



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***SEGMENTATION OF MALAYSIAN ECOTOURISTS AT KINABALU
NATIONAL PARK BASED ON ECOTOURISM ATTRIBUTES***

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NATIONAL PARK BASED ON ECOTOURISM ATTRIBUTES**

By

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
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SEGMENTATION OF MALAYSIAN ECOTOURISTS AT KINABALU NATIONAL PARK BASED ON ECOTOURISM ATTRIBUTES

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Understanding ecotourists is an integral part in ecotourism marketing as it allows planners and marketers to design products based on the target market needs. Since domestic ecotourism is a blooming industry in Malaysia, information regarding the Malaysian ecotourist market segments is vital to enhance and assist the development of ecotourism. The main purpose of this study was to segment Malaysian ecotourist market into hard, structured and soft ecotourists using the fundamental ecotourism principles, as well as general trip characteristics associated with their ecotourism experience. With a sample of 403 Malaysian ecotourists in Kinabalu National Park, Sabah, a discriminant analysis was employed in this study to identify the three clusters of hard, structured and soft ecotourists. The results obtained in this study confirm that the domestic ecotourist segment in Malaysia comprises of hard, structured and soft ecotourists, which further corroborate to the findings of previous studies in the literature. Meanwhile, cross validations from the identified ecotourist segments found that 39 percent of the Malaysian ecotourist segments were identified as hard ecotourists, while 61 percent of the Malaysian ecotourists consisted of the structured and soft ecotourists

segments. It is further acknowledged that majority of the 61 percent of the structured and soft ecotourists tend to portray travel characteristics towards the softer end of the ecotourism spectrum. The other purpose of this study was to ascertain the identified ecotourist segment preferences towards the selected attributes of eco-friendly accommodation, particularly the ecolodges. Recognizing that users of ecotourism accommodation would most likely be ecotourists, determining the preferences towards the attributes of eco-friendly accommodation is an important aspect in marketing, particularly in designing and implementing programmes that suit ecotourism accommodations. In this study, several variables of ecolodges, including the main principles of ecolodges, were taken into consideration for the purpose of getting a glimpse into the identified ecotourists' segments preferences towards ecotourism accommodations. It was found that the hard ecotourists presented the same tendencies in adhering to the principles of ecotourism, whereby they gave higher ratings for several eco-friendly attributes as compared to the structured and soft ecotourists. Meanwhile, the hard ecotourists also rated significantly higher tendencies to prefer attributes measuring inclinations towards nature-based attractions ($M=4.17$) compared to the structured and soft ecotourists. On the contrary, the hard ecotourists also rated significantly lower in the attributes preferring services and comfort, as well as preferring the type of accommodations that are rather rustic and contain natural elements. The results of this study further acknowledge that the Malaysian ecotourist segments are not homogenous, and this further recommends the implications towards the design of programmes and accommodation packages based on the types of ecotourists, as well as the active implementation of environmental-friendly practices in ecotourism areas.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

**SEGMENTASI EKOPELANCONG MALAYSIA BERDASARKAN ATTRIBUT
EKOPELANCONGAN**

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Pemahaman mengenai ekopelancong adalah satu bahagian penting dalam pemasaran ekopelancongan kerana ia membolehkan individu-individu yang terlibat seperti perancang dan pemasar merekabentuk produk berdasarkan keperluan sasaran pasaran. Oleh kerana ekopelancongan domestik adalah industri yang berkembang di Malaysia, maklumat mengenai segmen-segmen ekopelancong adalah sangat penting untuk meningkatkan dan membantu di dalam membangunkan ekopelancongan di Malaysia. Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mensegmenkan pasaran ekopelancongan Malaysia kepada beberapa jenis ekopelancong seperti *hard*, *structured* dan *soft* menggunakan prinsip-prinsip asas ekopelancongan serta ciri-ciri perjalanan umum yang berkaitan dengan pengalaman ekopelancongan mereka. Dengan menggunakan sampel yang terdiri daripada 403 ekopelancong Malaysia di Taman Negara Kinabalu, Sabah, *discriminant analysis* telah digunakan untuk mengenalpasti tiga segmen iaitu *hard*, *structured* dan *soft* ekopelancong. Dapatan daripada kajian ini mengenalpasti segmen-segmen ekopelancong domestik di Malaysia sebagai *hard*, *structured* dan *soft*, di mana hasil

