall, the tallest waterfall in the world, is located in the lush, green forest. the tallest waterfall in South East Asia, at 303 metres (1,414 feet above sea level). The Asian elephant, Malayan tiger, and tapir are just a few of the protected animal species that call it home.

Along with sustainable development, the idea of sustainable tourist development is evolving. The elements of nature, education, and sustainability are typically found in ecotourism. Ecotourism combines social, economic, and environmental interests. For ecotourism to be sustainable, it needs to be professionally marketed and developed through education. Ecotourism undoubtedly needs to pay attention to social and cultural factors in addition to the preservation of the natural environment. The natural world continues to be a significant factor in the growth of ecotourism and a powerful tourist draw.

The process of building and maintaining a tourism economy in a rural area is known as ecotourism development. At its most basic level, tourism development may be summed up as the process of creating plans and strategies to boost, develop, and stimulate tourism in a rural area. In this context, we are attempting to comprehend how ecotourism development (natural resources, cultural and historical legacy, and unique events) might affect the ecotourism destinations.

There are three objectives of this research:

1. To examine the relationship between natural resources and ecotourism destination competitiveness in Kelantan.
2. To identify the relationship between cultural heritage and ecotourism destination competitiveness in Kelantan.
3. To study the relationship between special event and ecotourism destination competitiveness in Kelantan.

2. Significance of the Study

This study could contribute to the development planning for government agencies like Ministry of Tourism, art and Culture (MOTAC), Kelantan Tourism center, Local municipal as a reference in order to develop Kelantan tourism destination. It can also help the local tourism player like tourist guide, travel agency, event companies in hosting more international events and promoting a vibrant Eco life to attract tourists

3. Literature Review

3.1 Ecotourism Destination Competitiveness

The key determinant of a destination's long-term success is its competitiveness [1]. [2] provided one of the earliest definitions of destination competitiveness as approaches and procedures that may be used to analyze the various aspects of destinations in the context of planning. [3] mentioned that definition of destination competitiveness as the most appropriate one. Destination competitiveness is the important factor that provide goods and services which it shows the significant tourism experiences by tourists.

According to prior research, increasing the competitiveness of tourism destinations is crucial to ensuring the viability of rural destinations [2,3]. Competitiveness is, in its most basic sense, the ability of a place to recognize its key selling points, locate markets that are likely to purchase them, establish a market environment where these products can be purchased, recognize change and potential threats, and be able to sustain the process over an extended period of time in a way that is both environmentally and economically sustainable [1].

3.2 EcoTourism Development

Ecotourism development is the process of creating and sustaining a tourism industry in a rural location. The process of developing plans and strategies to advance, cultivate, and encourage tourism in a rural area can be summed up as tourism development at its most fundamental level. In this context, our goal is to understand how management of natural resources, cultural and historical heritage, and distinctive events may affect the development of ecotourism and enhance the competitiveness of ecotourism destinations.

3.3 Natural Resources

According to [2], natural resources are the flora and fauna species that make up the ecosystem's primary resources. Natural resources are things found in nature that people can use, such as water, plants, woods, animals, soil, and stone. Hence, it can be specified these things as natural resources [2]. According to [4], what attracts tourists to a place is the makeup of tourism products (such as environmental resources, a range of facilities, and services). A thriving tourist destination, according to [4], can provide visitors with unique experiences that include access to natural resources. Additionally, places designated as world historic sites have an advantage in the tourism market.

According to [3], one of the main reasons people travel, especially to a particular country, is because of that location's natural or environmental resources. To sustain the distinctiveness of the objects used in the local tourism business, it is therefore desirable to protect distinctive assets [1, 2, 4]. As a result, maintaining a beautiful natural environment at a high standard must be a key priority if we want to stay competitive. [5] mentioned that natural attractions' quality is a component of destination quality and can influence a destination's competitiveness in the tourism industry [5]. Other research has concentrated on particular elements of destination competitiveness, such the environment nature-based tourism.

