



**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY,
MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCE, SATISFACTION
AND LOYALTY IN ECOTOURISM CONTEXT**

By

THOO POH YEE

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Chair : Shazali bin Johari, PhD
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Service quality and satisfaction are critical factors in destination loyalty, as per the expectation-confirmation theory (ECT). However, recent studies have challenged the direct impact of service quality on satisfaction and loyalty behaviour in national park experiences, highlighting the need to re-evaluate causal effects in protected area research. Bako National Park (Bako NP), the oldest and most popular national park in Sarawak, has been criticised for unsatisfactory services and facilities, with visitors leaving negative reviews on popular tourism websites like TripAdvisor and Google. Based on the extant literature review, there is currently a lack of scientific research on visitors' destination loyalty towards Bako NP. Thus, this study aims to address these gaps. First, it seeks to determine the level of service quality, satisfaction, memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), and destination loyalty among the visitors of Bako NP. Subsequently, this study examines the causal relationships between these constructs and explores whether satisfaction and MTEs mediate the relationship between service quality and destination loyalty.

A self-administered online survey was carried out and generated 123 samples. Data was analysed by descriptive analysis and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The results indicated that the level of service quality and MTEs were high, as were satisfaction and destination loyalty. PLS-SEM analysis outcomes demonstrated all causal relationships between the constructs except for the direct relationship between service quality and destination loyalty. The analysis also revealed that satisfaction and MTE significantly mediated the relationship between service quality and destination loyalty. However, these findings contradicted the negative online reviews, necessitating a focused group discussion (FGD) with the Bako NP management to provide a better understanding of the underlying reasons behind this. The FGD outcomes revealed that Bako NP management prioritises service quality and has taken proactive measures to upgrade its facilities and accommodations in recent years, addressing any broken

amenities promptly, and suggesting most visitors did return to Bako NP due to their memorable experiences from previous visits.

The management also highlighted that focusing on visitor experiences has emerged as a crucial factor in the success of Bako NP, more than other factors. Hence, this study confirms previous research on the significance of prioritising visitor satisfaction and MTE, as demonstrated by the clear relationship between service quality, satisfaction, MTE, and destination loyalty. These findings offer valuable theoretical and practical contributions. For Bako NP management, incorporating these insights into their strategic planning presents a clear opportunity to improve visitor experiences and foster loyalty. However, it must be highlighted that the lack of generalisability is the primary limitation of this study since the survey employed convenience sampling and relied on an online platform during the COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdown period. Therefore, it is recommended that future research should replicate this model for multi-group or cross-cultural studies in Bako NP or other national park destinations. By validating these findings, the breadth of knowledge in this field can expand and enrich our understanding of visitor experiences in national parks.

Keywords: loyalty model, memorable experiences, ecotourism, national park, PLS-SEM analysis, mediation

SDG: GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**HUBUNGAN ANTARA KUALITI PERKHIDMATAN,
KENANGAN PENGALAMAN PELANCONGAN, KEPUASAN
DAN KESETIAAN DALAM KONTEKS EKOPELANCONGAN**

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Kualiti perkhidmatan dan kepuasan adalah faktor kritikal dalam kesetiaan terhadap destinasi, seperti dalam teori jangkaan-pengesahan. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat kajian terkini yang secara langsung mencabar kesan kualiti perkhidmatan terhadap kepuasan dan kesetiaan pelawat terhadap pengalaman di taman negara. Hal ini menunjukkan terdapat keperluan untuk menilai semula kesan sebab dan akibat dalam penyelidikan terhadap kawasan perlindungan. Taman Negara Bako (TN Bako) yang merupakan taman negara yang tertua dan terkenal di Sarawak telah dikritik atas sebab perkhidmatan dan kemudahannya yang tidak memuaskan, sehinggakan terdapat segelintir pelawat yang meninggalkan ulasan negatif di laman web pelancongan terkenal seperti TripAdvisor dan Google. Berdasarkan tinjauan literatur semasa, terdapat kurang penyelidikan saintifik mengenai kesetiaan terhadap destinasi ini dalam kalangan pelawat TN Bako. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menangani jurang tersebut. Pertama, ia bertujuan untuk menentukan tahap kualiti perkhidmatan, kepuasan, kenangan pengalaman pelancongan (MTE), dan kesetiaan terhadap destinasi di kalangan pelawat TN Bako. Seterusnya, kajian ini mengkaji hubungan kesan antara konstruk ini dan mengenal pasti sama ada kepuasan dan MTE menjadi pengantara dalam hubungan antara kualiti perkhidmatan dan kesetiaan terhadap destinasi.

Tinjauan dalam talian telah dilaksanakan dan menghasilkan 123 sampel. Data telah dianalisis menggunakan analisis deskriptif dan pemodelan persamaan struktur kuasa dua terkecil separa (PLS-SEM). Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa tahap kualiti perkhidmatan dan MTE adalah tinggi, begitu juga dengan kepuasan dan kesetiaan terhadap destinasi. Hasil analisis PLS-SEM menunjukkan semua hubungan kesan antara konstruk ini adalah signifikan kecuali hubungan langsung antara kualiti perkhidmatan dan kesetiaan terhadap destinasi. Analisis juga mendapati bahawa kepuasan dan MTE secara signifikan menjadi pengantara hubungan antara kualiti perkhidmatan dan kesetiaan terhadap destinasi. Walau bagaimanapun, penemuan ini didapati bercanggah dengan ulasan negatif dalam talian, yang membawa kepada keperluan pelaksanaan perbincangan

kumpulan berfokus (FGD) dengan pengurusan TN Bako untuk memberikan pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang keadaan ini. Hasil FGD mendedahkan bahawa pengurusan TN Bako mengutamakan kualiti perkhidmatan dan telah mengambil langkah proaktif untuk menaik taraf kemudahan dan penginapannya dalam beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, termasuk menangani sebarang kemudahan yang rosak dengan segera. Mereka mendapati terdapat ramai pelawat telah kembali ke TN Bako kerana kesan kenangan pengalaman yang telah mereka peroleh daripada lawatan sebelum ini.

Pihak pengurusan juga menekankan bahawa tumpuan kepada pengalaman pelawat telah muncul sebagai faktor penting dalam kejayaan TN Bako, melebihi daripada faktor yang lain. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengesahkan penyelidikan terdahulu berkaitan kepentingan mengutamakan kepuasan pelawat dan MTE, seperti yang ditunjukkan oleh hubungan yang jelas antara kualiti perkhidmatan, kepuasan, MTE, dan kesetiaan terhadap destinasi. Penemuan ini memberikan sumbangan teori dan praktikal yang berharga. Bagi pengurusan TN Bako, dapatan ini dapat dimasukkan dalam perancangan strategik mereka untuk membantu meningkatkan pengalaman pelawat dan memupuk kesetiaan pelawat terhadap TN Bako. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat limitasi dari segi dapatan ini dalam melakukan generalisasi kerana tinjauan yang dilakukan menggunakan kaedah persampelan mudah dan juga secara atas talian akibat pelaksanaan sekatan pergerakan ekoran pandemik COVID-19. Oleh sebab itu, dicadangkan agar penyelidikan pada masa akan datang untuk mereplikasi model ini bagi kajian berbilang kumpulan atau silang budaya di TN Bako atau destinasi taman negara yang lain. Berdasarkan penemuan ini, pengetahuan dalam bidang ini dapat berkembang dan meningkatkan pemahaman kita tentang pengalaman pelawat di taman negara.

