

Chapter 9

Changing Behavioural of Patterns of Travelers to Urban Ecotourism Sites of Kuala Lumpur

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ABSTRACT

This underlying motivation behind this chapter is to examine and understand the changing patterns of travel behaviour of travellers to urban nature attractions of 2010 and 2015 (5 year gap period) in the context of Kuala Lumpur. Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia offers a major potential for the growth and development of urban ecotourism given the natural hotspots in both inside and on the peripheries of the city. The results emanating from the descriptive statistics employed in this study demonstrate that changes have occurred in terms of benefits of urban ecotourism, ecotourism activity, source of ecotourism knowledge and in terms of more female ecotourists than male. These results put forth a range of implications from the perspectives of understanding the evolving tourist behaviour in urban spaces and significance of urban eco-travel in Malaysia. In light of challenges and prospects faced in terms of survival of nature-based areas in and around Kuala Lumpur, the findings of the study have been discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Cities across the world have always been the point of confluence of diverse communities, cultures and individuals. Cities being confluence points have initiated the exchange and co-production of new ideas, develop epistemic values and bring innovation that has paved the path towards progress for humanity (Mitra, 2016). More interestingly, cities which enable vast travel opportunities for many due to the facilities it provides; lodging, entertainment and other utilities, have been instrumental in the construction of global citizenship through social exchanges in diverse cultural spaces it abounds (Mitra, 2016). It is in cities that ideas of ecological conservation and environmental awareness emerge and this helps in

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educating eco-travellers before they venture into wilderness spots for nature-based recreation (Kastelein, 2004). Nature spots in urban areas often become the means through which environmental learning and appreciation takes place that makes urban ecotourism a growing phenomenon in many cities across the world where an increasing number individuals seeking nature-based experiences (Okech, 2009; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). Urban Ecotourism is a concept that promotes environmental responsibility, local economic vitality, cultural diversity and experiential richness in urban tourism settings (Gibson, Dodds, Joppe & Jamieson, 2003). Global urban destinations like Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Toronto have focused on urban ecotourism as a part of their promotion of urban tourism experiences to international tourists (Wu, Wang & Ho, 2010).

The cities of Kuala Lumpur and Penang in Malaysia also hold a lot of potential for urban ecotourism given the natural hotspots both cities abound. Ecotourism in Malaysia is considered an area of major emphasis and is a part of broader growth and development of tourism in the country (Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail & Islam, 2011). Malaysia also won the Best Ecotourism Destination Award at The Travel Weekly (Asia) Industry Award in 2007 and 2008 (Tourism Malaysia, 2008). Malaysia is also among the twelve mega-biologically diverse countries with its tropical rainforests covering upto 60 percent of its landmass abounding diverse species of flora and fauna (Tourism Malaysia, 2008). Ecotourism in Malaysia by 2002 was growing at a rate of 35 percent annually and constituting 10 percent of its tourism (Marker, Blanco, Lokanathan & Verma, 2008). Given this significance of ecotourism in Malaysia, urban ecotourism can be posited as a recreational activity able to provide satisfying urban nature-based experiences to tourists and visitors and motivating them to re-visit urban nature-based attractions is imperative. Moreover, development of smart cities based on development of sustainable natural environments and information technology has been the call of the day across the world. Urban ecotourism development in the cities of Kuala Lumpur and Penang can foster and set examples of best practice smart destinations in Malaysia.

Visitors and tourists to urban ecotourism attractions have been found to give priority to ecological and environmental aspects (experiential value), experiential knowledge and seek alternative tourism activity in urban areas that are related to nature and authentic nature-based experience (Okech, 2009; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). Moreover, socialization between visitors and tourists while visiting urban ecotourism sites is an important aspect that renders them satisfactory ecotourism experiences and influences their behavioural intentions (Chan & Baum, 2007; Eubanks Jr, Stoll, & Ditton, 2004). Besides, opportunities for environmental education as well as environmental resilience experienced by urban ecotourism attractions provide enhanced opportunities for visitors and tourists to engage in nature-based recreation in such attractions (Kastelein, 2004). Accessibility in terms of developed transport systems and technological connectivity in terms of Wi-Fi availability, internet zones and social media sharing in urban areas can benefit visitors and tourists to derive satisfaction and intention to re-visit urban ecotourism attractions. Unique nature spots in and around cities and urban areas can be used sustainably by local tourism authorities through the promotion of urban ecotourism to all sections of the urban population in order to educate them and make them aware about the value of natural environments to human societies (Okech, 2009).

Tourists engaged in urban eco-travel or eco-tourists in urban settings are driven by the factors of self-fulfillment, thrill and excitement in experiencing ecotourism activities. Eco-tourists visiting urban ecotourism destinations give priority to ecological and environmental aspects (experiential value) and seek alternative tourism activity in urban areas that are related to nature and authentic nature-based experience (Gibson et al., 2003). Moreover, eco-tourists tend to have higher levels of education and as a result seek to acquire knowledge through learning on key aspects of urban ecotourism attractions particularly environmental values and ecotourism activities (Okech, 2009). Experiential knowledge of

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