



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**PERCEPTION OF STAKEHOLDERS TOWARDS ATTRIBUTES OF
THE PENANG NATIONAL PARK AS A NATURE TOURIST
DESTINATION**

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PENANG NATIONAL PARK AS A NATURE TOURIST DESTINATION**

By

SUHAILA ARIFFIN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

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August 2008

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The growth of the tourism industry in Malaysia has resulted in an increasing number of tourist visits to the natural areas. A series of studies are conducted to thoroughly identify the perceptual attributes of a nature tourism destination of Penang National Park. The attributes consist of natural environment, recreational activities, park management and socio-cultural traits that exist at and surrounding the park. The purpose of the study is to establish the perceptions of the three main stakeholders of Penang National Park on the respective attributes selected for this study. The stakeholders are visitors, local villagers and park personnel of Penang National Park. Three different sets of questionnaire survey instruments are used to assess the perceptions of each stakeholder group. However, this study is focused on the visitors because they are the users and the consumers of the products at Penang National Park. T-test and ANOVA show the differences in the perceptions of visitors on the attributes selected for the park. The findings show that the majority of the stakeholders are satisfied with the attributes available at Penang National



Park. The main implication of the different perceptions of visitors toward the attributes at the park is that park management should improve their efforts in order to fulfil the needs of the different characteristics of visitors. The management should sustain the quality of services and carry out only environmental-friendly development to maintain nature tourism in Penang National Park. The management practices should be in tandem with the principles of nature conservation of national parks.



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

**PANDANGAN PIHAK-PIHAK YANG BERKEPENTINGAN TERHADAP
ATRIBUT-ATRIBUT TAMAN NEGARA PULAU PINANG SEBAGAI
DESTINASI PELANCONGAN SEMULAJADI**

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Pertumbuhan industri pelancongan di Malaysia telah menyumbang kepada penambahan bilangan pelancong ke kawasan semulajadi. Beberapa siri kajian telah dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti secara mendalam sifat-sifat pelancongan semulajadi di Taman Negara Pulau Pinang. Sifat-sifat tersebut melibatkan persekitaran semulajadi, aktiviti rekreasi, pengurusan taman dan sosio-budaya yang terdapat di taman dan sekitar taman tersebut. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti tanggapan tiga pihak utama yang berkepentingan terhadap Taman Negara Pulau Pinang terhadap sifat-sifat sumber yang telah dipilih untuk kajian ini. Pihak-pihak yang berkepentingan tersebut adalah pelawat, penduduk kampung dan kakitangan Taman Negara Pulau Pinang. Tiga set borang soal selidik yang berbeza telah digunakan untuk memperolehi tanggapan daripada setiap kumpulan pihak yang berkepentingan. Namun demikian, fokus kajian ini diberikan kepada pelawat kerana mereka adalah pengguna dan pelanggan yang menggunakan

produk yang terdapat di Taman Negara Pulau Pinang. Ujian-T dan ANOVA menunjukkan perbezaan tanggapan mengikut ciri-ciri pelawat terhadap sifat-sifat yang dipilih untuk taman tersebut. Keputusan menunjukkan majoriti daripada pihak yang berkepentingan berpuas hati dengan sifat-sifat yang terdapat di Taman Negara Pulau Pinang. Implikasi utama kepada perbezaan tanggapan pelawat terhadap sifat-sifat di taman tersebut adalah pihak pengurusan taman hendaklah meningkatkan usaha di dalam memenuhi keperluan pelawat yang berbeza. Pihak pengurusan hendaklah mengekalkan kualiti perkhidmatan dan hanya menjalankan pembangunan mesra alam untuk mengekalkan pelancongan semulajadi di Taman Negara Pulau Pinang. Praktis pengurusan hendaklah seiring dengan prinsip pemuliharaan semulajadi taman negara.