Kata Kunci: model kesetiaan, kenangan pengalaman, ekopelancongan, taman negara, analisis PLS-SEM, pengantaraan

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May God bless all of you. ♥

Love,
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
Bako NP	Bako National Park
BCa	Bias-Corrected and Accelerated
CA	Cronbach's Alpha
CB-SEM	Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling
CF	Conditions of Facilities
CR	Composite Reliability
DL	Destination Loyalty
ECT	Expectation Confirmation Theory
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoF	Goodness-of-Fit
H	Hedonism
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait
I	Involvement
IS	Information System
K	Knowledge
LC	Local Culture
LL	Lower Level
M	Meaningfulness
MOTAC	Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture Malaysia
MTE	Memorable Tourism Experience
N	Novelty
NEP	National Ecotourism Plan
NPLM	National Park Loyalty Model
PERHILITAN	Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia

PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
PRF	Permanent Reserved Forest
R	Refreshment
RM	Ringgit Malaysia
RS	Responsiveness of Staffs
SAT	Satisfaction
SC	Sanitation and Cleanliness
SFC	Sarawak Forestry Corporation
SFD	Sarawak Forestry Department
SQ	Service Quality
SS	Safety and Security
TPAs	Totally Protected Areas
UL	Upper Level
UN FAO	The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
UNWTO	United Nations' World Tourism Organization
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WOM	Word of Mouth

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes the groundwork for the study. It begins with an overview of ecotourism in Malaysia, followed by the problem statement, conceptual framework, research objectives, the scope of the study, the significance of the study and the operational definitions of concepts used in this study.

1.2 Background of Study

Protected areas, such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, are once solely dedicated to conservation. These days, they have increasingly become tourist destinations providing public services to visitors (Rodger et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2011). This shift necessitates park management to prioritise visitors' satisfaction as clients (Taplin et al., 2016). The management of protected areas requires a balancing act between conservation goals and visitor experiences. On the one hand, managers must strive to protect local biodiversity and landscapes. On the other hand, they must also provide educational and recreational services to visitors, all while being mindful of the good and bad tourism impacts on the protected areas (Oviedo-Garcia et al., 2019). According to Wilshusen et al. (2002), it is very likely that the principle of strictly protected areas would not be able to protect biodiversity on a sustainable basis. Eagles et al. (2013) have also concluded that natural areas require a path towards sustainable development in order to ensure their future.

Tourism activities in protected areas offer a vital economic lifeline to local communities with greater revenue from visitors' financial contributions, conservation support and employment opportunities (de Oliveira et al., 2021). Tourism can contribute to the alleviation of poverty and revitalise rural economies in developed countries (Valdivieso et al., 2015; Snyman, 2016). However, the economic impact of tourism is highly dependent on the number of visitors and their expenditure on services and products locally and regionally. Visitor volume is an important indicator of the demand for tourism services in a region, notably the total number of incoming visitors new and returning visitors (Neuvonen et al., 2010). A steady flow of visitors determines the long-term sustainability of the protected areas (Whitelaw et al., 2014). In turn, the financial contribution from tourism activities can fund the conservation effort, which is necessary when public funding is scarce and dwindling (Valdivieso et al., 2015; McCarthy et al., 2012). Weaver and Lawton (2011) indicate an important paradigm in the perception of visitors, from perceiving them as a threat to a source of ecological integrity. This new perspective recognises visitors as important entities in providing economic support to protected areas, such as national parks.

According to Buckley (2009), visitors can generate up to 80% of the park's total revenue via individual charges by entrance fees. In essence, visitors are the principal source of income for national parks, particularly the satisfied and loyal ones, providing continuous financial, political, and social support (Moore et al., 2017; Newsome, 2013; Weaver & Lawton, 2011). Therefore, ensuring a continuous flow of visitors is essential for the park's economic well-being and support for local communities. As Moore et al. (2013) argue, attracting more visitors is not just about financial gain, but also about securing vital public advocacy for conservation efforts. National parks, as public institutions, rely heavily on visitor engagement and support to ensure their future and the preservation of the natural treasures they hold.

In marketing strategies, destination loyalty is an essential element as it is by far the best predictor of post-visit behaviour (Cossio-Silva et al., 2019; Chen & Chen, 2010; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). According to Cossio-Silva et al. (2019), loyalty is attained by exceeding the visitors' expectations, providing unique experiences and assuming a commitment with these visitors. This translates into tangible benefits, with loyal visitors exhibiting a stronger intention to revisit and spread positive word-of-mouth references about it to their family and friends (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020; Mohamad et al., 2011; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In a world of tightening budgets and fierce competition for public funds, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, where healthcare demands have dominated resource allocation, visitors' loyalty carries even greater weight (Moore et al., 2017; Taplin et al., 2016; Weiler et al., 2013). According to Moore et al. (2017), loyal visitors are normally less sensitive to price increments and act as valuable magnets, attracting new visitors through positive word of mouth (WOM) to family and friends. This clearly shows that loyal visitors are very important to a destination since pursuing new ones is more expensive than retaining existing ones. Furthermore, the financial benefits of loyalty extend beyond visitor spending, enriching service providers and businesses alike (Moore et al., 2017; Weaver & Lawton, 2011).

The concept of loyalty in tourism has been extensively operationalised as a single construct measured using multiple items, such as intention to revisit, positive WOM and intention to recommend (Chan et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2020; Markov et al., 2018; Mihanyar et al., 2016; Chi, 2012; Rivera & Croes, 2010; Tian-Cole et al., 2002). This approach, however, overlooks the potential nuances of loyalty, particularly in the context of nature-based tourism destinations. For instance, the works of Tian-Cole et al. (2002), Lee et al. (2004), and Weaver and Lawton (2011) on visitors' behavioural intentions and loyalty at a wildlife refuge in Texas, Umpqua National Forest in Oregon, and Francis Beidler Forest in South Carolina, respectively. In each of these studies, the researchers focused on measuring visitors' intentions to revisit the destination and recommend it to others. Interestingly, their findings revealed a lower mean for intention to revisit than recommend, suggesting that the intention to revisit iconic destinations may not accurately predict loyalty (Pinkus et al., 2016; Rivera & Croes, 2010). Therefore, when measuring loyalty in destinations like national parks, it is necessary to consider the specific characteristics and context of the destination being studied. The researchers recommended further investigation into loyalty, its determination, and measurement, particularly in relation to nature-based tourism destinations.

Generally, in the extant tourism literature, service quality and satisfaction are both believed to be the key antecedents of destination loyalty (Matolo et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2021; Muhamad Nasir et al., 2021; Carvache-Franco et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019; Chen & Chen, 2010). Positive experiences arising from high service quality and visitor satisfaction foster a bond with the destination, a phenomenon explained by the well-established expectation-confirmation theory. The theory posits that the comparison of pre-visit expectations with perceived performance results in product confirmation, which directly influences customer satisfaction and, ultimately, repurchase intention (loyalty) in consumer behaviour (Oliver, 1980). Numerous tourism studies have empirically validated this direct and indirect influence of service quality and satisfaction on destination loyalty (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019; Cossio-Silva et al., 2019; Breiby & Slatten, 2018; Hallak et al., 2017; Subrahmanyam, 2017; Kim et al., 2015; Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014; Kim et al., 2013).

While past research has established the importance of service quality in national park experiences, recent studies have challenged its direct impact on satisfaction and behaviour, where the relationship between these constructs was not significant (Mahdzar, 2016; Taplin et al., 2016; Thapa & Lee, 2017; Rodger et al., 2015). For example, Nordin et al. (2021) found no significant relationship between the dimensions of service quality, namely eco-tangibles, tangible, and reliability, with satisfaction under the ECOSERV scale towards Malaysia's Kuala Tahan National Park. This finding echoes the call by Rodger et al. (2015) to re-evaluate these causal effects in protected area research. Saayman et al. (2016) further highlighted the limitations of existing causal models that delve into the analysis of service quality along with other variables in the current national parks' literature. These variables include but are not limited to, the profitability and sustainability of national parks, as well as the behaviour exhibited by other visitors, such as loyalty, as highlighted by Rivera and Croes (2010). It is vital for future research to explore and investigate the impact of service quality on return visitation and positive word of mouth (Saayman et al., 2016).

