



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**MEMORABLE ECOTOURISM EXPERIENCES IN TAMAN NEGARA,
KUALA TAHAN, MALAYSIA**

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**MEMORABLE ECOTOURISM EXPERIENCES IN TAMAN NEGARA, KUALA
TAHAN, MALAYSIA**

By

THANAM A/P SUBRAMANIAM

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

January 2020

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the almighty God who made it possible for me to attain this height of academic excellence!



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

MEMORABLE ECOTOURISM EXPERIENCES IN TAMAN NEGARA, KUALA TAHAN, MALAYSIA

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January 2020

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Tourism experiences at tourism destinations are essential to sustain the tourists' destination loyalty. Studies have shown that the experiences at ecotourism destinations are different from tourism destinations because these experiences cultivate the visitors' or tourists' concerns towards both the nature and environment. Although previous studies were conducted in Taman Negara, most of them focused on tourists' satisfaction, conservation and attractions with limited studies on Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs). Furthermore, past studies have also asserted the limitations in MTEs constructs and the literature gap between MTEs, travel motivation, place attachment, tourists' behavioural intention and actual behaviour. Thus, the objective of this study is to introduce and examine Memorable Ecotourism Experiences (MEEs) in Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan. The study further analyses the mediating effects of MEEs between travel motivation, place attachment and behavioural intention; direct effects between behavioural intention and actual behaviour; and moderating effects of socio-demographic factors of ecotourists and travel characteristics. A total of 387 questionnaires were collected with purposive sampling technique and were used in the analysis. PLS-SEM was utilised to examine the direct and mediating effects between constructs; while Hierarchical Multiple Regression (HMR) analysis was used to evaluate the moderating effects. The results clearly indicate that travel motivation has direct effect on behavioural intention; while place attachment does not have direct effect on ecotourists' behavioural intention. In addition, MEEs mediate the relationships between travel motivation, place attachment and ecotourists' behavioural intention. Whereas moderating analysis revealed that the purpose of visiting (leisure, adventure and visiting family and friends) significantly moderated the ecotourists' behavioural intention; in comparison to age, nationality, own vehicle, hotels and family and friends house which significantly moderated the ecotourists' actual revisit and pro-environmental behaviour. Hence, it can be concluded that the mediating effects of MEEs enhance the relationships between travel motivation, place attachment

and behavioural intention. In addition, this study has introduced seven new sub-constructs (freeing, adverse feelings, sociable, service, planning, education awareness and nature) of MEEs which significantly influence the ecotourists' behavioural intention. Most of the socio-demographic variables and trip characteristics moderate the ecotourists' actual behaviour compared to behavioural intention. Thus, the outcomes of the study provide new insights to ecotourism policy makers and stakeholders in designing forthcoming ecotourism plans, policies and regulations. The respective authorities of Taman Negara, stakeholders and service providers should create, manage and practice MEEs at ecotourism destinations in order to enhance ecotourists' intention to revisit and pro-environmental behaviour. Taman Negara management should also focus on creating additional activities and services to generate memorable experiences and enhance the destination loyalty of visitors or tourists to the park.

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

**PENGALAMAN EKOPELANCONGAN BERMAKNA DI TAMAN NEGARA,
KUALA TAHAN, MALAYSIA**

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Pengalaman pelancongan di sesebuah destinasi pelancongan adalah penting untuk mengekalkan kesetiaan pelancong. Kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa pengalaman di destinasi ekopelancongan berbeza berdasarkan destinasi kerana ia memupuk kebimbangan terhadap alam dan sekitar. Walaupun kajian pernah dijalankan di Taman Negara, kebanyakannya berfokus kepada kepuasan pelancong, pemuliharaan dan tarikan taman serta hanya sebahagian sahaja tertumpu kepada pengalaman pelancongan bermakna (*Memorable Tourism Experiences –MTEs*). Tambahan pula, kajian juga menegaskan pembatasan dalam pembolehubah- pembolehubah *MTEs* dan jurang kajian di antara *MTEs*, motivasi perjalanan, tarikan tempat (*place attachment*), niat tingkah laku pelancong serta tingkah laku sebenar. Oleh yang demikian, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk memperkenalkan dan mengkaji pengalaman ekopelancongan bermakna (*Memorable Ecotourism Experiences- MEEs*) di Taman Negara Kuala Tahan. Kajian ini juga menganalisis kesan pengantaraan di antara *MEEs*, motivasi perjalanan, tarikan tempat dan niat tingkah laku pelancong; kesan langsung di antara niat tingkah laku pelancong dan tingkah laku sebenar; dan kesan 'moderator' sosio-demographic ekopelancong serta ciri-ciri perjalanan. Sebanyak 387 soal selidik telah dikumpulkan dengan kaedah 'Pensampelan Purposive' dan digunakan dalam analisis. Analisis PLS-SEM telah digunakan untuk mengkaji kesan langsung dan hubungan di antara pembolehubah- pembolehubah; manakala analisis '*Hierarchical Multiple Regression (HMR)*' digunakan untuk kesan 'moderator'. Hasil kajian menunjukkan motivasi perjalanan mempunyai kesan langsung dengan niat tingkah laku; tarikan tempat tidak mempunyai kesan langsung dengan niat tingkah laku ekopelancong. Tambahan pula, *MEEs* mengantarakan hubungan di antara motivasi perjalanan, tarikan tempat dan niat tingkah laku ekopelancong. Manakala, analisis kesan 'moderator' menunjukkan tujuan lawatan (mengisi masa lapang, pengembaraan dan melawat keluarga dan rakan- rakan) 'moderator' niat tingkah laku ekopelancong. Selain itu, umur,

