



# Exploring the Aboroginal Bateq Community Perception Towards Potential of Ecotourism Development at Pahang National Park. Malaysia

Zainuddin Bin Zakaria<sup>1</sup>(✉), Maisarah Abdul Hamid<sup>2</sup>, Zatul Iffah Mohd Fuza<sup>2</sup>, Zaliha Zainuddin<sup>3</sup>, and Abdul Kadir Othman<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Terengganu, Dungun Campus, 23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

hzainudd@uitm.edu.my

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, UiTM Terengganu, Dungun Campus, 23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

{maisa179, zatul701}@uitm.edu.my

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 21030 Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia

zaliha.z@umt.edu.my

<sup>4</sup> Institute of Business Excellence, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

abdkadir@uitm.edu.my

**Abstract.** Ecotourism is among the highlighted tourism products in Malaysia. There are many types of ecotourism attractions and among the popular destinations is Taman Negara Pahang. This place consists of various nature and built attractions and among the unique characteristics of this place is the aboriginal people that live here. The Bateq community is among the biggest aboriginal people at this place and some of the community is already involved with tourism. This industry helps the Bateq community to sustain in their daily lives. However, their perceptions towards ecotourism development is required to understand. Therefore, this exploratory study was conducted to determine the perception of the Bateq community towards ecotourism development at Taman Negara. The SWOT analysis was employed in this study by looking at strength, weakness, opportunities and threats among Batek communities towards ecotourism development. In depth interviews were conducted with 10 informants from the Bateq community at three villages and one resort owner and operator at Taman Negara Pahang. The results showed that the strength of the Batek community is their lifestyle and culture. There are many unique products and services that can be offered to tourists. This includes the food, arts performance, local souvenirs and their daily lifestyle. Meanwhile, the weakness among this Bateq community is their attitudes. The lady and kids are shy and reluctant to interact with the tourists. Additionally, the language barrier, civilization and the facilities are the weakness of this community. Meanwhile, the opportunity of this place is the support by the local authorities in education, monthly income and health. Meanwhile they also received the tourism support from the Destination Management Organization (DMO) and travel agency. Finally, the threats for this community are the Weather, Pandemic/ endemic and the tourist

arrival. This community also has utilized the technology where they use the solar system for electricity and use smartphones for social media. This highlights the potential of this Bateq community to be involved in ecotourism development at Taman Negara Pahang. The local authorities can determine their strength and weakness to develop the ecotourism development at Taman Negara Pahang.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism · The Bateq · Aboriginal Community

## 1 Introduction

Ecotourism is important for the sustainability of the tourism industry. In Malaysia, ecotourism is one of Malaysia's biggest tourist attractions and it consists of various attractions including nature and built attractions. The National Park in Peninsular Malaysia is a popular ecotourism destination and it provides meaningful experiences through various ecotourism activities, enriched by its lush green forest, diverse flora fauna and coupled with its historically and culturally vibrant local communities [1]. This park is the largest national park in Peninsular Malaysia and known to be the world's oldest tropical rainforest. Among the main attractions of this place is visiting the aboriginal village and there are two ethnics of orang sail in Taman Negara namely Batek and Semakberi. This local community is among the unique attractions at this place and it is important to maintain the sustainability of this community in order to provide the competitive advantage of this destination.

The Bateq community is under the subethnic of Negrito and in Pahang there are 1124 people [2]. Orang Batek are mainly found the north east of Pahang, North West of Terengganu and south Kelantan. In Pahang, most of them are concentrated in the area of Kuala Tahan particularly the National Park. There are a number of Orang Bateq settlement areas of Kuala Tahan which include: Kampung Kuala Sat, Kuala Kemiang and Kampung Dedari [3]. Even Though the number of this community is not many and not the largest at Pahang, but some of this community already directly and indirectly involved with ecotourism development at Pahang National Park.

The ethnic Batek is already involved with ecotourism. They contact tourists on the Tembeling River and they have a long history with tourism [4]. Among the activities that involve visiting the Orang Asli village, selling souvenirs, being the tour guide, boatman, working at a hotel and porter for Mount Climbing. According to [5], the majority of them enjoyed interacting with tourists and this highlighted their attitude towards the tourism development at Taman Negara. However, study that analyzed the internal and external strength of this community is still limited.

The Batek ethnic behavior, preference, acceptance and attitudes towards ecotourism development are important. The residents- attitude Therefore, this study is conducted to analyses the internal and external attributes that influence the Batek community involvement in ecotourism. The result of this study is useful for the Destination Management organization (DMO) on marketing purposes and local authorities for planning of tourism development at this place.

## 2 Research Methodology

In order, to determine the perception of the Batek community towards ecotourism development at Taman Negara, this study apply exploratory study where researchers use a qualitative approach as one of the aspects in understanding primary data (Yin, 2009). The vital reason this study used a qualitative approach is because this approach can help in explaining why and how an event occurs at the same time it focuses on how people interpret experiences related to life events [6]. In addition, the qualitative approach is also often seen to assists researchers obtain complete and accurate information between researchers and informants through direct communication [7]. Besides, this method could get two-way feedback on questions in the context of the study [8].