Tourism researchers have acknowledged that providing high-quality service is one of the most crucial factors determining the success of the tourism sector (Teshome & Demissie, 2021; Aseres & Sira, 2020; Kumar et al., 2020; Fotiadis & Spyridou, 2020; Gogoi, 2020; Nian et al., 2019; Ban & Ramsaran, 2017; Cong, 2016; Sadat & Chang, 2016; Rodger et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2007; Atilgan et al., 2003). Service quality involves the evaluation of aspects directly under the destination management's control (Tian-Cole & Crompton, 2003). Both service quality and satisfaction are the main concepts grounded in expectation-confirmation theory (ECT). Service quality, in this theory, is considered as the gap between expectation and perception (Parasuraman et al., 1985), while satisfaction is the process of meeting or exceeding expectations (Oliver, 1980). However, a distinction between these two concepts has been the source of confusion (Moore et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2004; Tian-Cole & Crompton, 2003; Baker & Crompton, 2000). Fortunately, a consensus has emerged in recent research, with most scholars now agreeing that service quality and satisfaction are distinct concepts (Moore et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2004; Tian-Cole & Crompton, 2003).

Research on tourism experiences has increased tremendously in recent years, reflecting its growing importance in the increasingly competitive tourism sector (Kahraman & Cifci, 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Mahdzar et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2019; Boo & Busser, 2018; Zhang et al., 2018; Sipe & Testa, 2017; Mahdzar et al., 2016; Ali, 2015; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Rajaratnam et al., 2014). As Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003) pointed out, it is through interaction between visitors and destinations that tourists get to form their on-site experiences actively. On-site tourism experiences, which last a very short time and provide mainly transitory feelings, are stored in the visitor's memory, allowing him or her to recall their previous experiences (Kim, 2018). Marketing studies have indeed established that future consumer decisions are notably influenced by their past experiences through their stored memory (Mantonakis et al., 2008).

It is essential to recognize that tourists who have had positive memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) often go on to make recommendations through WOM or by leaving positive reviews, which in turn, potentially influence the decision-making processes of other tourists (Chen et al., 2021; Kim, 2018; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). This aspect holds particular significance from the perspective of tourism marketing. The ability of satisfied tourists to share their positive experiences with others can have a significant impact on the decision-making processes of potential travellers, as these recommendations carry a certain level of credibility and trustworthiness. The power of WOM and positive reviews cannot be underestimated, as they have the potential to sway the perceptions and choices of prospective tourists, ultimately influencing their decision to select a particular destination or engage in a specific tourism activity. Therefore, marketers and tourism organizations must recognize and harness the potential of leveraging positive MTEs in their marketing strategies to influence and shape the decision-making processes of potential tourists effectively. Kim and Ritchie (2014) have proposed and supported hedonism, refreshment, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge as dimensions of MTEs using a confirmatory study in Taiwan. They suggested destination managers focus on these dimensions by allocating their resources when developing and creating tourism programs and marketing strategies.

Building on Sangpikul's (2018) conclusion that destination loyalty hinges on both travel experience and tourist satisfaction, numerous studies have investigated the specific dimensions of experience impacting loyalty across diverse destinations and found a significant causal relationship (Kim, 2018; Wu, 2017; Wu, 2016; Ali et al., 2014; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; King, 2002; Baker & Crompton, 2000). Kim (2018), for instance, demonstrated that MTEs have a positive direct effect on revisit intentions and positive WOM for mass tourism, highlighting the critical role of MTEs in building destination loyalty. However, Kim (2018) adopted only five items from Kim et al. (2012)'s original MTE scale, which consisted of seven dimensions with 24 items. Similarly, Mahdzar (2016) positioned MTE as a mediator between perceived quality and revisit intention in Malaysia's Mulu National Park and found that MTE fully mediated the causal relationship. The researcher also proposed further determination on the consequences of MTE towards satisfaction, word-of-mouth, and intention, as their study focused solely on revisit intention. Additionally, the perceived quality measurement items used were based on Cronin et al. (2000), where the items were composed of performance-based and product-based suited for sporting events, fast food,

long-distance carriers, health care, and entertainment but not related to nature-based tourism.

While extensive research has explored the relationship between visitors' service quality, satisfaction, and destination loyalty, there remains a noticeable lack of comprehensive data within the current body of literature that delves into the specific mechanisms underpinning this relationship. Moreover, the majority of studies conducted in the context of national parks have solely focused on these constructs within a single model, thereby leaving a significant gap in empirical studies pertaining to the role of MTE within this particular model. Consequently, the present study strives to address these gaps by re-examining the causal relationship between service quality, satisfaction, and destination loyalty in the context of a national park setting. Additionally, this study introduces the concept of MTE as a mediator in the aforementioned relationship, aiming to illuminate the underlying processes that contribute to destination loyalty formation, ultimately enriching the understanding of visitor behaviour in these unique settings.

1.3 Ecotourism in Malaysia – An Overview

The 20th century has witnessed a perpetual global growth of tourism. Statistics by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2020) reported that annual tourism rates had grown by 4% by 2019, with the tourism industry accounting for 10% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), generating 330 million jobs (World Economic Forum, 2020). Unfortunately, this momentum was abruptly halted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which crippled global mobility in 2020, and the global GDP contribution in 2020 plummeted to only 5.5% – a staggering 49.1% decline compared to the previous year (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2021). Despite this setback, optimism remains. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2022), the tourism sector in 2022 is poised for a strong recovery, with global GDP contribution rebounding to pre-pandemic levels, restoring millions of jobs if governments worldwide continue to remove travel restrictions.

The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a devastating blow to Malaysia's thriving tourism sector. Back in 2019, the tourism industry was the third largest contributor to the nation's GDP, after the manufacturing and commodities sectors, with a 15.9% share of the total GDP involving 3.6 million workers. Before the pandemic outbreak, Malaysia had launched the "Visit Truly Asia Malaysia 2020" campaign in anticipation of the continued momentum of tourism growth in Southeast Asia, targeting 30 million visitors and RM100 billion in revenue from tourist arrivals in 2020 (Malaysian Investment Development Authority, 2022). However, the pandemic abruptly brought the campaign to a halt in 2020.

In December 2020, ex-Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin unveiled a bold vision for Malaysia tourism: a 10-year tourism policy plan prioritising both technology and ecotourism. This ambitious initiative aims to propel Malaysia into the world's top ten

tourism destinations, measured by both arrivals and revenues. Muhyiddin emphasised the critical role of digital technology in driving industry development while highlighting ecotourism as a top priority for achieving sustainable resource utilisation for new economic growth and creating employment opportunities (Utusan Malaysia, 2020). This focus aligns with the 17 types of tourism identified in Figure 1.1, according to the Executive Summary of the National Tourism Policy 2020-2030. Notably, both the 11th Malaysia Plan for Tourism Industry 2016-2020 and the National Tourism Policy 2020-2030 highlight the importance of establishing Malaysia as a premier ecotourism destination.