kewarganegaraan, kenderaan sendiri, hotel dan rumah keluarga serta rakan-rakan adalah 'moderator' tingkah laku sebenar. Oleh itu, disimpulkan bahawa kesan pengantara *MEEs* meningkatkan hubungan di antara motivasi perjalanan, tarikan tempat dan niat tingkah laku ekopelancong. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga memperkenalkan tujuh pembolehubah *MEEs* (termasuk kebebasan, perasaan negatif, sosial, perkhidmatan, perancangan, kesedaran pendidikan dan alam semula jadi) untuk mempengaruhi niat tingkah laku ekopelancong. Kebanyakan pembolehubah sosio-demografi dan ciri-ciri perjalanan memoderasikan tingkah laku sebenar ekopelancong, berbanding dengan niat tingkah laku. Oleh itu, hasil kajian memberikan pengetahuan kepada, pengubal dasar ekopelancongan, pihak berkepentingan (stakeholders) dalam merancang pelan, dasar dan peraturan ekopelancongan di masa hadapan. Pihak berkuasa Taman Negara, pihak berkepentingan dan pembekal perkhidmatan harus menyediakan, mengurus dan mengamalkan *MEEs* di destinasi ekopelancongan untuk meningkatkan niat melawat semula dan tingkah laku pro-alam sekitar. Pengurusan Taman Negara juga perlu memberi tumpuan untuk mewujudkan aktiviti- aktiviti dan perkhidmatan tambahan untuk menjana pengalaman bermakna seterusnya meningkatkan kesetiaan ekopelancong terhadap destinasi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Actual Behaviour
ACBDESL	Actual Behaviour – Destination Loyalty
ACBPEN	Actual Behaviour – Pro-Environmental Behaviour
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BEHINT	Behavioural Intention
CB	Covariance Based SEM
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNN	Cable News Network
DWNP	Department of Wildlife and National Parks
EPU	Economic Planning Unit
EPP	Entry Point Projects
ETP	Economic Transformation Programme
FRIM	Forest Research Institute Malaysia
HMR	Hierarchical Multiple Regression
GST	Good and Service Tax
GTP	Government Transformation Programme
KATS	Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources
MEEs	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences
MEEAF	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences – Adverse Feelings
MEEDESA	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences – Destination Attributes

MEEEDU	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences – Education Awareness
MEEF	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences - Freeing
MEEH	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences –Hedonic
MEEINV	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences –Involvement
MEEKL	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences – Knowledge
MEELC	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences – Local Culture
MEEMEAN	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences – Meaningfulness
MEENA	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences - Nature
MEENF	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences – Novelty Familiarity
MEEPLAN	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences -Planning
MEER	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences - Refreshing
MEES	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences -Sociable
MEESER	Memorable Ecotourism Experiences - Service
MTEs	Memorable Tourism Experiences
MOTAC	Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia
NEM	New Economic Model
NKEA	National Key Economic Areas
NKRAs	National Key Result Areas
NTP	National Transformation Programme
PA	Place Attachment
PAPA	Place Attachment –Place Affect
PAPD	Place Attachment – Place Dependence

PAPI	Place Attachment – Place Identity
PAPSB	Place Attachment – Place Social Bonding
PEMANDU	Malaysia's Performance Management and Delivery Unit
PLS	Partial Least Squares
RM	Ringgit Malaysia
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TN50	Transformasi Nasional 50
USD	US Dollar
WoM	Word of Mouth
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The tourism industry is playing an increasingly important role in the global economy and is known to be the second fastest growing sector in the world. It is one of the main source of national income and balance of payments in many countries, including Malaysia. The World Travel and Tourism Council claimed that the global Travel and Tourism sector obtained 3.9 percent growth in the year 2018 that contributed USD 8.8 trillion to the world economy (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019). Gloria Guevara (President and CEO of WTTC) highlighted that Travel and Tourism sector could be used as a tool to generate prosperity to the country while improving the socio-economic aspect of the population as the sector created 319 million job opportunities especially for women, youths and marginalised groups of society (Aynalem et al., 2016; World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019).

The tourism sector was introduced to Malaysia's economy in 1960s and has shown a rapid growth in the 21st Century (Norizawati and Tarmiji, 2014). The sector has also been selected as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) of Malaysia under the National Transformation Programme (NTP) in 2010 and in 2018, the tourism sector in Malaysia has contributed RM84.1 billion to Malaysia's economy (ETP Report, 2016; MOTAC, 2020). Thus, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC) introduced 12 Entry Point Projects (EPP) which have been categorised into five themes such as affordable luxury; nature adventure; family fun; events, entertainment, spa and sports; and business tourism to position Malaysia as a one of the preferred tourism destinations (Anuar et al., 2013; PEMANDU, 2010; ETP Report, 2016).

Malaysia which is blessed with warm weather, biodiversity, natural resources, retail landscape and cultural assets has been recognised as one of the countries that receives the highest number of international tourists around the world (The Star, 2018). In 2014, Malaysia was elected as one of the top ten must visit global destinations (Lonely Planet, 2016). The CNN travel survey (2014) also indicated that Kuala Lumpur was chosen as the world's fourth best shopping destination (Kim, 2014). Furthermore, the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) agenda also highlighted the idea of positioning Malaysia as duty free shopping destination, vibrant shopping precinct, global biodiversity hub, business tourism destination, and entertainment zone (ETP Annual Report, 2016). A study by Mohamad et al. (2013) addressed that beautiful beaches, wildlife and adventurous holidays with good amenities in Malaysia managed to create an image as a favorable tourism destination among international tourists. Therefore,

the arrivals of tourists to Malaysia has shown continuous rise from year to year, despite a drop by 4% in the number of tourists visiting Malaysia in the year 2015.

