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TOURIST SATISFACTION, DESTINATION IMAGE, LOYALTY, AND REVISIT INTENTION TO MALAYSIA'S NATIONAL PARKS

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the tourism sector is creating thousands of job opportunities in the industry. It is one of the significant economic growth contributors in Malaysia. Realising the importance of this industry, this study aims to provide an overview of the critical determinants of tourists' revisit intention to Malaysia's national parks. To contemplate possible factors for revisit intention, the study will investigate the relationship between tourist satisfaction, destination image, loyalty and revisit intention. This study is conceptual. A comprehensive review will be presented based on the most recently selected literature from an academic journal and relevant online platforms. However, as mentioned in the conceptual analysis, this study focuses less on the critical and comprehensive outcomes of revisiting the intention of Malaysia's national parks. Based on the thorough literature, this study attempts to find both academic and industry perspective contributions that engage with ecotourism, one of the potential tourism industry sectors. The study will provide a holistic pedagogy to destination management authorities to focus on the related factors for domestic tourist revisit intention. The practical implication of this study is to assist and provide clear ideas to the national park management authorities about the determinants of domestic tourist revisit intention. By providing a glimpse of tourist revisit intention factors, the national park management can implement strategies to increase the rate of revisiting tourists. Nevertheless, national park management may implement these factors as part of recovery strategies after covid 19 pandemic, especially to encourage domestic tourists for revisiting. This study exposes the potential and possibility of the huge impact of ecotourism in the Malaysian tourism industry. Consequently, the study will suggest some critical sustainable resilience strategies which can support tourists' revisit intention to Malaysia's national park. The study finding will be original in their form and will be a unique attempt. Therefore, the study observations will be precious to all the stakeholders and policymakers of Malaysia's ecotourism sector.

Keywords: Ecotourism, National Park, Revisit intention, Satisfaction, Destination image, loyalty

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1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered a vital profitable sector for many developing and developed countries. Various researchers contemplate this industry as the fastest-growing industry, which has made tremendous growth in the last few decades (Gossling et al., 2019; Nilashi et al., 2019; Oviedo-Garcia et al., 2016). This industry has been continuously contributing to economic development by creating different job sectors, improvements in local people's living standards, and remarkable growth in other related sectors. Rapid growth in economic development and the rise of individual incomes help to increase the demand for tourism activities worldwide (Elaine et al., 2020). From the World Tourism Organization statistic, the rate of international tourist arrival increased by 4% in 2019, but it also reported a massive fall in 2020-2021 due to the global pandemic. However, during the post-pandemic phase, the industry is applying all the strategies to boost the tourism field, and it works well as borders are open and tourists are moving.

In Malaysia, the tourism industry has been overgrown since 2000 and has become one of the main segments of GDP growth. This country is one of the top five destination countries in Asia Pacific. To diversify economic growth, the government puts all efforts into all fields of the tourism industry (Allameh et al., 2015, Al-Mulali et al., 2019). Before the Covid 19 pandemic, the country generated almost RM200 billion from this industry which shows the significant impact of this industry on economic progression. In 2018, the industry added 15.2% of the Gross Valued Added of Tourism Industries and 6.5% of Tourism Direct Gross Domestic Product to Malaysia's GDP (DSMO, 2019). Tourism is one of Malaysia's imperative income sources (Chan et al., 2021).

Ecotourism is a subsector of the tourism industry and is one of the main pillars of sustainable tourism development for social, environmental and economic sustainability (Chan, 2018). Conversely, in Malaysia's tourism industry, the contribution from ecotourism sites is not that significant compared to other related tourism sectors. Especially the support from domestic tourists to revisit the destination is not satisfactory. In contrast, other South East Asian countries have good support from domestic tourists to revisit the national parks that, bring competitive advantages. Although the national parks of Malaysia are full of a richness of natural resources and beauties to boost the ecotourism sectors, the rate of repeated tourist visitation to ecotourism destinations is slow, mainly for domestic tourists (Thong et al., 2020). Besides, competition from neighbouring countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam creates tough challenges to be the best in ecotourism. This is because of the lower rate of tourist's revisit intention to ecotourism destinations. In addition, the amount of study in this context is not satisfactory in Malaysia (Chin et al., 2018; Konul, 2019).