Maintaining a tourist attraction, in this case a natural resource, also means maintaining financial viability [1]. The preservation of fauna and flora is a significant problem in the growth of tourism as these are frequently the main resources that draw tourists. According to [1], "small" nations that are blessed with top-notch natural assets frequently focus on tourism. If manufacturing and tourism are distant substitutes, that is, if the elasticity of substitution between manufacturing and tourist is less than one, then these economies could expand at a non-decreasing rate and encourage sustainable economic development.

3.4 Cultural Heritage

According to the Tourism Malaysia website, Malaysia's generation was formed by Malays, Chinese, Indians, and many more ethnic groups that coexisted there. By blending all these traditions together, a truly Malaysian culture was being created. The diversity of culture legacy has made it an indispensable source of intellectual and spiritual depth for all civilizations. The importance of cultural legacy to human growth has grown in the twenty-first century [6]. He held the view that culture not only offers the potential for national growth but also paves the path for the long-term advancement of humanity. Our ambitions and achievements have been influenced by our cultural values. Culture, according to [6], offered the connection between the present. [6] mentioned that culture has offered the connection between the present, the past, and the future. Cultural information can also foster community cohesion and intercultural understanding. Therefore, it is important to encourage the improvement and preservation of cultural heritage as a fundamental component of human advancement.

In Malaysia, there are two types of cultural heritage: tangible and immaterial. Artifacts or ageing structures can be examples of tangible cultural heritage. For instance, moveable or unmovable cultural heritage, such as artwork, sculptures, monuments, and so on, can be separated from tangible cultural heritage [7]. The heritage of Malaysia may have included intangible cultural heritage, which was measured in terms of the attitudes, values, and lifestyles of the people. On a global and local level, cultural heritage was not a renewable resource, thus it needed to be protected in a sustainable way. Other than natural resources, a tourist site may have a competitive advantage due to its cultural history. It's

because those are prerequisites for competition, but they're insufficient in and of themselves. Therefore, cultural heritage can be a complementing component to increase the competitiveness of a tourism site [6].

3.5 Special Events

Special events are now frequently used by small communities to provide leisure opportunities to their residents as well as to attract tourists and raise money [2]. According to [2], special occasions had a range of purposes, including providing opportunity for amusement and social interaction outside of the norm as well as ritually remembering significant occurrences. The travel industry today routinely makes use of special events to advertise destinations and create positive perceptions of them [8]. In the context of tourism, [2] defined extraordinary events as infrequent occurrences outside of typical activities that are largely driven by profit. Special events have become a common means for small communities to offer recreational possibilities to their members, as well as to draw tourists and increase revenue [1,6]. Special events served a variety of functions, including commemorating a momentous occasion with ritual [2] and offering opportunities for recreation and social engagement outside of the ordinary [3,4]. Special events are now frequently used by the travel industry to promote a location and paint a favourable impression of it [2].

Special events are regarded as a sort of cultural tourism service that raises a city's allure as a travel destination. Special events are now seen as a crucial and important part of the development and promotion of the tourism sector. According to [2], a simple description was the planned development and marketing of unique events as tourist attractions. Each special event has been advantageous to the tourism industry separately. As a result, it proved that the tourism industry's infrastructure has improved, which suggests improvements for events. Overall, special events have had a positive effect on how competitively priced tourist locations are. Sociological and anthropological publications emphasize the well-established function of festivals and events as agents of communities and social bonding, as well as means of reaching transgression, transcendence, and collective effervescence. The social impacts of events—which they defined as any that have an impact on people's quality of life—were examined in depth by [6] in their groundbreaking report. According to their research, host towns generally agree such events provide "quite substantial economic, entertainment, social, and development benefits." Researchers have looked into how sporting events foster community growth, shared ideals, and social identities. Events are also potent forms of communication, engagement, and connection [9].

3.6 Research Hypothesis

Using data from previous studies, it can be seen that all three of these developments are related to how competitive a site is for tourists. Natural resources are the most important aspect in enhancing the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations. Studies in the past have shown that natural resources greatly contribute to the competitive advantage of tourism and the creation of sustainable environments [9]. In this study, there were three hypotheses concerning the association between two variables:

H1: There is a positive relationship between natural resources towards ecotourism destination competitiveness.