However, the arrivals of tourist were seen to be fluctuating in the following years. Table 1.1 shows the tourist arrivals and receipts from year 2004 to the year 2018. It also indicated that the receipts from tourists continuously increased from year to year, except in the years of 2008, 2015 and 2017. The implementation of six percent Good and Service Tax (GST), world and local economies depression, uncertain political situation and traffic issue of the Johor-Singapore Causeway were identified as main reasons which had contributed to the decline in international tourist arrivals in the years of 2015 and 2017 (Suganya, 2015; Syahirah, 2019). Even though the tourist arrivals increased in years of 2016 and 2017, the receipts were the same in both years (RM 82.1 billion).

Table 1.1 : Tourist Arrivals and Receipts to Malaysia (2004 - 2018)

Years	Arrivals (number)	Receipts(RM)
2004	15.7 Million	29.7 Billion
2005	16.43 Million	32.0 Billion
2006	17.55 Million	36.3 Billion
2007	20.97 Million	53.4 Billion
2008	22.05 Million	49.6 Billion
2009	23.65 Million	53.4 Billion
2010	24.58 Million	56.5 Billion
2011	24.71 Million	58.3 Billion
2012	25.03 Million	60.6 Billion
2013	25.72 Million	65.4 Billion
2014	27.44 Million	72.0 Billion
2015	25.72 Million	69.1 Billion
2016	26.76 Million	82.1 Billion
2017	25.95 Million	82.1 Billion
2018	25.83 Million	84.1 Billion

[Source: MOTAC (2019)]

The Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC) (2019) has identified Singapore, Indonesia, China, Thailand, Brunei, India, South Korea, Philippines, United Kingdom and Japan as the top ten countries with highest number of tourists' arrivals to Malaysia. Malaysia is aiming to achieve 30 million tourists arrivals and RM 100 billion in receipt by the year 2020 (MOTAC, 2019). The Malaysian government planned and promoted several strategies and policies to boost and improve the tourism industry in order to position Malaysia as a tourist friendly destination. Some of the examples of the policies implemented by the government to develop the tourism industry in Malaysia were: 4th to 10th Malaysian Plans (year 1981- 2015), National Tourism Policy (1992) and Malaysia Tourism Transformation Programme (Mosbah and Saleh, 2014; Bhuiyan et al., 2013).

The tourism industry in Malaysia has been chosen as one of the National Key Areas in the Government Transformation Programme to attain the vision of 2020 (PEMANDU, 2010). In 2016, the Malaysia's 6th former Prime Minister highlighted the importance of formulating and drafting the nation's tourism and cultural policy by 2050 in National Transformation Plan titled 'Transformasi Nasional' (TN50) (Malaysia Treasury, 2017). In addition, RM500 million has been allocated in Budget 2018 to develop and promote the homestay and ecotourism programmes in Malaysia (Malaysia Treasury, 2018).

There are two divisions in the tourism sector: mass or conventional tourism and alternative tourism. Mass tourism usually covers 'sea, sun, sand and winter ski' tourism activities which mainly focuses on the entertainment element and results in more negative impacts to tourism destinations, due to high volume of tourists flow (Gonzalez, 2011). Singh (2015) further added that these tourism activities also damaged the natural environment and affected the local communities. Meanwhile, an alternative form of tourism is focusing on the conservation of the environment and promoting social and community values through entertaining and satisfying the customers. Alternative forms of tourism encompass nature based tourism, cultural tourism, wildlife tourism, educational tourism, agri-tourism, scientific tourism and adventure tourism (Mieczkowski, 1995) as shown in Figure 1.1. In the recent years, ecotourism has also been widely accepted as a form of alternative tourism (Triarchi and Karamanis, 2017; Bayram et al., 2017).

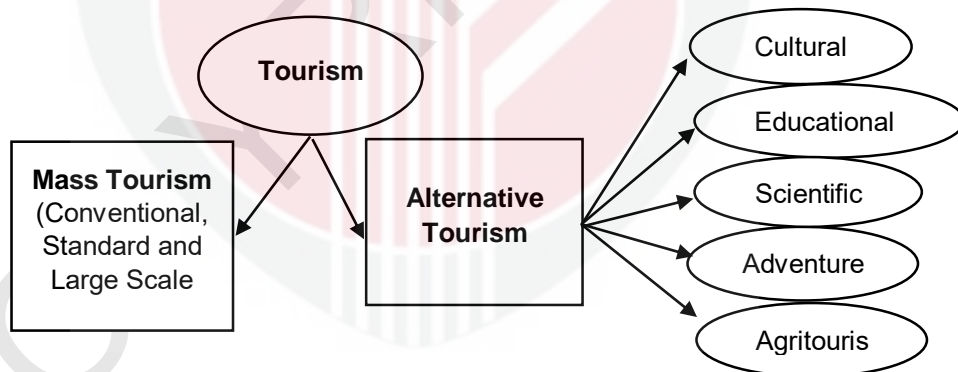


Figure 1.1 : Types of Tourism
[Source: Mieczkowski (1995)]

Ecotourism is referred to as an environmentally responsible trip and visitation to undisturbed natural areas while enjoying and appreciating the nature, promoting preservation and economically benefits the local communities (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1993). Fennell (1999) described ecotourism as a form of nature based tourism that provides an experience and learning about nature, managing low impact on nature, reducing the consumption of local resources and contributes to the socio-economics of the local population. Ecotourism is also

known as tourism activities that consist of nature based, active participation, learning, socio-cultural, involvement of the local community and ecological sustainability. It also aimed to provide numerous benefits such as long term sustainable resource preservation, empowerment of local people living in that community, promotion of public and private cooperation and material for scientific and educational research (Parks et al., 2009; Packer and Ballantyne, 2013; Honey, 1999). Zaiton (2008) classified nature tourism, sustainable tourism, low impact and wilderness tourism as various types of ecotourism. Similarly, Fallon and Kriwoken (2003) categorised green tourism, nature based tourism, alternative tourism and adventure tourism as different forms of ecotourism. Therefore, ecotourism can be concluded as a travel that offers lessons, happiness, entertainment, relaxation, awareness, involvement and socialisation at nature based tourism destinations.