The government introduced different promotional packages to increase the repeat domestic tourist visitation to the national parks. Nevertheless, to promote the ecotourism sector, Malaysia has listed almost 60 ecotourism clusters under National Ecotourism Plan (NEP, 2016-2025), and it is included all the national parks in this plan (MOTAC, 2019). Moreover, as a plan of post-Covid 19 pandemic travellers switching from urban tourism to ecotourism as ecotourism destinations are helping to maintain the standard operating system. Therefore, this study will focus on some essential factors which may assist the destination management authorities or policymakers in increasing the number of domestic tourists revisiting the national parks. In relation with the study emphasised satisfaction, destination image and loyalty as influential determinants for tourists' revisit intention.

Nuva et al. (2009) posited that ecotourism is considered one of the main sub-components of the tourism sector under nature-based tourism. The researcher further conjured that, Tourism industry players and stakeholders consider ecotourism as one of the fast-growing potential sectors in the tourism industry (Jin et al., 2010). Countries rich in biodiversity have been trying to increase the number of nature lover tourists to revisit the ecotourism destination. Along with that, ecotourism also focuses on sustainable tourism that emphasises ecotourism activities (Elaine et al., 2020) related to the conservation of the environment among tourists (Joyner & Bricker, 2018). In Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Thailand are doing well (Tan & Wu, 2016). China also focuses on this sector to get economic benefits from it.

As referential from the past studies, the problem that emerged requires much attention as it reduces the economic benefit for this industry. Domestic tourists in the ecotourism industry are the key drivers for maintaining destination sustainability by revisiting the destinations (Chi & Qu, 2008, Konuk, 2019). Thus, this paper is believed to be able to fill the literature gap for scholars as well as the policymaker and industry players in terms of further research and decision-making to boost

the growth rate of domestic tourist arrival.

The following sections will discuss associated literature based on previous research on the factors affecting tourists' revisit intention—the essential elements like tourist satisfaction, destination image and loyalty.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Revisit Intention

In the tourism industry context, revisit intention can refer to the likelihood of visitors returning to the same destination and considering key indicators of loyal tourists (Seetanah et al., 2018). Li et al. (2018) identified revisit intention as one of the key research topics in tourism literature. According to Yoon and Uysal (2005), tourist destinations can consider products and visitors can revisit the travel destination or recommend it to potential tourists who can be friends or relatives. Similarly, Parasuraman et al. (1985) defined revisit intention as the intention of visiting again after a tourist is satisfied with the destination services and willing to visit again.

Past research has indicated that repeat tourists tend to stay longer at a destination and participate more intensively in consumptive activities (Lehto et al., 2004; Zhang et al., 2014, 2018). This shows that repeat tourists are optimistic about the destination and love to spread positive word of mouth, which helps destination management to save management and marketing costs. At the same time, it needs extra cost for first-time visitors. However, sharing positive recommendations of destinations with others also can consider as revisit intention for a destination (Chin et al., 2018; Som & Badrneh, 2018).

The context of tourists' revisit intention has been widely used in tourism research, but the amount of tourist's revisit intention to Malaysian ecotourism destinations is very few (Thong et al., 2020). However, no proper criterion can represent the indicators for tourists' revisit intention in Malaysia's ecotourism (Abdullah & Lui, 2018). Concerning that, researchers try to measure tourist revisit intention by considering tourist satisfaction and loyalty towards the destination (Zhang et al., 2014). Along with that, other variables are also in consideration, such as destination image; loyalty and personal motives to see the tourist revisit intention level (Cong & Dam, 2017; Isaac & Eid, 2018).