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 28th August 2008 to conduct the final examination of Suhaila Ariffin on her Master of Science thesis entitled “Perception of Stakeholders Towards Attributes of the Penang National Park as a Nature Tourist Destination” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the Master of Science.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

SUHAILA ARIFFIN

Date: 5 February 2009



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 National Park in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the establishment of protected areas is based on the main principles of nature conservation. The establishment of national parks in Malaysia subsequently changes the people's perceptions that forests and wilderness areas plays a very important role as wildlife sanctuaries and to preserve the natural resources. People have come to realized that area conservation is important to maintain the stability of the ecosystem. On the other hand, people have also recognized that national parks are places for outdoor recreational pursuits, which contribute towards healthy lifestyles of the society. The host communities generate benefits from income generation through tourism activities. Indeed, the two-way relationships between the park management and the authorities including the local communities should be well emphasized by the management and the authorities so that nature tourism can always be part of a wider sustainable development strategy (Rosmalina, 2005).

The Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), Peninsular Malaysia was given the authority to protect and manage national parks, preserving wildlife and wildlife sanctuaries for their biological resources including the scientific, educational,



recreational, economical and other values for the present and future generations. In parks, recreation and tourism activities are highly encouraged (DWNP, 2003).

One of the future nature tourism destination which making its move to promote nature-based tourism is the Penang National Park (PNP). This newly gazetted national park has the potential to be highlighted as an important nature tourism destination in Malaysia as the park has a lot of distinctive natural resources that have yet to be explored. This park, which is located in West Malaysia, has both forest and marine features that has the potential to draw a wide range of visitors to the park. In fact, in Malaysia, PNP is the only park that holds this unique characteristic.

1.1.1 Towards Positioning PNP as a Nature Tourism Destination

The first step towards positioning PNP as a nature tourism destination is to determine the important product attributes that visitors will consider while evaluating a destination. Looking at the preferences of the park's stakeholders on these attributes and then by matching these with their perceptions on the destination, the preferred position for a destination can be achieve.

It is well established that every product generates attributes among the target customers. In simple terms, these attributes are known as positions of the particular product. The position enjoyed by the same product may differ for each different customer groups.

Visitors destinations being one of the major products associated with the tourism industry are also no exceptions. Destinations may develop images without conscious efforts of the marketers because these forms of products are widely discussed, debated and visited by the customers. Destination positioning, which is a process of building and maintaining resources for a destination helps in developing and implementing particular strategies of the concerned marketers; or such positions may not be sufficient to achieve desired marketing goals. This necessitates a detailed scientific study on the level of preferences and perception of visitors of particular groups (Payne and Nilsen, 1997). These preferences can then be promoted for the destination in query and if needed a new and profitable position may be developed as a result. PNP offers an example of positioning a destination. In order to position PNP as a nature tourism destination, there is a need to identify product attributes of the park.

As this national park is newly established in Malaysia, there is a lot of work and research that need to be done in order to carefully plan its marketing strategies as a significant nature tourism destination in Malaysia. One of the main research aspects that can initially be carried out is to identify available and new tourism attributes of the park.

At present, there is a lack of research on the research topics mentioned above.

1.2 Problem Statement

PNP is the first protected area legally gazetted under the National Park Act of 1980. This establishment signifies the Penang State and federal governments' efforts in protecting the environment. Formerly known as Pantai Aceh Forest Reserve, this park is located at the north-western tip of Penang. It was officially declared as PNP in April 2003. Currently, this park is managed under the supervision and jurisdiction of DWNP. This department is responsible to manage and protect the unique ecosystem and natural resources of the park.

As a newly established national park, the park is still in the process of restructuring its management organization. The main concern faced by the PNP management in promoting the area as a nature tourism destination is the lack of organized research conducted to identify product attributes in order to project its marketing strategies. It is clear that nature tourism is an extremely dynamic form of tourism and its destination areas are constantly changing to meet new market tastes and desires (Butler and Waldbrook, 2003). Therefore, a series of studies are needed to thoroughly identify product attributes of the park. The product attributes consists of natural environment, recreational activities, park management and socio-cultural traits that exists at or surrounding the park. Identification of the product attributes is essential for the park management to plan its future marketing and management. There is a need to examine the perceptions of PNP's stakeholders towards the identified attributes. The stakeholders consist of the park visitors, park personnel and villagers surrounding PNP.