Uriely et al. (2006) indicated that public interest and expectations to visit tourism destinations which preserve both physical and cultural environment increased as an impact of increased awareness on ecotourism, green and sustainable tourism. Thus, many developed and developing countries, such as Malaysia focuses and encourages the development of ecotourism sector to enhance the nation's economy. Malaysia is categorised as an ecotourism destination since it is blessed with a variety of ecosystems (such as mangroves, swamps, coral reefs, caves, mountains and limestone), flora and fauna (15,000 species of flowering plants, 286 species of mammals, 150,000 species of invertebrates and 4,000 species of fishes and countless micro-organisms) and attractive tropical rainforests (Azlizam et al., 2018; Zaiton and Yuhani, 2015; Marker et al., 2008). Penang National Park (Teluk Bahang), Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM), Mulu Caves National Park (Sarawak), Royal Belum State Park, (Perak), Taman Negara (Pahang), Cameron Highlands (Pahang) and Pulau Perhentian, Terengganu were identified as seven wonders of Malaysian ecotourism (Michelle, 2014).

Even though the ecotourism sector already exists in Malaysia for a long duration of time, the roles and contribution were well recognised in Malaysia in 1996 when the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (MOCAT) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) drafted the National Plan of Nature in 1996. This plan aimed to help the Malaysian government to develop the country's ecotourism potential to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of the country with effective tools while offering socio-economic benefits to local communities (Chin, 2010; Marzuki et al., 2011). The National Ecotourism Plan of Malaysia consists of six chapters as shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 : Chapters of National Ecotourism Plan of Malaysia

Chapters	Titles	Contents
1	The National Ecotourism Plan	Ecotourism policy and strategies.
2	Ecotourism Potential: Site listings	List of current and potential sites for ecotourism development
3	Ecotourism Guidelines for Malaysia	Basis of specific activities and functions in all ecotourism areas, including strategies and recommendations on how to strengthen the guidelines
4	Current Status of Ecotourism in Malaysia	Current social, economic and environmental components that surround the ecotourism sector in Malaysia
5	Malaysia's Place in the Region'	Tourism and ecotourism situation from an Asia Pacific context
6	The Annexes	

[Source: Chin (2010); Marzuki et al. (2011)]

The National Ecotourism Plan was used as a pillar in developing tourism policies in Malaysia. Siow et al. (2015) criticised the plan as there was a gap between the policy and real practices due to the limitation of the operators in identifying and adhering the best practices, impractical practices at site specific scenarios and situations. Thus, the Malaysian government started to give priority to ecotourism sector in several national plans as shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 : Malaysian Plans

Malaysian Plans	Years	Content
Eight	2001-2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote nature based tourism or ecotourism. Provide the best approach to ecotourism sector by recommending health and safety, conservation- inputs, site selection, zoning and carrying capacity
Ninth	2006-2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight the need of generating income for the local communities while conserving the nature
Eleventh	2016-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position Malaysia as a premier ecotourism destination by leveraging biodiversity assets through extensive protection and conservation while supported by the branding and promotion activities.

[Source: Economic Planning Unit (2016)]

The Malaysia's New Economic Model (NEM) also acknowledged sustainability as one of the main indicators in Economic Transformation Program (ETP) to achieve vision 2020 (as shown in Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3). The sustainability component highlights the economic and environmental concerns. Economic sustainability can be achieved through the establishment of fiscal discipline (safeguard macroeconomic balance) and financial stability. Meanwhile, environmental sustainability can be attained through enhancing economic growth while protecting the nature and reducing environmental degradation (Economic Planning Unit, 2016). Thus, it clearly indicates that, the Malaysian government realised the importance of ecotourism sector to the Malaysian economy and gave priority to the development of this sector and continuously promoted the sector.

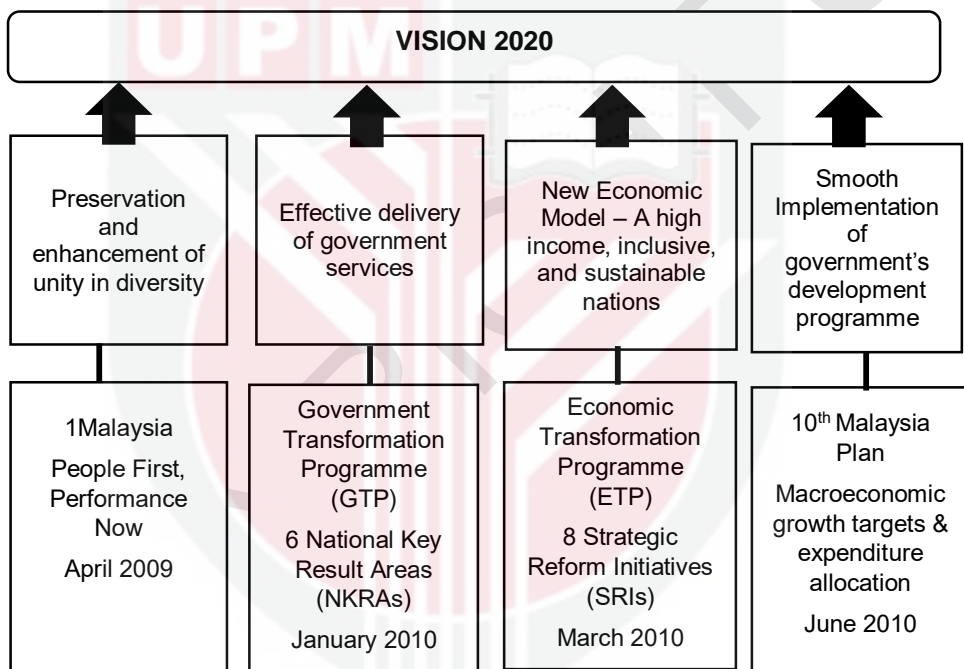


Figure 1.2 : The Four Pillars of National Transformation
 [Source: New Economic Model report- Economic Planning Unit (2016)]