Consequently, some previous studies attempted to present the importance of tourist revisit intention and figure out some related factors (Chon & Woosnam, 2020). They described it as; repeated tourists were expected to be more likely than first-timers to choose the exact destination for their future visit (Abdullah & Lui, 2018). With that, Kozak (2001) supported that tourists who had visited a destination once or more times were more likely to revisit it again, thus demonstrating increased tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Luo and Hiseh (2013) posited that tourists' or visitors' willingness to visit a destination repeatedly could consider as the revisit intention. Similarly, Wong et al. (2015) described tourist revisit intention as the willingness of tourists to recommend the same destination to others. However, Li and Shi (2018) have considered it as an expression of loyalty. Moreover, the context of revisiting intention in the ecotourism sector is an essential and critical issue as most loyal tourists are practical elements or indicators which help destination management authorities to manage the destinations well (Lin, 2019). Adding to that, Abdullah and Lui (2018) mentioned by adding up different benefits, repeat visitors contribute to the development of tourist countries.

Many tourist developing countries focus on tourist revisit intention as it helps the destination for continuous growth. Therefore, tourism has become crucial and essential to such countries, and an increasing number of researchers concentrate on tourism development. About that, revisiting the intention to the destinations is a vital and crucial element to ensure the success of any destination (Mai et al., 2019). Compared with other sub-sector of tourism in Malaysia, the revisit intention rate for ecotourism is comparatively low. Researchers argued to focus on different factors which may help the destination management authorities to increase the rate of repeat visitors.

Consequently, Nurul et al. (2018) suggested that more attention needs to analyse the tourist's revisit intention for Malaysia's ecotourism as the number of tourists revisiting the ecotourism destination is still lower. Although Malaysia's ecotourism, especially the national parks, has a significant opportunity to uphold this industry, a depth investigation to

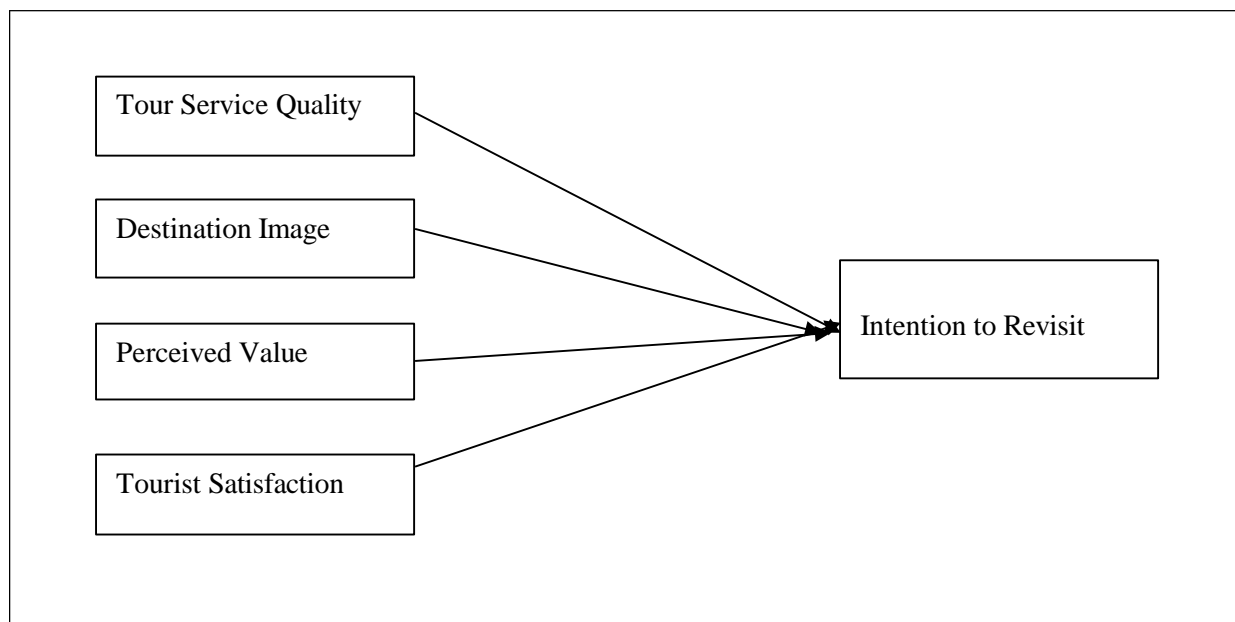
determine the determinants may help the destination management authorities.