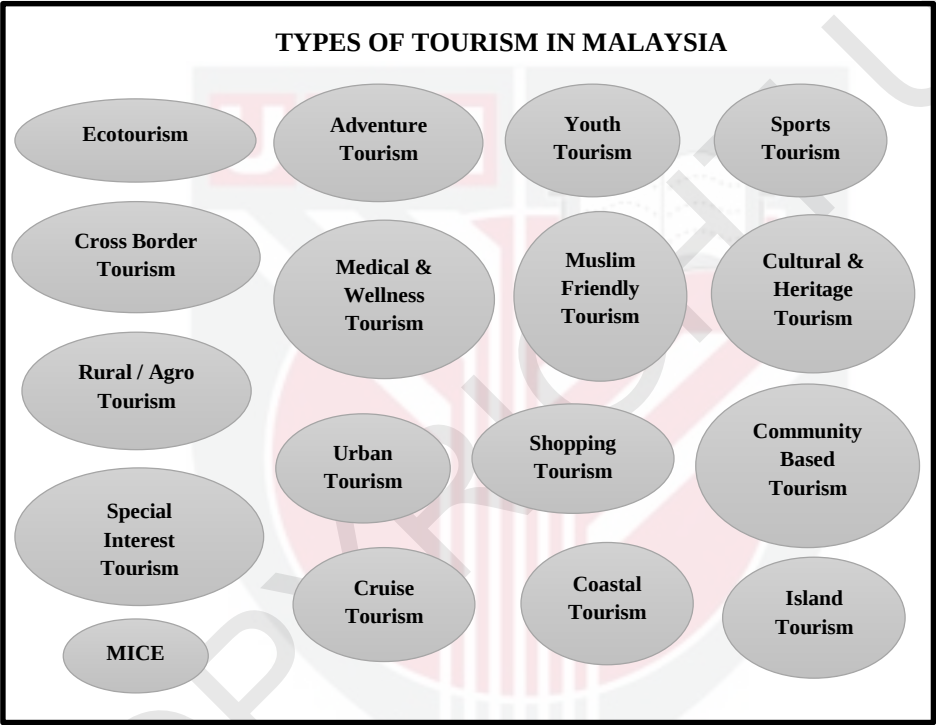


Figure 1.1 : Types of tourism in Malaysia
(Source: Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, 2020)

Malaysia, renowned for its natural scenic beauty and wildlife diversity across its 14 states (Chew et al., 2016; Mohamad & Ab Ghani, 2014; Mohamad et al., 2012), presents a treasure trove of ecotourism opportunities. Malaysia’s National Ecotourism Plan (NEP) for 2016–2025 identified 60 ecotourism clusters nationwide, with a remarkable nine clusters located in the Bornean island of Sarawak, which is also the largest state in Malaysia. This concentration of hotspots, coupled with Sarawak’s distinction as the state with the most national parks, positions it ideally to become a leading ecotourism destination within Malaysia.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN FAO) (2019), Malaysia boasts an impressive 62.3% of forested land area, which includes national parks, state land forests, permanent reserved forest (PRF), and wildlife and bird sanctuaries. This natural wealth has earned Malaysia a place among the world's megadiverse countries, harbouring around 306 mammal species, 242 amphibians, 742 birds, 242 reptiles, and 15,000 species of vascular plants (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2019). Beyond these terrestrial treasures, the country's waters teem with over 500 marine fish species, 449 freshwater fish species, and more than 150,000 species of invertebrates. There are currently a total of 2,056 threatened species, inclusive of all major taxonomic groups, based on the 2021 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.

Malaysia's national parks are definitely one of the main attractions for ecotourism, boasting one of the world's oldest, most primitive, and richest in flora and fauna with an abundance of endemic species. More than half of the total national parks are located in East Malaysia, also widely known as the Malaysian Borneo, as shown in Table 1.1. The region comprises Sabah, Sarawak, and Labuan; it is revered for its lush tropical rainforests as it is home to endemic species, such as the Bornean Pygmy elephant, a variety of primates, including the endangered Proboscis Monkey and Bornean Orang-utan, and more than 600 species of birds, eight of which belonged to the hornbill family.

Among all the national parks, Taman Negara is the oldest and largest national park in Malaysia, with 130 million years of history, sprawling across three states, namely Pahang, Terengganu, and Kelantan. Meanwhile, Bako National Park (Bako NP) is the oldest and smallest national park in Malaysian Borneo. Despite its size, Bako NP boasts the broadest range of vegetation, with nearly every type of Bornean plant represented and offering the most accessible access to fascinating wildlife encounters. According to the well-known travellers' website Tripadvisor, the top five national parks in Malaysia according to the travellers' favourites are Bako National Park, Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park, Turtle Island Park, Penang National Park, and Taman Negara. These national parks offer excellent wildlife sightings, beautiful sceneries, easy trails, canopy walks, and accommodation options.

Table 1.1 : List of the State and National Parks in Malaysia

Region	Names
Peninsular Malaysia	1. Kuala Tahan, Pahang National Park 2. Sg. Relau, Pahang National Park 3. Kuala Koh, Kelantan National Park 4. Tg. Mentong, Terengganu National Park 5. Pulau Pinang National Park 6. Kuala Gandah Elephant Conservation Centre
East Malaysia	Sabah 1. Kinabalu Park 2. Tawau Hills Park 3. Crocker Range Park, Keningau 4. Tun Sakaran Marine Park, Semporna 5. Sipadan Island Park, Semporna 6. Tunku Abdul Rahman Park 7. Turtle Islands Park, Sandakan 8. Pulau Tiga Park, Kuala Penyu Sarawak 1. Bako National Park 2. Mulu National Park 3. Niah National Park 4. Lambir National Park 5. Similajau National Park 6. Kubah National Park 7. Gading National Park 8. Batang Ai National Park 9. Matang Wildlife Centre 10. Semenggoh Wildlife Centre 11. Sama Jaya National Reserve 12. Loagan Bunut National Park 13. Tanjung Datu National Park 14. Wind Cave Naure Reserve 15. Talang Satang National Park 16. Fairy Cave National Park 17. Santubung National Park 18. Maludam National Park

(Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2019)

National parks in Peninsular Malaysia are all under the governance of the federal government, specifically by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN). Meanwhile, the national parks in Sabah and Sarawak are under the management of Sabah Parks and Sarawak Forestry Corporation, respectively. Peninsular Malaysia enforces federal conservation legislation under the authority of PERHILITAN with the National Parks Act 1980, which authorises the establishment and regulation of national parks. In Sabah, the Board of Trustees of Sabah Parks is responsible for managing the national parks under the National Parks Ordinance of 1962, which was later repealed and replaced by the National Parks Enactment of 1977 and,

later in 1984, the Parks Enactment of 1984. In Sarawak, the state government formed a statutory body named Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) under the Sarawak Forestry Corporation Ordinance 1995 to manage all the Totally Protected Areas (TPAs) and conserve the biodiversity of Sarawak governed by the National Parks and Nature Reserves Ordinance 1998 and Wild Life Protection Ordinance 1998.

On the other hand, the tourism sector in Malaysia is generally under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC). However, Sabah and Sarawak have their own ministry of tourism, namely the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment Sabah and the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak, respectively. All these ministries are responsible for promoting the uniqueness of Malaysian tourism, arts, culture, and heritage.

In line with the current United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)'s sustainable development goals for tourism, the Malaysian government also recognises the potential of ecotourism and formulated the National Ecotourism Plan 2016-2025, highlighting five focus areas, namely investment in ecotourism, tourism concessions, synergy between ecotourism and conservation, ecotourism marketing, and ecotourism cluster. The plan consists of a total of 19 strategies and 86 action plans and it will be utilised as "an instrument within the overall sustainable development of Malaysia and the economy and as a tool for conservation of ecotourism sites in the country."

1.4 Bako National Park

Table 1.2 presents the top 10 national parks in Malaysia according to the visitors' rates compiled by Tripadvisor (2022). The top choices for tourists opting for ecotourism in Malaysia by Travel Triangle Blog (2021) are listed in Table 1.3. Both internationally recognised websites crowned Bako National Park (Bako NP) as the first choice among all the national parks in Malaysia.