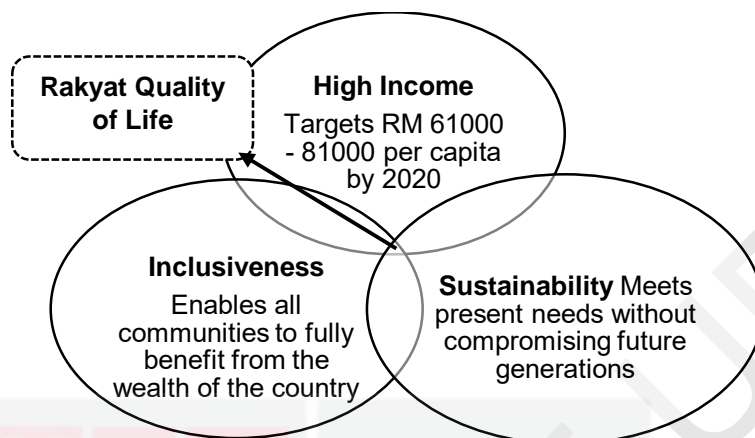


Figure 1.3 : Goals of the New Economic Model

[Source: New Economic Model report- Economic Planning Unit (2016)]

Although Malaysian government continuously developing several policies and plans to enhance the ecotourism sector, Kim et al. (2018) and Corte (2015) asserted that the sustainability of the ecotourism sector highly depends on destination loyalty or retention, positive word of mouth (WoM) and tourists' satisfaction. A tourist or visitor who is satisfied with his or her previous trip, prefers to revisit the destination repeatedly and spread positive word of mouth to others (Somaskanthan and Rosmalina, 2016). Bosque and Martin (2008) indicated that the positive or negative feelings which are created through different levels of satisfaction, shape different tourism experiences among the tourists. Several studies revealed that there is a positive relationship between tourists' satisfaction and tourists' loyalty to particular destinations (Chiou and Shen, 2006; Sui and Baloglu, 2003; Oliver and Burke, 1999; Dick and Basu, 1994; Fornell et al., 1994). The tourists actually remember both positive and negative emotions and feelings that are gained from their holidays or vacations (Sthapit, 2013), even though several studies claimed that the positive emotions are more memorable compared to negative feelings (Wirtz et al., 2003; Larsen and Jenssen, 2004). Tourist who gained negative experience or dissatisfied with his or her current visit may not revisit the place or destination and will not recommend it to others (Chen and Chen, 2010). Similarly, Reisinger and Turner (2003) revealed that the negative feedback is considered more powerful than positive feedback since it able to damage the reputation of tourism destinations and reduce visitors' arrival to a particular destination. Furthermore, Chi (2011) found the repeat visitors illustrated higher levels of revisit and referral intentions compared to first time visitors when the visited destination provides higher tourist satisfaction and positive previous experiences.

In line with this, Taman Negara Pahang which is popular among tourists to the abundance and diversity of nature with rich ecosystems has a possibility facing

a decline in arrivals of tourists due to negative feedback that has been increasing in the recent years. The user generated content which was collected through the 'trip advisor' blogs showed numerous negative feedback in relation to several issues as shown in Table 1. 4. Unhygiene rooms or restaurants, over promised, over priced and poor services were identified as serious issues at Taman Negara Pahang that contributed to the negative word of mouth (WoM). Each negative feedback received from tourists has high potential for damage to the destination image and reduce the number of visitors to Taman Negara, Pahang in the future. In addition, several tourists revealed that they were not interested to revisit Taman Negara in future due to bad experience, poor services and unattractive recreational activities (tripadvisor blog, 2019; NST online, 2017).

Table 1.4 : Tourists' Negative feedback in Taman Negara

Issues	Percentage (%)
Overpromised by tour agency/ organisation	12.5
Over priced	15.0
Unhygienic Rooms / Restaurants	32.5
Horrible food	5.0
Rude and lazy tour guide	5.0
Overcrowded	10.0
Poor service	12.5
Boring activities	7.5

[Source: Tripadvisor blog (2019)]

Therefore, past studies and current situation in Taman Negara Pahang asserted the significance of creating positive memorable tourism experiences among tourist in order to attract and retain the tourists' interest in a particular destination. Mahdzar et al. (2015) also added that the unique experiences which delivered to the tourists via creative tourism products and interaction with local communities and service providers will make the tourist feel excited, delighted, enjoyed, shared the experiences with others and had high tendency to visit the destination again. In line with this, Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) concept was introduced in Kim (2009 and 2010). MTEs was initiated to stress the importance of creating memorable experiences among tourists to positively influence their loyalty behaviour.

This MTEs concept comprises of seven sub-constructs such as hedonism, local culture, novelty, refreshment, meaningfulness, knowledge and involvement (Kim, 2010). Later, social interaction was added as an additional construct of MTEs (Wei et al., 2019). In addition, a study by Subramaniam et al. (2018) revealed that most of the previous studies of MTEs were applied in tourism destinations compared to ecotourism destinations. In line with this, Kastenholz et al. (2012), Devesa et al. (2010) and Chan and Baum (2007) found that experiences at ecotourism destinations were not necessarily associated with

MTEs. However, these experiences were formed by a combination of nature, simple accommodation, environment, facilities, social interaction, culture, local communities and learning experiences.