Presently, the park received very small numbers of visitors because they do not know about PNP existence and the main attractions of the park. This study is carried out for the purpose of identifying the attributes that could attract more visitors to the park. This is worth the efforts of marketing the park knowing the main or exact attributes that attract visitors. This is because marketing the wrong attributes will lead to damaging the natural areas due to the large numbers of visitors and it will become not suitable for each visitor to fully experience the visit. The management need to know what attributes that attracts visitors so they can assess the activities which can be conducted by the different groups of visitors. Offering many product attributes to different groups is better because it can reduce the impacts of the specific areas.

As the park personnel are a part of the stakeholders of PNP, their participation in this perception study were needed due to their familiarity with their job descriptions. But they lack experience on park management as the park was newly established. Their perceptions would be valuable in the management and administration of PNP as it to determine their commitment and knowledge about the resources in the park.

This study also intends to define the roles of local communities involved in the development of PNP. The social environment and cultural activities that can contribute to the tourism of PNP are important attributes to be determined. Their support and cooperation towards the management of the park are crucial because they are a part of DWNP's objectives, which are:



1. To ensure that the biodiversity resources of the country are protected, controlled and managed in a sustainable manner.
2. To develop ecotourism potential of biodiversity resources in line with the National Ecotourism Plan.
3. To ensure the existence and preservation of a Protected Areas System encompassing all ecosystems in Peninsular Malaysia. To ensure the Protected Areas System is managed in a sustainable manner.
4. To ensure management and existing breeding of wildlife species contribute to conservation and commercialization.
5. To ensure the sustainable management of biodiversity that generates optimum benefits.
6. To ensure a competent workforce of the Department in conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity.
7. To increase and encourage public awareness and community support towards the importance of conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity.
8. To increase applied research on biodiversity for the purposes/benefits of conservation, education and commercialization.

This perception study is conducted in order to see whether all the selected product attributes complied with the needs of the visitors of PNP. Results from this study is valuable as a decision-making tool in helping the PNP's management to project its future marketing plan. Well-developed marketing strategies can better serve the park marketing needs and to encourage more visitors to the park and to manage the park in a sustainable manner.

1.3 Objectives

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the perceptions of the selected stakeholders on the product attributes of PNP.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the profile of the selected stakeholders (visitors, villagers and park personnel) of PNP.
2. To determine the visitors' perceptions towards the product attributes on natural environment, recreational activities and park management of PNP.
3. To determine the villagers' perceptions towards the product attributes on socio-cultural elements of the villages and park management of PNP.
4. To determine the park personnel's perceptions towards the product attributes on park management of PNP.
5. To determine the differences in visitors' perceptions towards product attributes of PNP.

1.4 Justification

Since its establishment in 2003, most of the visitors to PNP were domestic tourists and happened to be residents of Penang Island. As an effort to fully manage and promote PNP at the national and international levels, a lot of studies and strategies need to be undertaken by DWNP. DWNP's aim in managing PNP is to develop the park as a significant nature tourism destination in Malaysia. In order to do that, there is a need to identify relevant attributes that need to be highlighted as its tourism products.

This study is one of the initial efforts in projecting PNP as a nature tourism destination. Through this study, socio-demographic background of stakeholders especially the visitors of PNP can be systematically identified. This information is very valuable for the park managers to find out more about the customers that they are serving.

This study also can help the park managers to clearly identify the product attributes of PNP. This attributes are significant in marketing management process and provide more insight to cautiously develop the park.

After all the relevant product attributes are selected through secondary data there is a need to investigate PNP's stakeholders' perceptions towards the product attributes. Visitors' perceptions and concerns on the product attributes need to be taken into consideration, as they are the major customers and are a part of the park stakeholders. The perceptions of villagers and park personnel are additional information to support

the findings of this study. This perception study enables the park managers to highlight product attributes that are perceived important by the visitors. Useful information from this study can assist the management in decision making, thus it could also served as a supporting tool in the park planning process. Hopefully, through wise and thorough marketing planning process founded by research, natural areas such as PNP can be developed as a significant nature tourism destination in a sustainable manner.