## 3 Technique and Procedure Data Collection

The technique used in this study refers to random sampling where the location and list of informants have been obtained from Focal Persons who have been identified from the Department of Orang Asli Development, Pahang. Before the interview was conducted, the researcher was informed about the interview procedure starting with filling out the consent form for ethical requirements. In terms of protecting and ensuring against data loss, the researcher used a recording tool in each interview session. In addition, in this qualitative approach, most of the details also obtained from the observation of the informant's behavior, examination of documents, and interviews with those involved [9]. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 informants from the Batek community at three (3) villages and one (1) tourism operator were interviewed in Taman Negara Pahang. Among the Batek community, four adults at Kampung Kuala Atok, four adults at Kampung Kuala Sungai Sat and two adults at Kampung Teresek were interviewed within the space of two days. The tourism operator who is also a resort owner was interviewed at the operator's premise on the first day of the collection process. The interview took approximately 45 min to 1 h depending on the availability and the informants' answers.

In terms of data collection, the in-depth interview protocol was used as an instrument used in all the interviews conducted. This instrument is divided into 2 parts which are demography and the involvement of Orang Asli in the ecotourism development at Taman Negara, Pahang. The collected data was analyzed using the Thematic Analysis method where it was transcribed verbatim.

## 4 Findings and Analysis

In this section the authors will be discussing the results of our in-depth interview with the members of the Batek community living in Taman Negara Pahang, Malaysia. The main source of information is gathered from the in-depth interviews with the Batek community. In addition, the authors also conducted some observations on the behavior of the community and physical environment of the villages visited by the authors. As the results of these interviews and observations, several themes emerged from this exercise. The themes are discussed in the next sections.

#### **4.1 Acceptance of Ecotourism Activities**

The majority of the Batek community are willingly accepting the tourists and eco-tourism activity in their villages.. The reason being is that tourism brings in additional income to the community. Nevertheless we discovered two perceptions during the Covid 19 Pandemic. The perceptions are as follows:

1. The majority of the community believes that the Covid-19 has a negative effect on tourism activity. This is due to the closing of Taman Negara Pahang from all tourists and tourism activities for almost two years.
2. One individual perceived that there is a blessing in disguise when no tourists are allowed to visit their villages. He believes that the tourists would spread the Covid virus to the community when they visit the Batek community even though everybody in the community has been vaccinated.

#### **4.2 Impact of Ecotourism on the Environment**

The individuals who were interviewed believe that tourism does not negatively impact the flora and fauna found in the villages and surrounding areas. We think that the impact on the flora and fauna should be investigated since many of the tourists only spend only a few days with the community, hence it is not sufficient for the community to evaluate the impact of tourism on the flora and fauna surrounding the villages.

#### **4.3 Tourism Products (Souvenirs)**

There are a few tangible products such as Bamboo Comb, Blow Pipes and its accessories, Walking Cane, Souvenirs made from weaving materials such as purses, small handbags and mattresses. The products however have to be “pre-ordered” before the products can be sold to the tourists as the products are not “mass produced” before the tourists come to visit the villager. Another option is for members of the community to distribute the souvenirs to retailers or Jabatan Kebajikan Orang Asli (JAKOA) at Kuala Tahan, Pahang. Even though a small number of Blow Pipes and its accessories are readily available in some Batek villages, the Batek leaders should be working with the relevant authority such as the Malaysian Office of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) and JAKOA to promote and distribute and aggressively promote the souvenirs as a popular Tourism products in Taman Negara.

#### **4.4 Challenges in Eco-tourism Among the Batek Community**

Based on the authors observation and experience interviewing the respondents, we discovered that one of the challenges in developing and attracting more tourists to visit the Batek community is the issue of hygiene and cleanliness. During our visit to Kuala Sat village, we discovered that the village children are throwing sweet and junk food wraps that we gave to them around the village houses. The sweets and cookies are actually brought by tourists who visited the villages. JAKOA and other authorities head of the community should be helping the community to create a system of disposing of the thrash. Any thrash should be properly disposed of because any thrash that will contribute

**Table 1.** Summarised Findings of the Research of the Batek Community at Taman Negara, Pahang

Strength of The Batek Ethnic	Weakness of the Batek Community	Opportunity for the Batek Community	Threats for the Batek Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique lifestyle and culture</li> <li>• There are many unique products and services that can be offered to tourists. This includes the food, arts performance, local souvenirs and their daily lifestyle.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attitudes. The lady and kids are shy and reluctant to interact with the tourists.</li> <li>• Language barrier,</li> <li>• Unique civilization</li> <li>• Excellent facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support by the local authorities in education, monthly income and health.</li> <li>• Tourism support from the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) and travel agency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weather,</li> <li>• Pandemic/ endemic</li> <li>• Tourist arrival.</li> <li>• Technology where they use the solar system for electricity and use smartphone for social media</li> </ul>

to the pollution of the environment and flora and fauna. In addition, tourists who visit the community must be educated on how to dispose of any thrash or gifts that may contribute to the increase of thrash in the Batek community's villages.