H2: There is a positive relationship between cultural heritages towards ecotourism destination competitiveness.

H3: There is a positive relationship between special events towards ecotourism destination competitiveness.

Figure 1 showed that the three factors of the study's hypothesis—natural resources, cultural heritage, and distinctive events—were positively and significantly related to the competitiveness of ecotourism locations. These natural resources, according to researchers, are crucial to increasing the competitiveness of ecotourism locations [1]. Prior research has shown that common assets significantly contribute to tourism's economic advantage and the development of a sustainable environment [1]. Natural resources are significantly contributed to the competitive advantage of tourism and the development of sustainable settings.

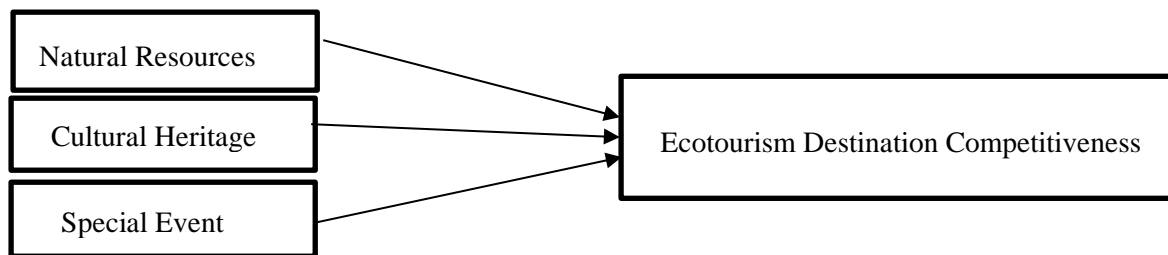


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the relationship between ecotourism development and ecotourism destination competitiveness in Kelantan

4. Methodology

Researchers employed descriptive research as a quantitative method approach in this investigation. To observe and describe a research subject or problem without in any way affecting or modifying the variables, description research was used. This research is conclusive in nature, instead of exploratory. In addition, descriptive research usually done on a larger scale of population and able to answer what, where, who, where and how of a situation in the research study. Thus, descriptive research was selected by researcher to collect the data of this study. The main instrument of this study that researcher used is questionnaire. Questionnaires were generally less expensive and time consuming than the interview and observation. There were two methods to distribute the questionnaire. First, researchers are used online survey method. The online survey was distributed through Google Form. Secondly, face to face approach had been applied. Researchers would as the courtesy of respondents to fill in the Google Form questionnaire. After the respondents had complete the questionnaires, the researchers collected the data and made an analysis.

In this study, Kelantan respondents were chosen using a straightforward random sample procedure. 381 respondents who had visited ecotourism sites in Kelantan were given the questionnaire. It was advised to create random sampling for the population with a modest number of respondents using SPSS version 24. According to [10], the sample size is chosen for the study to produce a valid and trustworthy sample. The researcher used basic classification data as well as nominal measurements, which lack any logical reasoning. For instance, items measured on a Likert scale that use a 5-point Likert scale to score the level of satisfaction (1 strongly disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Less agree, 4 Agree, and 5 strongly agree). Two types of data analysis were done which regression analysis and descriptive analysis.

5. Findings

5.1 Background of The Respondent

The researcher distributed a total of 381 set questionnaire, but it was only 227 set of questionnaires were return and usable. Table 1 shown the background of the respondents where the number of female respondents was higher than the male respondents. The frequency of female respondents was 157(69.2%) while the frequency of male respondents was 70(30.8%).

Table 1: Background of The Respondents

Gender	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)
Female	69.2	157
Male	30.8	70
Total	100	227

5.2 Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

The researcher used Pearson's correlation in this investigation. This study used correlation to assess the linear relationship between two variables, namely the competitiveness of ecotourism destinations and the development of ecotourism which is natural resources, cultural heritage, and special event. The correlation coefficient's (r) value ranged from -1 to +1. The correlation value of 0 indicated that there is no linear relationship between the two variables, while a correlation coefficient of -1 or +1 indicated that a perfect linear relationship had been formed.