Table 1.2 : Top 10 National Parks in Malaysia by Tripadvisor

Top 10 National Parks in Malaysia	
1.	Bako National Park
2.	Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park
3.	Turtle Island Park
4.	Penang National Park
5.	Taman Negara National Park
6.	Sipadan National Park
7.	Kinabalu Park
8.	Batang Ai National Park
9.	Niah National Park
10.	Kubah National Park

Table 1.3 : Top 10 best national parks in Malaysia by Travel Triangle Blog

10 Best National Parks in Malaysia

1. Bako National Park
2. Taman Negara National Park
3. Gunung Mulu National Park
4. Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park
5. Niah National Park
6. Penang National Park
7. Endau-Rompin National Park
8. Similajau National Park
9. Gunung Gading National Park
10. Lambir Hills National Park

The area where Bako NP is located was named after a mangrove species, *Rhizophora sp.*, thriving within its boundaries (Figure 1.2). Bakau or bako, as pronounced by the native, is the local name of the species, hence the name Bako Village or Kampung Bako, which was established in 1853. The natives have inhabited the area for centuries, with the forest in Kampung Bako originally known as Muara Tebas Forest Reserve in 1927. A landmark decision in 1957 transformed it into Sarawak's first national park on May 1, officially opening its doors to the public on May 4. This gazettelement predated Sarawak's integration into the Malaysian Federation in 1963.

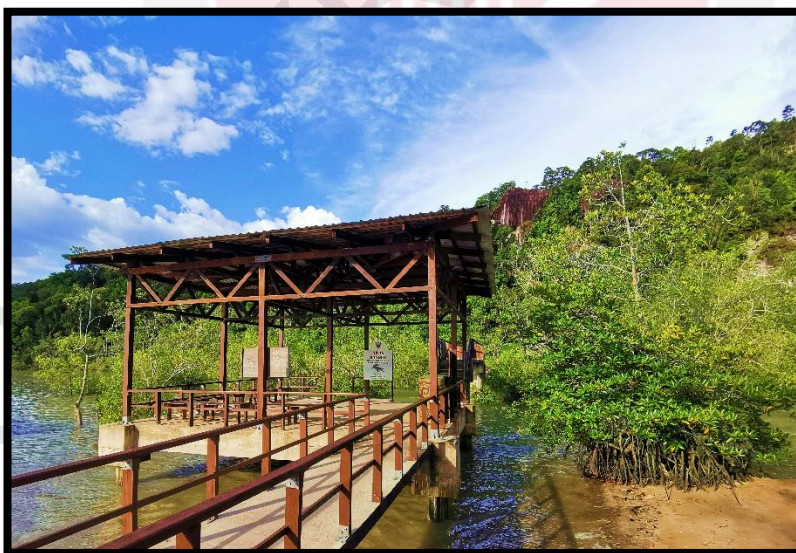


Figure 1.2 : The entrance of Bako National Park surrounded by mangrove forest

Bako NP holds a unique distinction; it is not only the first and oldest park in Sarawak, but also on Borneo Island. The gazettment of Bako NP is primarily for conservation purposes, with recreation, education, and research as secondary objectives (Good, 1988). The park's management has seen an evolution over the years. Initially, from its inception until 1973, the Sarawak National Parks Board of Trustees held the reins for fifteen years. Subsequently, the National Parks and Wildlife Division of the Sarawak Forestry Department (SFD) took over for three decades. As of June 9, 2003, the park's administration entered a new era with the appointment of Sarawak Forestry Corporation Sdn. Bhd. (SFC) as the authorized manager. Although SFC handles the day-to-day operations, the SFD retains responsibility for all legal matters pertaining to the park.

The journey to Kampung Bako begins in Kuching town, with two options for travellers: independent exploration by car or public transportation. Those with their own vehicle can drive for about 37 km (30 minutes) to the jetty at Kampung Bako, whereas those without their own transport can easily take the bus from Kuching town. Visitors to Bako NP must obtain a permit entrance at the ticketing counter (Table 1.4), followed by a 25-minute boat ride along the Bako River to reach the main entrance of Bako NP (Figure 1.3). The boat ride services are fully provided by the villagers of Kampung Bako (Figure 1.4). The gazettment of Bako NP has significantly benefited the local community, enabling them to generate income through ecotourism activities. The short travel time even makes day trips a viable option. The Sarawak government's decision to refrain from expanding road access to Bako NP reflects their dedication to conservation and understanding that unfettered accessibility could threaten the park's delicate ecosystem.

Table 1.4 : Entrance fees of Bako National Park

Category	Adult (19-59 years old)	Senior Citizen 60 years old and above / Disabled person	Children above 6 years old but less than 18 years old	Children 6 years old and below
Price (RM) for Malaysians	10.00	5.00	3.00	Free
Price (RM) for Non-Malaysians	20.00	10.00	7.00	Free



Figure 1.3 : The main entrance of Bako National Park



Figure 1.4 : Boats at the jetty managed by the villagers of Kampung Bako for the visitors of Bako National Park

Despite being the smallest national park in Sarawak, Bako NP boasts seven distinct ecosystems, each with its own flora and fauna (Figure 1.5). Every type of vegetation found on Borneo Island can be found in Bako NP. The park's allure includes hiking through the wonderful forests with abundant wildlife sightings, leading to scenic beaches or coastal cliffs overlooking the South China Sea. The hiking trails pass through mangroves, peat swamp forests, mixed dipterocarp forests, *Kerangas* forest (heath forests), *Kerangas* scrub, waterfalls, and grasslands. Brunig (1974) attributed the various vegetation found in Bako NP to human activities and geomorphological changes. Bako NP has one of the most extensive *Kerangas* forest and a subtype, namely *Kerangas* scrub, exclusive to this area, which, according to Pearce et al. (1983), is associated with historical burning practices. The *Kerangas* forest, also known as Sundaland heath forest, is a type of tropical moist forest characterised by a low, uniform canopy, with thick underbrush and rich growth of moss and epiphytes endemic to Borneo Island and is classified as vulnerable. Clarke and Lee (2004) highlight the pitcher plant (*Nepenthes*) as the star attraction.