Furthermore, the inconsistent supply of running water may prevent more tourists from visiting the Batek community. Running water is essential in any society and for tourists visiting any tourist destination especially to clean oneself after going to the toilet. During the author's visit to the community, we discovered that there are toilets in the villages, however, there is no running water in the toilets even though there are taps and water pipes built in the toilets. This absence of running water would create problems for tourists and visitors to the community to urinate or defecate.

In conclusion, the findings can be summarised in Table 1.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

Studies on the Batek' communities by exploring their perception towards potential of ecotourism development at Batek' villagers at Taman Negara Pahang, Malaysia has given the researchers some insight into their perception. The ecotourism elements such as flora and fauna, ethnic and Batek's way of life have been conducted by several researchers. In Malaysia for example, a few forests or National parks have been selected as research sites to explore the Aboroginal ethnic perception towards development of ecotourism at their site or villages. Based on the authors observation and experience interviewing the respondents, we discovered that one of the challenges in developing and attracting more tourists to visit the Batek community is the issue of hygiene and cleanliness. During our visit to Kuala Sat village, we discovered that the village children are throwing rubbish all around their villages littered by them.

It is part of the conservation of biodiversity effort initiated due to the development of tourist resorts that starts to make sense in these areas. What is seen in National Park Pahang is a sanctuary of flora and fauna in both the land and ecosystem. The area that surrounds it is the nature rainforest paradise for tourists. However, little is known about

the bliss of the land occupied with the extensive forest stands where the tiny creatures often hide. Inventories on the tree species conducted, led to the discovery of several flora species occupying the forest of National Park. This indicates the need to protect the existing rainforests. We postulate that it is critical to protect not only the flora and fauna of Taman Negara Pahang, but also other national parks in Malaysia. A well protected area will not only sustain the livelihood of the Batek's community but also create an attractive ecosystem that will lure the tourists to visit the Batek's community.

This is what the authorities should have done in the rainforest of National Park Batek's villages in Pahang. Due to the natural geographical formation of the rainforest with the hills and steep slopes dominating the villages, therefore, there is no future on large scale agricultural and forestry activities around this area. Besides, the effort to industrialise the island is also worthless as there is no work force and resources. The most conducive effort to develop a sustainable ecotourism among the Batek's communities is to let the villages be as it is, of course with the natural habitats itself but taking more effort to introduce and develop more ecotourism activities. In order to promote ecotourism, the biological component itself must be discovered and highlighted. In this case, the enchanting flora and fauna would be a good source. Forest inventories seem to be the most common ways to gain spatially based surveys within the project area to quantitatively assess species distributions by habitat type. Only then, extensive effort in providing more jungle tracks can be constructed and guided walks offered to the tourists visiting Taman Negara, Pahang.

The Jabatan PERHILITAN or the Forestry Dept can conduct training or nature guiding the Batek's youth. The phenology of the forests was essential for the survival of the wild animals that depend on the fruits for food and flowers for nectars. Other than that, with the spotted timing of flowering, fruiting and leaf flushing would give ideas to the tourists to spot any animals of their interests as well as to see and learn their behavior in the in-situ habitat. The forests indeed contain some beneficial tree species that can be turned into economic products. But the Batek communities don't know to turn some medicinal value from the forest as compared to certain aborigines in other parts of the Pahang states. Therefore, planning and providing facilities such as an in-situ display for plants with significant information, more trails connecting the Batek's site, and a resting point on top of the hills that offer delightful landscapes of nature and rivers would be relevant. Expert tours and nature guides are necessary for handling tourists. With a great consideration on providing the facilities on the blissful land and experts for guiding and monitoring would make better sustainable tourism in National Park Pahang, Malaysia. However, the dilemma in trying to promote ecotourism to the world is that it can positively control the spread of COVID 19 at their villages. Due to overexposure to the public, those elements might be harmed or disturbed. Researchers are competing to introduce new ecotourism sites, each with different potential but at the same time to sustainably conserve and protect the site. Batek communities really appreciate that COVID 19 really has blessing in disguise. In relation to the habitat, the finding shows that ecotourism is less sustainable in islands and mountain regions, particularly higher fragility of the ecosystems and lower carrying capacity for the tourists. However, we believe that there is a critical need for effective control and management of tourist numbers and distribution as it is the main reason for the unsustainable case

studies. Hence, as a suggestion, ecotourism should be small-scale and locally operated or owned together with careful planning and management prior to any ecotourism project settlement, and getting the feedback from the communities is very important in order to promote ecotourism at National Park, Pahang Malaysia.

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