With a correlation value (r) of 0.716, Table 2 demonstrated a significant association between the two variables. Significantly, the competitiveness of the tourism destination's natural resources was.000. As a result, it supported the notion that natural resources contribute positively towards competitiveness of tourism destinations.

H1: There is a positive relationship between natural resources towards tourism destination competitiveness.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis for Hypothesis 1

		Natural Resources	Tourism Competitiveness	Destination
Natural Resources	Pearson Correlation		.716**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N		227	
Tourism Competitiveness	Destination	Pearson Correlation	.716**	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	227	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 demonstrated a significant correlation of 0.661 between the two variables. Significantly, the competitiveness of the tourism site was.000 in terms of its cultural assets. This supported the idea that there was a beneficial association between cultural heritage and competitiveness of tourism destinations.

H2: There is a positive relationship between culture heritage towards tourism destination competitiveness.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis for Hypothesis 2

		Culture Heritage	Tourism Competitiveness	Destination
Culture Heritage	Pearson Correlation		.661**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N		227	
Tourism Competitiveness	Destination	Pearson Correlation	.661**	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	227	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 had a correlation coefficient of 0.783, which indicated a significant association between the two variables. Significantly, the competitiveness of the travel and special event destinations was.000. As a result, it supported the notion that unique events contribute favourably to the competitiveness of tourism destinations.

H3: There is a positive relationship between special events towards tourism destination competitiveness.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis for Hypothesis 3

		Special Event	Tourism Competitiveness	Destination
Special Event	Person Correlation		.783**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N		227	
Tourism Competitiveness	Person Correlation	.783**		Destination
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	227		

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

6. Discussion and Recommendation

This study looked at the relationship between tourist growth and Kelantan's competitiveness as a travel destination. Future researchers may assess the results of this study and take these important factors into account when making theoretical recommendations. The researcher believes that future research should concentrate more on the perceptions of students about the growth of ecotourism in Kelantan. Visitors from all walks of life will perceive and react to the growth of tourism differently. The researchers also advise that future studies investigate and take a closer look at a different research approach that might have an impact on the relationship between ecotourism growth and destination competitiveness. Sustainability, for instance, may simultaneously affect related dependent variables despite having different factors than those that affect ecotourism development. The researcher discovered that sustainability may serve as both a motivating element for destination growth and a strategy to increase the competitiveness of ecotourism destinations. The study framework might assist in shifting their viewpoints to one that is more favourable toward the competitiveness of tourism destinations.

It is strongly advised that future study continue to collect data from respondents using quantitative methods rather than qualitative ones. This approach is encouraged for future research because the results can be easily seen through the data acquired. In the meantime, the findings would be more accurate, trustworthy, and applicable to a bigger population. Expanding the study's geographic scope is advised for future research to produce better, more thorough results. The researcher can broaden their study's scope in the future to include other regions, such as other Malaysian states, to gather complete and reliable information regarding how competitiveness affects tourist destinations. Other than that, it is strongly advised to conduct face-to-face sessions to gather information.

As a result, when creating ecotourism, ecological factors are considered and locations that will be used as tourist destinations are chosen. Ecotourism, one of the alternative kinds of travel, may also empower people by utilizing natural resources. Poor infrastructure and local population participation are obstacles to the growth of ecotourism. Due to the great allure value of nature, ecotourism development must continue to be sufficient for the time being and is reliant on its scope. The natural ecology must then be maintained by continuing education. Developing ecotourism areas is necessary to increase marketing efforts, increase the number of facilities available to support ecotourism activities, and increase the visibility of the region. Ecological processes must be managed properly to continue. For natural processes to continue, ecotourism destinations must be established with competent environmental management. Ecotourism development, is based on the uniqueness and status of existing regions through development by enabling communities to flourish socially and improve their social standing in society, is also fostered through cultural tourist activities.

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