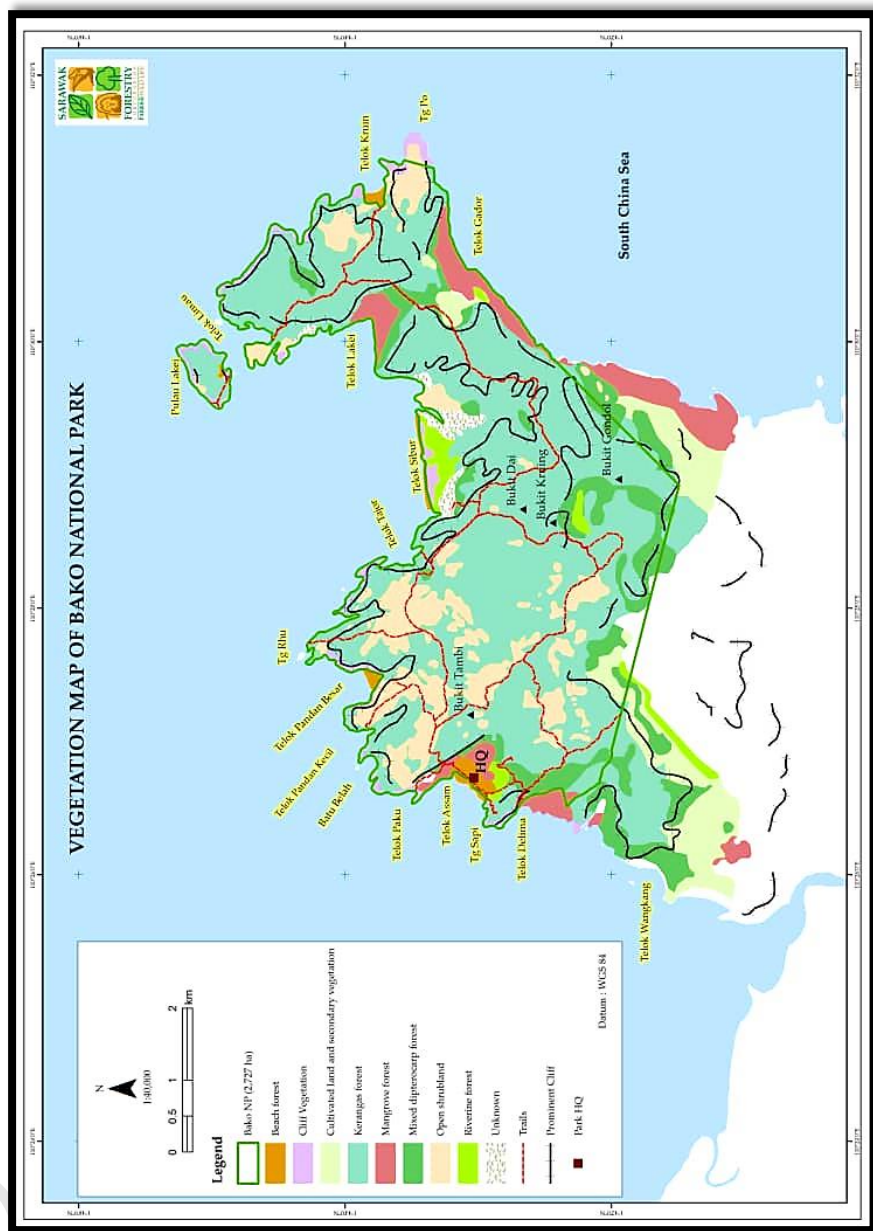


Figure 1.5 : The vegetation map of Bako National Park
(Source: Sarawak Forestry Corporation, 2023)

1.5 Problem Statement

Malaysia, comprising a total of 14 states, is renowned for its natural scenic beauty and wildlife diversity (Chew et al., 2016; Mohamad & Ghani, 2014; Mohamad et al., 2012). This rich biodiversity makes Malaysia one of the 12 mega-diverse countries in the world. Malaysia also acknowledges the importance of preserving its social, environmental, and cultural wealth heritage, and there is a vast potential for the ecotourism industry in the Asia Pacific region (Nair & Thomas, 2013). Puah, et al. (2018) highlighted the significant contribution of the tourism industry to the country's positive economic growth through tourist receipts. Among all the states, the National Ecotourism Plan (NEP) 2016-2025 has identified Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia as having the highest number of national parks, thereby positioning the region as having the highest potential to boost ecotourism. Sarawak has a total of 18 national parks, while Sabah has eight. Even so, the total number of visitors to Sarawak's national parks was only approximately half of the number of visitors to Sabah's national parks (Figure 1.6).

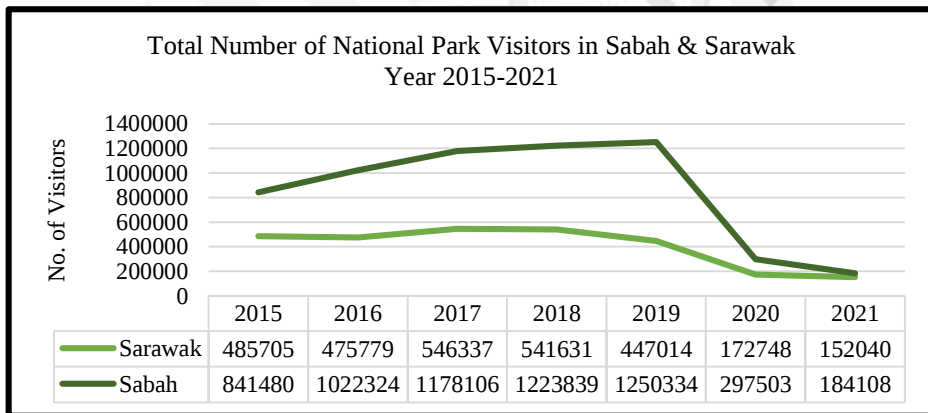


Figure 1.6 : Total number of national park visitors in Sabah and Sarawak from year 2015-2021

(Source: Malaysia Tourism Key Performance Indicators, 2015-2021)

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Sarawak Forestry Corporation, Abang Arabi bin Abang Aimran, stresses the need for studies on visitor loyalty to guide future sustainable management of Sarawak's national parks, notably Bako National Park (Bako NP), the state's oldest national park (pers. comm. January 14, 2020). Sarawak Forestry Corporation is a statutory body of the Sarawak government that manages all the Totally Protected Areas (TPAs) in the state. Until now, no formal scientific research has been done on visitors' destination loyalty towards national parks in Sarawak, specifically in Bako NP. While existing research in Bako NP focuses primarily on flora and fauna survey, the gap remains in understanding visitors' satisfaction (Shuib et al., 2012), motivation (Kamri & Radam, 2018), and economic valuation (Kamri, 2014; Marikan et al., 2006; Hussin, 2003).

Shuib et al. (2012) painted a bleak picture of visitor satisfaction in Bako NP, highlighting unsatisfactory services and facilities. Lack of facility maintenance was a significant concern, with most visitors leaving disappointed. Indeed, the Sarawak Auditor-General's Report 2016 Series 2 highlighted the "dismal facilities" at Bako NP and warned of potential income losses if improvements are not made (Dayak Daily, 29th November 2017). Negative reviews on popular tourism websites such as TripAdvisor (Figure 1.7) and Google (Figure 1.8) further substantiate these concerns.

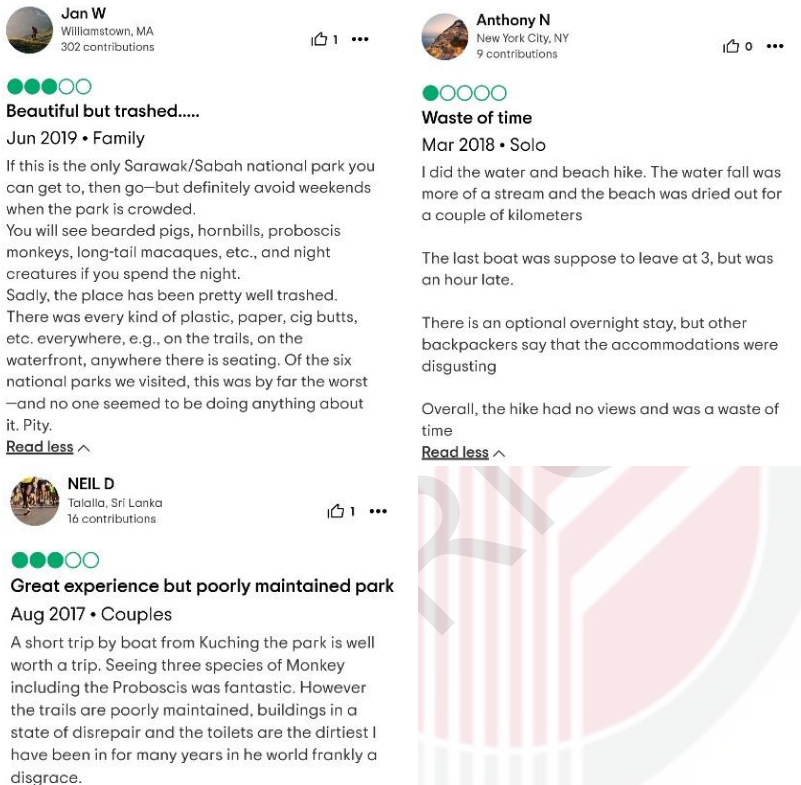


Figure 1.7 : Bako National Park visitors' reviews at TripAdvisor
(Source: TripAdvisor, 2020)