Moreover, the number of studies on tourist revisit intention to Malaysia's ecotourism is very few and needs more research to find out the influential factors of revisit intention. Nurul et al. (2019) researched "Revisit intention factors for Ecotourism to Tasik Kenyir" and suggested continuous research on this topic in different ecotourism destinations in Malaysia. Other critical literature reviews suggest various factors for revisit intention: satisfaction level, perceived quality, destination image, destination attractiveness, perceived value, loyalty, cultural contact, technology and destination management capabilities, etc (Boopen & Nunkoo, 2020).

However, Usep Suhud and Setyo Ferry (2014) presented three modified models to predict Indonesian tourists revisit intention to Sydney. This model involved four predictor variables: tour service quality, destination image, perceived value and tourist satisfaction. The study shows each of these variables had a direct link to revisit intention (Usep & Setyo, 2014). Therefore, tourist satisfaction, destination image and loyalty should all directly and positively impact tourists revisiting intention to Malaysia's national parks.

Figure 2.1

Modified model to predict revisit intention



Source: Usep & Setyo, (2014)

2.2 Tourist's Satisfaction and Revisit Intention

The definition of satisfaction is divided into three categories per tourism activities: service-related satisfaction, destination-related satisfaction, and satisfaction of tourists (Santoso, 2019; Lew et al., 2019). If the tourist is satisfied, they would like to revisit the destination (Santoso, 2019). According to Kotler et al. (2018), tourism satisfaction considers enjoyment or disappointment when a destination meets or fails a tourist expectation level. An and Eck (2019) claimed in a study that a higher level of tourist satisfaction will achieve higher performance in tourist destinations.

A recent study was conducted based on tourist satisfaction towards Kota Kinabalu Ecotourism and found that tourist satisfaction positively impacts Kota Kinabalu ecotourism development and growth (Nattana et al., 2020). Besides, the

importance of satisfaction has been proven by past studies for the ecotourism sector (Lin, 2019; Mafi et al., 2019), which also presented the importance of studying satisfaction in ecotourism destinations. However, previous studies abstracted that satisfaction significantly influences tourists' revisit intention (Dayour & Adango, 2019). In addition, Samuel (2009) indicated some motivational variables as tourist satisfaction factors for revisit intention, such as destination performance, service quality, hygiene factors etc. Moreover, past empirical research used transportation services as an attribute to measure tourist satisfaction for revisit intention (Boopen & Nunkoo, 2020).

Keep in mind the importance of tourist revisit intention, past studies have given much effort to understand the antecedents of tourists' revisit intention, and it has been found from the previous studies that satisfaction with the destination is a significant determinant (Zhang et al., 2018). Similarly, many empirical past studies have focused on tourist satisfaction as one of the critical factors of tourists' intention to revisit the destination (Chiu & Cheng, 2016; Park & Byung, 2020; Um et al., 2016).

The above discussion shows that the finding appeared to be mixed or inconclusive. But most research results produce a positive relationship between satisfaction and revisit intention.

2.3 Destination Image and Revisit Intention

The concept of image is quite old and was studied early by Boulding (1956). In that study researcher's viewpoint on the image is that human behaviours are much more attracted by image rather than objective reality. Destination image increases the destination's attractiveness by combining products, attractions, services and other related attributes (Aiello et al., 2015). In the ecotourism context, the destination image indicates the tourist's feelings or emotional reaction to the landscape (Jiang et al., 2018). Moreover, the ecotourism destination image refers to the nature bases image, which presents the total impressions of an ecotourism site.

When tourists or visitors have a set of impressions, ideas, expectations and emotional thoughts about a place, it refers to the concept of destination image (Lordanova, 2013; Tasci & Gartner, 2017). It has been tested in many past ecotourism destinations and proven that destination image is imperative for these destinations (Chin et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2020). Referring to that, Sharma and Nayak (2018) considered destination image to consist of three elements which are, cognitive, affective and conative.

With that, a study also describes that tourists' choice of destination depends on the images they hold of the given destination, affected by both the cognitive, affective and unique image the destination owns (Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

The perceived positive image of the destination can be expected to impact the tourist's decision to revisit the destination positively. It indicates that tourists' beliefs and knowledge about the destination attributes refer to the tourists' feelings and emotions (Li et al., 2018). However, a tourist's positive consideration of the destination image outlines the desired future decision to revisit the destination (Stylos et al., 2017; White, 2014).