kajian ini menyokong dapatan kajian-kajian yang telah dilakukan sebelum ini. *Cross validations* kepada segmen ekopelancong yang dikenalpasti juga mendapati bahawa 39 peratus daripada segmen ekopelancong Malaysia sebagai *hard ecotourists*, manakala 61 peratus terdiri daripada *structured* dan *soft ecotourists*. Majoriti (61 peratus) daripada jenis ekopelancong yang dikenalpasti sebagai *structured* dan *soft ecotourist* cenderung ke arah ciri-ciri *soft ecotourism spectrum*. Selain itu, kajian ini juga dilakukan bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti keutamaan segmen-segmen eko-pelancong terhadap ciri-ciri penginapan mesra alam terutamanya *ecolodges*. Penentuan keutamaan ke arah ciri-ciri penginapan yang mesra alam merupakan aspek penting dalam pemasaran, khususnya dalam merancang dan melaksanakan program-program yang bersesuaian untuk penginapan ekopelancongan. Dalam kajian ini, beberapa pembolehubah *ecolodges*, termasuk prinsip-prinsip utama *ecolodges*, telah diambilkira untuk memperolehi pandangan tentang keutamaan eko-pelancong terhadap ciri-ciri kemudahan penginapan mesra alam. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa *hard ecotourists* lebih cenderung di dalam mematuhi prinsip-prinsip eko-pelancongan dimana mereka telah memberi penilaian yang tinggi terhadap beberapa ciri-ciri penginapan mesra alam, berbanding dengan *structured* dan *soft ecotourist*. *Hard ecotourist* juga dilihat sebagai memberi penilaian yang lebih rendah di dalam keperluan perkhidmatan dan keselesaan, tetapi lebih berminat untuk jenis penginapan yang mempunyai unsur alam semulajadi dan berciri '*rustic*'. Kajian ini menjelaskan lebih lanjut bahawa segmen eko-pelancong Malaysia adalah sangat berbeza, dan ini memberi implikasi terhadap rekabentuk program dan pakej penginapan yang berdasarkan jenis eko-pelancong eko, dan pelaksanaan amalan mesra alam sekitar di kawasan ekopelancongan yang aktif.

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on **16 February 2012** to conduct the final examination of Sheena binti Bidin on her Master of Science thesis entitled, "Segmentation of Malaysian Ecotourists at Kinabalu National Park based on Ecotourism Attributes", in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the degree Master of Science.

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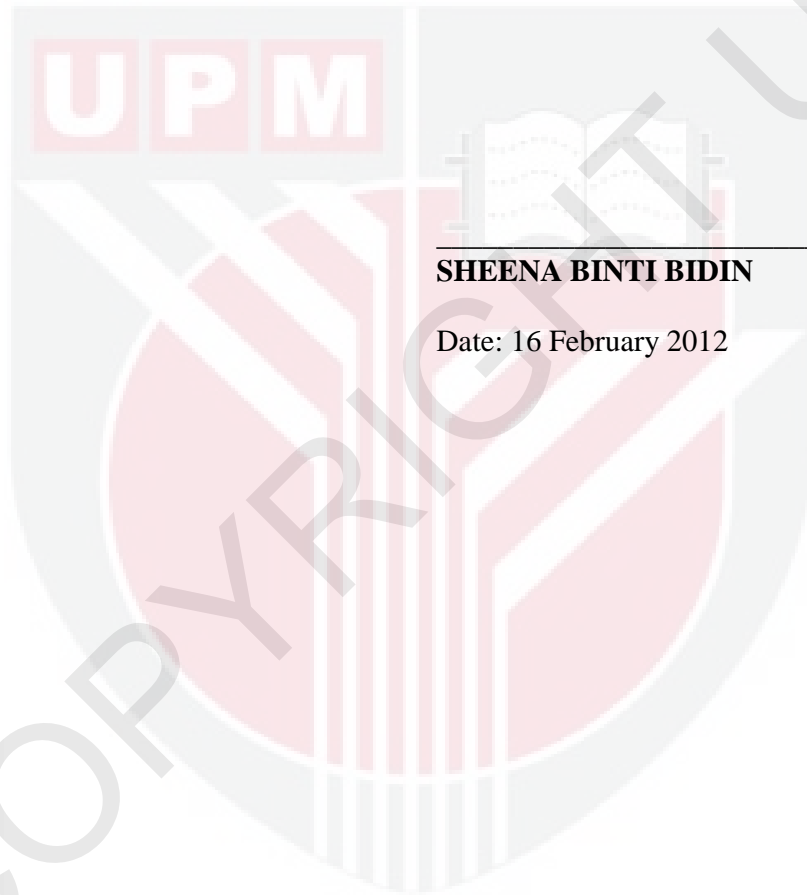
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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or any other institution.



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Date: 16 February 2012



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