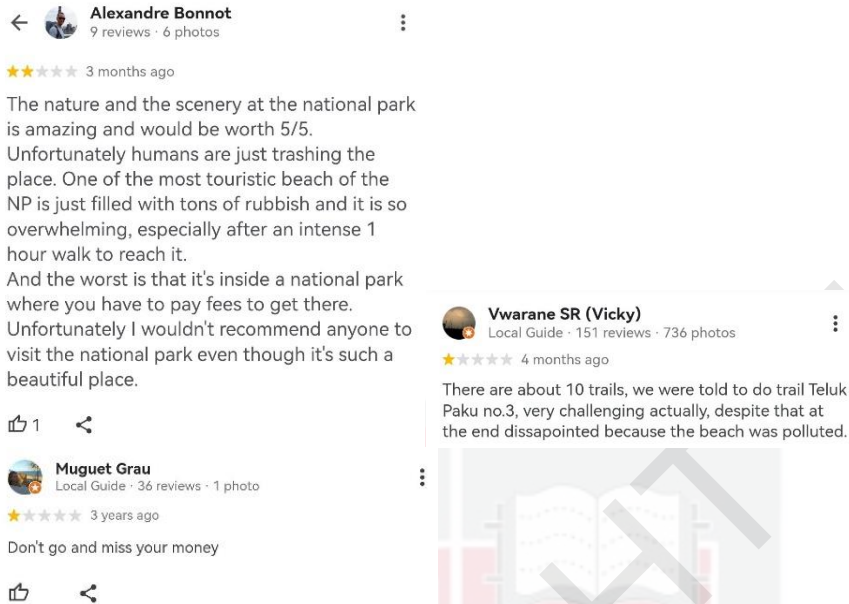


Figure 1.8 : Bako National Park visitors' reviews on Google
(Source: Google, 2020)

The negative online reviews went beyond complaints; they even urged potential visitors to avoid Bako NP altogether, citing poor facilities and accommodation and the park's littering problem. These negative reviews could explain the lower visitor numbers in Sarawak's national parks compared to those in Sabah. According to Singh et al. (2018), word of mouth (WOM) is a force that can influence consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour, and He et al. (2020) further demonstrate that negative WOM significantly erodes perceived credibility and purchase intentions.

Oviedo-Garcia et al. (2019) emphasised the importance of actively monitoring visitor feedback to anticipate and address potential dissatisfaction. The significance of visitor satisfaction cannot be underestimated or undervalued within the domain of destination marketing, as it exerts a profound and far-reaching impact on various critical aspects, including, but not limited to, the selection and choice of a specific destination by potential tourists and travellers, the patterns and behaviours exhibited in the consumption of goods and services within these destinations, the likelihood and probability of repeat visits by these individuals, the spreading of positive WOM publicity, and ultimately, the level and extent of destination loyalty that is demonstrated and showcased by these visitors in their ongoing interactions and engagements with the destination (Hallak et al., 2017; Chiu et al., 2016). Empirical evidence suggests that overall satisfaction is a strong predictor of loyalty, as supported by extant literature (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Loncaric et al., 2021; Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Prayag, 2008; Chen & Tsai, 2007).

According to the expectation confirmation theory, increased service quality leads to greater visitor satisfaction, ultimately fostering stronger destination loyalty. Extensive research supports this positive link, demonstrating the significant influence, both directly and indirectly, of service quality on satisfaction (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019; Cossío-Silva et al., 2019; Breiby & Slatten, 2018; Hallak et al., 2017; Subrahmanyam, 2017; Kim et al., 2015; Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014; Kim et al., 2013). Except for a few studies that showed otherwise (Mahdzar, 2016; Taplin et al., 2016; Thapa & Lee, 2016; Rodger et al., 2015). A study by Matolo et al. (2021) found that satisfaction mediated the relationship between service quality and destination loyalty partially for Serengeti National Park in Tanzania.

Satisfaction is a subjective personal assessment of the psychological consequences derived from a specific experience, and in the context of this study, service quality is associated with the cognitive assessment of the outcomes delivered by the park (Zhong et al., 2017; Ramseook-Munhurrin et al., 2015; Tian-Cole et al., 2002; Oliver, 1993; Crompton et al., 1991). Moore et al. (2013) highlighted the importance of acknowledging visitor satisfaction as a highly subjective notion that can be affected by numerous external factors. This inherent subjectivity makes it less controllable by park managers compared to service quality (Moore et al., 2013). In contrast, Neuvonen et al. (2010) defined service quality as elements that a manager can control or impact through management actions. Therefore, it is essential to assess visitor perceptions of service quality using appropriate tools. However, in the nature-based tourism sector, especially in national parks, studies focusing on the assessment of the perceived service quality with other variables are lacking (Saayman et al., 2016; Ban & Ramsaran, 2017; Yusof et al., 2014). This scarcity highlights the need for further investigation into how park managers can effectively measure and improve service quality to enhance visitor satisfaction and overall park experience.

A study in Sarawak's Mulu National Park showed that memorable tourism experience (MTE) significantly mediates the relationship between perceived quality and revisit intention (Mahdzar, 2016). The finding prompted a call for additional exploration into the broader consequences of MTE, particularly on satisfaction, WOM, and intention to recommend. The study by Kim (2018) on mass tourism showed that MTEs significantly influence revisit intention and spread positive WOM, suggesting their crucial role in destination loyalty formation. Kim and Ritchie (2014) urged destination managers to assess their capability to deliver memorable experiences and develop managerial actions aimed at increasing loyal behaviours. They proposed using the seven dimensions of MTEs – hedonism, refreshment, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge – as evaluation tools. In addition, Zhong et al. (2017) found that MTE is a stronger predictor of affective commitment and tourists' storytelling behaviour when compared to satisfaction.

The measurement of visitor loyalty presents a challenge as it primarily relies on assessing the behavioural intentions of those who have already visited a destination (Moore et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2013; Weaver & Lawton, 2011). Previous studies refer to both loyalty and behavioural intentions. However, in this context, it is preferable to employ the term destination loyalty, encompassing the intention to revisit and recommend the destination to others, as well as a broader allegiance towards other national parks, including Sarawak

as a whole. Although previous studies have shed light on the various factors that influence destination loyalty, it is worth noting that a comprehensive model that encompasses service quality, satisfaction, MTE, and destination loyalty within a single framework is an overlooked area, particularly with regard to the context of national parks setting.

This study is motivated by the need to address significant gaps in understanding of tourist behaviour. It takes on a three-fold approach; first, it seeks to determine the perceived level of service quality, satisfaction, MTE, and destination loyalty among the visitors at Bako NP. By doing so, it aims to capture a holistic view of visitor perceptions and sentiments. Subsequently, this study examines the causal relationships between these constructs. Lastly, this study explores satisfaction and MTE as the mediators between service quality and destination loyalty. In essence, this study bridges the existing knowledge gaps and improves the understanding of influencing factors of destination loyalty.