Moreover, several studies have also presented that the image of the ecotourism destination can connect visitors and nature, which can motivate them to revisit the destination and develop strong links with the natural world (Olmsted et al., 2020).

There has been an increasing extent of examining the relationships between destination image and revisiting intention to ecotourism destinations in the national parks (Thong et al., 2020; Mohamad & Ghani, 2014; Trung & Khalifa, 2019). Some studies claim that the functional characteristic of destination image impacts tourists revisiting their intention to ecotourism destination (Thong et al., 2020). But the study's findings revealed only price and value had a significant positive impact on tourists' revisit intention. In contrast, other functional characteristics of destination image do not significantly impact tourists' revisit intention. The study suggested examining more destination images to get the positive result of destination image for tourists' revisit intention to ecotourism destination of Malaysia (Thong et al., 2020).

The study by Erawan (2019) mentioned that destination image positively and considerably influences tourist revisit intention. Along with that, another study proved that destination image positively influences tourist satisfaction, which helps to increase the revisit intention (Jeong & Kim, 2019).

2.4 Loyalty and Revisit Intention

Loyalty defines in many ways for different sectors and fields. Among the several definitions, there is one explanation which uses commonly for tourism research which is “A person who is interested in re- buying the tourism products or revisiting the tourist destination from the same service holder or to the same destination and also recommends it to others by word of mouth” (Liu et al., 2012). Tourism loyalty depends on many factors due to tourism's heterogeneous nature (Hermawan, Brahmento & Hamzah, 2018). Loyal tourist positively impacts the destination as it influences tourist to repeat visiting (Dyah & Abdul, 2016). For ecotourism, destination loyalty is a vital factor that can help measure tourists' needs and wants (Hepworth & Mateus, 1994).

Homburg and Giering (2017) stated that they measured loyalty as future behavioural intention. Another research conceptualised tourist loyalty as continued repurchase and acts of recommendation to friends or relatives (Opperman, 2018). Concerning that, a tourist's loyalty towards the destination refers to a tourist's intention to revisit the destination and their readiness to recommend it to others (Kumar & Nayak, 2019). Moreover, it is considered an important goal of every tourist destination to make the tourist loyal to the destination.

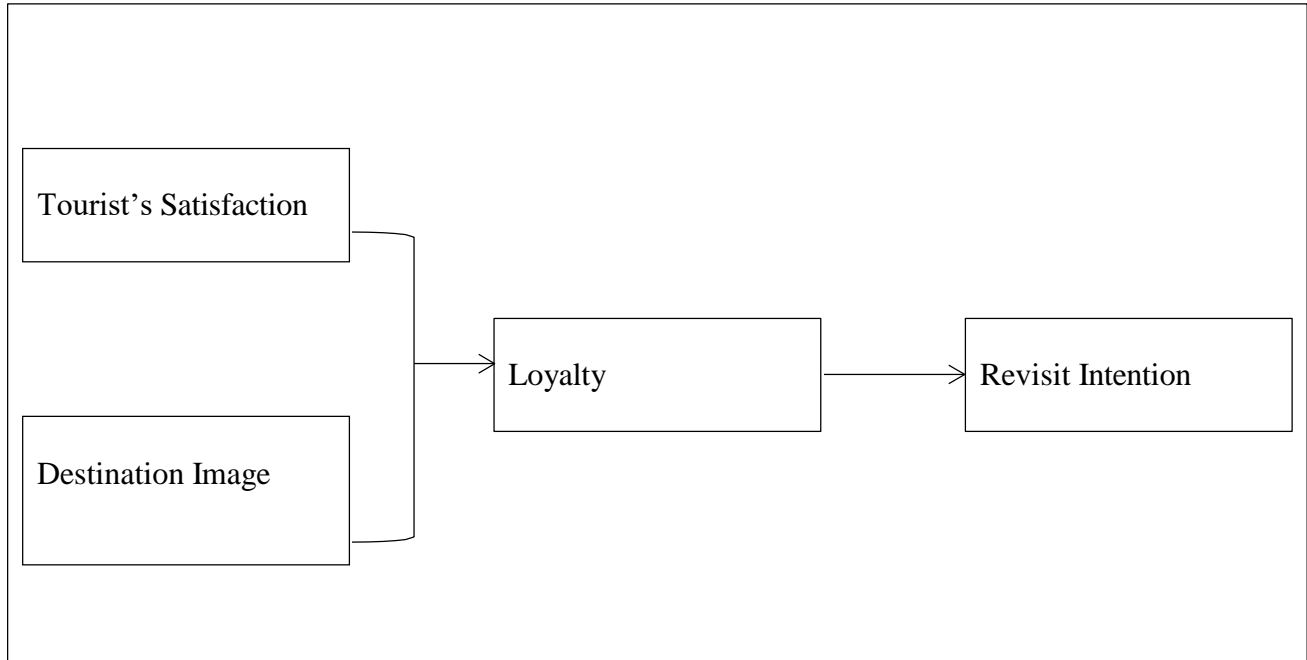
Similarly, studies have shown that tourist satisfaction can positively correlate with tourist loyalty which can impact revisit intention (Alexandris et al., 2006; Khen & Dileep, 2020). In addition, researchers also stated that satisfaction could help create loyalty and its ultimate effects to revisit intention, indicating the mediation role of tourist loyalty (Hosany & Prayag, 2017). Likewise, many researchers have also investigated the precedents of tourist loyalty and found a strong relationship between destination image and loyalty (Cossio et al., 2019; Harun et al., 2018). The studies established that destination image strongly influences loyalty, which helps tourists' desire to revisit the destination and their willingness to recommend others (Awatara et al., 2020; Hoang et al., 2021). It indicates that loyalty might influence satisfaction and destination image as a mediator to impact on tourists' revisit intention.