Apart from Malaysia, MTEs had also been tested in various countries such as Iran, Myanmar, Zimbabwe, Finland, China, Taiwan, India, etc. Correspondingly, previous studies by Thoo et al. (2019), Gohary et al. (2018), Mahdzar (2018), Sharma and Nayak (2019), Kim (2017), Kim et al. (2010), Kerstetter and Cho (2004a), Wirtz et al. (2003), Sthapit (2013), Zaw et al. (2014), Hurombo et al. (2014), Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) and Lehto et al. (2004) indicated that all the seven dimensions of MTEs were significantly influencing destination satisfaction, destination image, future decision making, future trips and visitors' loyalty via revisit intention and positive Word of Mouth (WoM). In contrast, studies by Sthapit and Coudounaris (2017) and Yu et al. (2019) asserted that not all the seven constructs of MTEs influence the tourists' behaviour. Only local culture, novelty, hedonism, involvement and knowledge were significantly influencing the tourists' revisit intention. Likewise, Gohary et al. (2018) and Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013) revealed that novelty and local culture did not necessarily support tourists' intention to revisit and destination satisfaction despite them having had memorable experiences in previous visits. When applied as a mediator in tourism studies, MTEs illustrated a significant relationship with tourists' intention to revisit (Zhang et al., 2018; Thoo et al., 2019; and Mahdzar, 2016).

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite numerous research in the past on memorable tourism experience since 2010, most of these were empirical studies conducted in a tourism context (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2017; Wang, 2016; Chandralal and Valenzuela, 2015; Zaw et al., 2014; Kim and Ritchie, 2013; Chandralal and Valenzuela, 2013; Kim et al., 2012 and Kim, 2010) and only a few are from an ecotourism perspective (Yadaz and Krishnan, 2017; Subramaniam, et al., 2018; Akkus and Gulluce, 2016; Mahdzar et al., 2015; Quinlan, 2015; and Hurombo et al., 2014). This clearly indicates that the MTEs studies in ecotourism sector is fairly new and needs to be explored further in the near future.

In addition, the analysis of MTEs literature revealed that only seven significant constructs were repeatedly explored in various studies while the other eleven constructs were ignored. The destination attributed which was introduced by Mahdzar et al. (2015) as a construct of MTEs has not been explicitly discussed and explored in other tourism studies. One problem in the review of MTEs literature is lack of information on the attributes of ecotourism destination such as nature and educational awareness that affect the formation of MTEs. Such information would help to increase the understanding of MTEs at ecotourism destinations and of the managerial practices necessary in assuring MTEs. Moreover, Sthapit and Coudounaris (2017); Sthapit (2013); Zhang et al. (2017);

Quinlan (2015) and Chandralal et al. (2015) stressed on the lack of constructs such as destination attributes, visitor demographics, visitor socio-psychographics, tourists' satisfaction, loyalty, word of mouth, intention to revisit, awareness seminar and environmental lecture in the current MTEs studies. The analysis clearly highlighted the limitation of MTEs studies in the ecotourism sector and limitation of constructs in MTEs studies. Therefore, it is evident that 'Memorable Ecotourism Experiences (MEEs)' which comprises all 18 variables (originated by Kim, 2010), destination attributes (Mahdzar et al., 2015) and nature (beautiful scenery) and education awareness is a clear gap in tourism literature. The lack of MTEs studies as a mediating factor stressed the need for the study to explore MEEs as a mediator in the ecotourism sector.

Besides MEEs, ecotourists' behavioural intention and actual behaviour also play crucial roles in sustaining the tourists' destination loyalty. The TPB theory which was used as an underpinning theory to evaluate the ecotourists' behaviour stressed that an individual's actual behaviour could be predicted through behavioural intentions with the combination of subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Studies by Ziadat (2015), Hsu and Huang (2012), Muala (2011), Lam and Hsu (2006), Gopi and Ramayah (2007), Amoroso and Hunsinger (2008) and Canniere et al. (2008) demonstrated positive and significant relationship between behavioural intention and actual behaviour. However Juvan et al. (2017), Carrington et al. (2010), Devinney and Auger (2007) found contradictory outcomes whereby behavioural intention not necessarily lead to actual behaviour. Therefore, it emphasised the need for further study in exploring the tourists' behavioural intention and actual behaviour in the ecotourism sector.

Place attachment has been identified as one of the factors influencing the creation of tourism experiences (Ramkissoon et al., 2014; Lewicka, 2011; Yuksel et al., 2010; Hinds and Sparks, 2008). Nevertheless, the relationships between visitor socio-demographics, place attachment and memorable experiences have yet to be fully explored in the current and previous studies. Ramkissoon et al. (2014), Ram et al. (2016), Tsai (2016), Loureiro (2014), Hosany et al. (2014) and Allan (2016) highlighted the lack of studies in relation to visitors' satisfaction, memorable experiences, past experiences, frequency of the visitation, memory, socio-demographic of tourists, psychographic constructs and place attachment in different national park settings, context and samples. Past studies also indicated the limited studies in two dimensions of place attachment: place affect and place social bonding. Hence, it highlighted the pressing need for further studies to analyse place attachment in relation to tourists' behaviour in the ecotourism sector.

Likewise, travel motivation also plays an important role in destination loyalty. The analysis showed that both push and pull motivational factors significantly influences the tourists' level of satisfaction and tourism experiences (Said and Maryono, 2018; Mutanga et al., 2017; Aquino et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2017;

Utama et al., 2014; Khuong and Ha, 2014; Hikmah et al., 2013). However, Wang (2016) and Nicole and Paul (2009) claimed that only 'push factors positively and significantly influences the tourists' travel motivation and creation of MTEs. Mehmetoglu and Normann (2013), Yousefi and Marzuki (2015), Kassean and Gassita (2013), Yiamjanya and Wongleedee (2014) and Sthapit and Coudounaris (2017) further stressed the lack of studies in the interrelationship between 'push' and 'pull' motivational factors, moderating effects, empirical studies (quantitative method), types of tourists, frequency of visitations and MTEs. Thus, it further emphasises the necessity of the current study to explore the connection between travel motivation and tourist behaviour.