1.6 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to determine the influencing factors of visitors' destination loyalty towards Bako National Park (Bako NP) in Kuching, Sarawak. The specific objectives of the study are listed as below:

1. To determine the level of service quality, satisfaction, memorable tourism experience (MTE) and loyalty among the visitors of Bako NP.
2. To examine the causal relationships between service quality, satisfaction, MTE and destination loyalty of Bako NP.
3. To examine satisfaction as the mediator in the relationship between service quality and destination loyalty of Bako NP.
4. To examine MTE as the mediator in the relationship between service quality and destination loyalty of Bako NP.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study focused on visitors' perception of service quality, satisfaction, memorable tourism experience, and destination loyalty, and their causal relationships. The research site chosen was Bako National Park (Bako NP) in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. The population of the study refers to the local or foreign visitors of Bako NP aged 18 and above and those who have visited Bako NP. The present study uses the expectation confirmation theory as the underpinning theory, incorporating it with the experience economy to address the research gaps.

1.8 Significance of the Study

This study significantly contributes to both theoretical and practical aspects in the area of destination loyalty within the context of the national park, specifically in Sarawak, Malaysia. The current study combines the extant theories, namely the expectation confirmation theory and experience economy in the field of ecotourism and experiential marketing and expands the original models of the theories.

1.8.1 Theoretical Significance

This study's findings are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) in the ecotourism sector, particularly in the context of national parks. Blending constructs from ECT and experience economy will enhance the understanding of factors influencing destination loyalty in national parks, which is still limited in the current literature (Assaker et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017; Pinkus et al., 2016; Rodger et al., 2015). Such insight will benefit researchers and managers with tools to predict and cultivate destination loyalty behaviour. While ample literature is available on visitors' service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty, the concept of Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs), which implies the positive experiences retained in visitors' memories from their trip, has been notably overlooked in these discussions. MTEs have been found to strongly predict destination loyalty and act as a mediator between service quality and loyalty in other tourism fields. Examining both satisfaction and MTE as mediators between service quality and destination loyalty will provide new insights into the existing literature.

Previous studies have primarily focused on the intention to revisit, the intention to recommend, and positive word of mouth to assess destination loyalty. This study expanded these measurements by adding the intention to visit another national park, as suggested by Moore et al. (2017), thereby broadening the scope of loyalty assessment to parks more generally. As demonstrated by McKercher et al. (2012), tourism loyalty can manifest in specific settings, such as lakes, resorts or cities. This study aims to replicate this in Malaysian national park settings, specifically in Sarawak.

To date, studies examining visitors' loyalty behaviour, specifically in protected area destinations like the national parks in Sarawak, are scarce, with existing studies primarily focused on the behavioural intentions (Jun-Zhou et al., 2020; Mahdzar, 2016). This research is expected to advance our understanding of visitors at protected area destinations, such as the national parks in Sarawak, Malaysia. By employing ECT and economic experience, the current study focuses on visitors' perceived service quality, satisfaction, MTEs, and destination loyalty. This study distinguishes itself from previous research by integrating both emotional and cognitive processes, which are fundamental in shaping visitors' decision-making.

1.8.2 Practical Significance

The research process and findings of this study offer practical contributions that can benefit both park management and researchers across various fields. By gathering data on visitors' socio-demographic characteristics and visiting patterns, park management gains a deeper understanding of visitor behaviours, needs, and preferences (Chen et al., 2011). This information is valuable for ecotourism development, aiding in informed decision-making processes for better product development and formulating effective marketing strategies.

Understanding visitors' perception of service quality, satisfaction, MTE, and destination loyalty aids park management in assessing performance and identifying areas for improvement. This insight reveals the level of service and experience deemed satisfactory by the visitors, which will help for sustainable planning and management of natural areas (Seebunruang et al., 2022; Said et al., 2013).

By examining the causal relationships between service quality, satisfaction, MTE, and destination loyalty can guide the park management in implementing strategies that will enhance the overall visitors' experience and promote loyalty towards the park. This data-driven approach enables effective destination management, and the park can maintain and improve its ecotourism competitiveness (Chiu et al., 2016). This will definitely help them make more informed and impactful planning decisions and marketing plans aimed at cultivating a more loyal visitor base (Cui et al., 2019).

By understanding how satisfaction and MTE mediate the relationship between service quality and destination loyalty can equip park management with valuable insights for designing and improving their ecotourism offerings (Kahraman & Cifci, 2022), particularly with regard to the national parks located in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Overall, the findings of the study offer social researchers valuable insights into the factors influencing destination loyalty within national park settings. By illuminating the key factors, this research equips social scientists with a deeper understanding of this crucial concept in park management and visitor engagement.

1.9 Operational Definitions of Concepts

Several concepts relevant to this study have been defined based on the researcher's interpretation after reviewing the existing concepts from past studies. These concepts are visitors, visitors' destination loyalty, service quality, satisfaction, and memorable tourism experiences.

Visitors: The term "visitors" refers to people who travel for leisure, business, or other personal reasons outside their usual environment for more than a year, excluding being employed by an entity or resident in the place visited (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2008). In this study, "visitors" specifically refer to those who have visited Bako National Park (Bako NP).

Visitors' destination loyalty: Individuals who express positive post-visit intentions, including repeat visitation, recommendations to others, and positive word-of-mouth towards a destination (Matolo et al., 2021). In this study, visitors' destination loyalty refers to the favourable post-behavioural intentions of the visitors after they visit Bako NP, which is measured by indicators like positive word of mouth, intention to recommend, intention to revisit, and intention to visit other national parks in Sarawak.

Service quality: The term service quality refers to the overall assessment of a destination where their perceived experience of the service exceeded their expectations (Crompton & Love, 1995). In this study, service quality denotes the visitors' perception of the service experience at Bako NP, measured by five dimensions, namely sanitation and cleanliness, safety and security, condition of facilities, staff responsiveness, and information services.

Satisfaction: Satisfaction is defined as a person's emotional state of contentment produced when his or her desire, need, or expectation is met during their destination experience (Oviedo-Garcia et al., 2019). In this study, satisfaction refers to the visitors' emotional state of contentment achieved from the overall experience after their recent trip to Bako NP.

Memorable Tourism Experience: Memorable tourism experience or MTE refers to a tourism experience that leaves a lasting impression on visitors, even after the trip has concluded (Kim et al., 2012). In this study, MTE refers to the positive memorable experiences at Bako NP that the visitors recall from their trip. These experiences are assessed through the seven MTE dimensions outlined by Kim et al. (2012), namely hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge.

1.10 Organization of the Thesis

Chapter One: Introduction

The chapter begins by introducing the study's topic and presenting the problem statement and research objectives. It delineates the objectives of the study and clarifies the significance of this study. The chapter also provides clear definitions of key terms used in the study as a guide throughout this thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter expands the discussion on constructs of service quality, satisfaction, memorable tourism experience, and destination loyalty. It delves into existing literature related to these concepts, offering a bibliographic analysis and proposing a conceptual framework.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The chapter lays the groundwork for the research, detailing the research philosophy, the selection of research site, the overall research design employed, the methods used to collect data, and the chosen approach for analysing that data. It provides a roadmap for how the study was conducted and how the findings were generated.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the empirical findings, reports the results, and connects them directly to the objectives outlined earlier. It also discusses how the research goals were addressed.

Chapter Five: Summary, Implications and Recommendations

This chapter highlights the contributions of the research, summarising the key findings and their theoretical and practical implications. It also acknowledges the limitations of the study and offers recommendations for future research.

1.11 Summary

In summary, this chapter serves as the foundation of the study for understanding the impact of visitor perceptions on destination loyalty, specifically within the national park settings. The chapter introduces the research topic for an overview of the context, rationale, and scope of the research, highlighting its relevance within the field of study. This is followed by an outline of the problem statement, research objectives, scope of the study, significance of the study and definition of concepts. The structure of the thesis is also presented to guide the reader. The information presented in this thesis can prove invaluable for park managers and marketers regarding the impact of visitors' perceptions of service quality, satisfaction, and memorable tourism experiences on destination loyalty.

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