2.5 Proposed Research Framework

The proposed research framework is exhibited in figure 2.2 below. The model was developed to explain and demonstrate the relationship between the dependent, independent, and mediating variables. Revisit intention is applied as the dependent variable in this research, and the independent variables are Tourist Satisfaction, Destination Image. Loyalty will be operationalised as the mediating variable.

The proposed questionnaires for this study consist of a total of 25 items to measure domestic tourists' feedback on tourist satisfaction (7 items), destination image (6 items), tourist loyalty (6 items) and revisit intention (6 items). The items to design the questionnaires are adopted and adapted from previous studies. However, all the constructs are validated by past studies. As part of the pre-test, academicians and industry experts conducted the content and face validation. In addition, a pilot test will be completed before the actual data collection. For data collection, three national parks will be selected as the sampling location: Taman Negara national park, Penang national park and Bako national park. Simple random sampling was used to collect the data from domestic tourist respondents. Using SmartPLS version 3.3, the study will analyse the data to measure the relationships between the variables.

3 PROPOSED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK



4 CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate the factors affecting tourist revisit intention to Malaysia's national parks in order to boost the growth rate of domestic tourist arrival. Based on the previous studies, it can be concluded that tourist satisfaction, destination image and loyalty can influence a tourist to revisit their intention. The study included a detailed discussion of the factors that applied to tourist revisit intention. Apparently, national parks, as the essential components of the ecotourism sector, must have natural beauty and resources to convince domestic tourists to repeat their visitation. Likewise, tourists also need to be aware of the activities to sustain the destination for future generations. It is important to introduce different promotional strategies by the destination management, which can value tourists' time and spend so that they get the motivation to return. This study provides empirical evidence that tourist satisfaction, destination image and loyalty tend to influence and lead to revisit intention. As part of a wellness program and also going close to nature for relaxation, post-pandemic domestic travellers are highly interested in visiting the national parks. This emphasises the importance of national parks and that the industry should develop different strategies to promote the national parks for both international and domestic tourists. It is also vital to enhance and sustain the natural reserve in national parks since the ecotourism industry has massive potential for rapid revenue earner for the national economy. Consequently, this study also supports the government's effort to enhance the strategies for ecotourism sustainability by increasing the tourist revisit intention to Malaysia's national parks.

Last but not least, this study is expected to contribute to the literature on ecotourism studies in Malaysia. Although researchers have done much research on Malaysia's tourism sector, the ecotourism sector, especially the national parks, is yet to be explored.

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