Besides that, tourists' pro-environmental behaviour is also one of the important constructs in ecotourism studies. This behaviour highly influences the sustainability of ecotourism destinations since it is practising conservation and preservation of nature. Ballantyne et al. (2011); Duerden and Witt (2010); and Ballantyne et al. (2011a) have found that memorable experience has the possibility to influence tourists' pro-environmental behaviour but unfortunately, it has not been fully explored in past studies. Although most of the previous pro-environmental behaviour studies are related with place attachment and ecotourism, Ramkissoon et al. (2012), Tonge et al. (2015) and Ramkissoon et al. (2013) found limitation in exploring the visitors' behavioural intention and actual behaviour in relation to the dimensions of place attachment and pro-environmental behavioural. Weimer (2019), Kaiser and Schultz (2009), and Bamberg (2003) further indicated that the pro-environmental behavioural intention only moderates the actual behaviour. The contradictory findings underlined the need for the present study to explore both the intention and actual pro-environmental behaviour.

Moreover, the negative feedback by tourists on hygiene issues, pricing strategies and services at Taman Negara Pahang has a high possibility to damage the image of Taman Negara as a well known ecotourism destination in Malaysia and failed to attract the potential and repeated tourists. Correspondingly, studies by Hassan and Azhar (2017), Zaiton et al. (2013), Nor'ain et al. (2010) and Ibrahim and Hasan (2011) also underlined poor water quality, littering, unhygienic food stalls, overcrowding, provocation of wildlife, nature resource conflicts, disturbance of biodiversity system and river erosion as unsolved critical issues in Taman Negara, Pahang. Hence, it stressed the necessity of the current study to be conducted in Taman Negara Pahang.

The abovementioned negative feedback and environmental degradation issues have become major challenges to the Malaysian government, which initiated several plans and policies to improve the environmental sustainability at both tourism and ecotourism destinations. The National Policy on Biological Diversity (2016- 2025), 2nd National Ecotourism Plan (2016- 2025) and Economic Transformation Programme (2016) were developed by the Malaysian government to protect forest and biodiversity, control the practices of logging,

reduce environmental pollution and support the environmentally-friendly practices at both tourism and ecotourism destinations (KATS, 2020; MOTAC, 2020; ETP, 2016). Furthermore, the Malaysian government has allocated around RM 42 million in Budget 2020 (project 01900) to develop and sustain the ecotourism sector (Malaysia Treasury, 2020). Hence, this study attempts to fill the knowledge gap in the specific context of MEEs to influence the ecotourists' behavioural intention and actual behaviour.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to introduce and examine Memorable Ecotourism Experiences (MEEs) in Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan, Malaysia.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- 1) To examine the direct effect between travel motivation and place attachment and behavioural intention of ecotourists in Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan, Malaysia.
- 2) To analyse the mediating effect of the memorable ecotourism experiences between travel motivation and place attachment and behavioural intention of ecotourists in Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan, Malaysia.
- 3) To examine the direct effect between behavioural intention and actual behaviour of ecotourists in Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan, Malaysia.
- 4) To evaluate the moderating effects of socio-demographic of ecotourists and trip characteristics the relationship between behavioural intention and actual behaviour of ecotourist in Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan, Malaysia.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study contributes towards an understanding of role of Memorable Ecotourism Experiences (MEEs) in enhancing the ecotourists' future behavioural intention and actual behaviour in order to sustain the ecotourism destinations. On top of that, the significance of this study can be viewed from both theoretical and managerial perspectives.

1.4.1 Theoretical Contributions

In exploring the mentioned issues and literature gaps, the research is aimed to contribute to the growing body of tourism and ecotourism literature. The present study will introduce a new term or concept called 'Memorable Ecotourism

Experiences (MEEs)' by extending the current MTEs concept. This extended concept consists of all 18 variables (which were introduced by Kim (2010) but ignored by subsequent researchers), destination attributes (Mahdzar et al., 2014) and introduced two new variables: nature and education awareness (Subramaniam et al., 2019). Nature and education awareness were identified as suitable constructs to the ecotourism sector since this sector focuses on the appreciation of the natural environment while enjoying the trip. Furthermore, these two constructs were not clearly identified and discussed in the previous tourism literature. This present study also brings new insights to the current MTEs knowledge by introducing a new complex research framework which comprises of tourists' travel motivation, place attachment, MEEs, behavioural intention and actual behaviour (pro-environmental behaviour and destination loyalty). The study also highlights all the constructs or dimensions that have contributed to the formation of MEEs concept. In addition, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is used in this study to evaluate the effects of behavioural intention to actual behaviour since the relationship between these variables was criticised by several researchers in previous studies. Hence, the findings of the study provides new insights to TPB. Finally, the study has also formed a new conceptual framework by combining four theories: Push-Pull Theory, Attachment Theory, Experience Economy Theory and Theory of Planned Behaviour, which had been explored separately in previous studies. Overall, the outcome of the study has added new knowledge to the current tourism literature.

1.4.2 Managerial Implications

Besides theoretical contributions, the outcomes of the study also intend to create guidelines for several authorities and organisations such as the Malaysian government, Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC), Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), the management of Taman Negara Kuala Tahan, the site operators or service providers travel agencies and tour guides at Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan, which directly and indirectly influence the sustainability of this ecotourism destination. Firstly, the proposed research framework and outcomes provide new insights to all ecotourism policy makers including the Malaysian government, MOTAC, DWNP and academicians by stressing the need of creating memorable experiences as a part of providing quality experiences to the tourists to support the sustainability of financing strategy in national parks. The findings of the study also provide additional input to the strategy formulation policy of ecotourism by creating and increasing public and tourist educational programmes or awareness in order to support the sustainability of ecotourism destinations.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the importance of creating Memorable Ecotourism Experiences (MEEs) among local and international ecotourists in Taman Negara Kuala Tahan. The study also attempts to study the mediating relationship of MEEs between travel motivation, place attachment, behavioural intention and actual behaviour of ecotourists in Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan. The study was conducted among 387 local and international ecotourists who visited Taman Negara Kuala Tahan from April to July 2018. This study also excluded ecotourists who entered Taman Negara through Taman Merapoh, Kuala Koh and Tanjung Mentong entrances. This study adopted both quota sampling and purposive sampling methods: whereby quota sampling was used to determine the sample size of local and international ecotourists while purposive sampling method was used to distribute the survey questionnaires among ecotourists. Partial Least Squares (PLS) - Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis and Hierarchical Multiple Regression (HMR) analysis were applied in this study to analyse the collected data.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The following are the operational definitions used in the present study:

a) Ecotourism

Ecotourism is referred to as a responsible trip or visitation to pure natural based destinations while preserving the nature, promoting and practicing educational awareness, and enhancing the well-being and socio-economics of local communities.

b) Travel Motivation

Travel motivation refers to a combination of push and pull factors that trigger an ecotourist to visit an ecotourism destination. Push factors focus on the need of ecotourists to explore and gain new knowledge, experiences and escaping from the stress of routine activities. Meanwhile, the pull factors are centered on nature and man-made attractions at ecotourism destinations that encourages and influences ecotourists to visit an ecotourism destination.

c) Place Attachment

Place attachment is known as an emotional bonding that is created between individuals and their surrounding or environment, especially when they visit ecotourism destinations. It consists of an affective, functional, cognitive and

social bonding that is shaped between an individual and a particular ecotourism destination.

d) Memorable Ecotourism Experiences (MEEs)

Memorable Ecotourism Experiences (MEEs) in an extended version of Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) which consists of 15 sub-constructs and applied in the ecotourism sector. MEEs is referred to as recollection and evoked experiences that an ecotourist has gained after visiting an ecotourism destination. It also focuses on unforgettable memories that influences an ecotourist's future behaviour.

e) Pro-environmental Behaviour

The pro-environmental behaviour focuses on conservation or preservation activities that are practiced by an ecotourist to save the nature of ecotourism destinations. It also stressed the action or behaviour of an ecotourist to minimise the damages or harms to the nature and environment.

f) Destination Loyalty

Destination loyalty emphasises on the ecotourist's intention to visit a particular ecotourism destination repeatedly. Besides visiting, he or she also recommends a particular destination to the people surrounding them via positive word of mouth.

g) Behavioural Intention

Behavioural intention refers to a person's willingness or plan to visit the same destination again and practicing pro-environmental behaviour (intention to apply activities which minimise damages to the nature and the environment).

h) Actual Behaviour

Actual behaviour focuses on real action of visiting the same destination again and practicing pro-environmental behaviour (implement the activities which minimise damages to the nature and the environment).

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters and is organised as follows: Chapter 1 presented the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, significance of study, scope of the study, definition of terms and organisation of the thesis. Chapter 2 focuses on literature review with three main sections inclusive of conceptualisation, empirical evidences and underpinning theory, especially the reviews which support the direct relationship, mediating constructs and moderating constructs. This chapter also outlines the proposed research framework together with all underpinning theories of the study. While chapter 3 discusses the research methodology which includes the location of the study, research design, sampling (population, sample and technique), hypotheses of the study, preliminary analysis and data analysis method. Chapter 4 describes the data analysis and findings with further explanations of the analysis taken into consideration for the research. Lastly, chapter 5 outlines the discussion and conclusion of the research whereas the recapitulation of the research's study and its implications. This chapter also includes the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

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BIODATA OF STUDENT

Thanam Subramaniam graduated from National University of Malaysia (UKM) in 2005 with a B.A. (Hons) in Economics, majoring Economic Development. She enrolled for a postgraduate programme at the same University in the year 2007 and completed her studies in the year 2009. In the same year she was awarded a Master's Degree in Economics (majoring Economic Development).

She started her career as a Community Training Officer in Centre for Independent Journalism (NGO) in the year 2006. After completion of master degree, she joined the YPC International College (formerly known as Kolej Teknologi YPC- itweb) as an Economic Lecturer. After a year, she joined Binary University and taught Economic and Business modules. In August 2012, she joined Asia Pacific University and started to teach marketing modules for different levels, such as Certificate, Diploma and Degree. Modules taught are Marketing, Basic Marketing Skills, Consumer Behaviour, Service Marketing, Marketing Fundamental, B2B Marketing, Marketing Principles, International Tourism Marketing, Managing Services and Innovation Management and New Product Development.

She was accepted by the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia to pursue a PhD in September 2015 and her area of research is 'Antecedents and Outcomes of Memorable Ecotourism Experiences in Taman Negara Pahanga, Kuala Tahan Malaysia.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Subramaniam, T., Zaiton, S., Ramachandran, S., and Kunasekaran, P. 2018. Shifting from 'Experience Economy' to 'Memorable Tourism Experience': An Overview from Ecotourism. *Advance Science Letter*. 24, 3343–3346.

Subramaniam, T., Zaiton, S., Ramachandran, S., and Kunasekaran, P. 2019. Memorable Ecotourism Experiences in Taman Negara, Pahang. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE)*. ISSN: 2278-3075. Vol.7 Issue-5s.

List of Awards

1. Best Paper Award 2019

Presented Paper titled '*The Influence of Place Attachment on Pro-Environmental Behaviour of Ecotourist in Taman Negara Pahang, Kuala Tahan, Malaysia*' in ATRA Tourism Forum and 17th Graduate Research Colloquium, Taylor's University.

2. Best Paper Award 2018

Presented Paper titled '*Memorable Ecotourism Experiences in Taman Negara Pahang*' in Seminar FEB 2018: Growth and Competitiveness in Emerging Economics' Universiti Putra Malaysia.

3. Best Presenter Award 2018

Seminar FEB 2018: Growth and Competitiveness in Emerging Economics' Universiti Putra Malaysia



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