

**EXPERIENCE AND APPRECIATION ATTAINED
BY VOLUNTEER TOURISTS FROM
COMMUNITY BASED ECO-TOURISM CONSERVATION PROGRAM
IN BATU PUTEH, KINABATANGAN, SABAH**

HAFIZUL RIDZWAN BIN YAHYA

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilling of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Science (Tourism Planning)

Faculty of Built Environment
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JANUARY 2012

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the phenomenon and the importance of appreciation in volunteer tourism experiences. Although previous research has explored volunteer tourism motives, experiences and satisfactions, this study examines those phenomenon using in-depth interviews in order to explore the value of appreciation in volunteer tourism trips. This study investigates the reasons behind participating in volunteer tourism trips, their expectation and what they gained from the volunteer tourism experiences. The results of this study illustrate different motives compared to previous research where most of participants went on their trip to have a new experience of different part of the world or to help others (altruism). Where motive of 'meet and interact with local people' (curiosity) revealed in this study. The differences in these findings illustrate how volunteer tourists' motivation can be different base on the volunteer's motives and desire. These volunteer tourists experiences revealed three main sub theme related to; interaction and relationship, contributions from involvement and experiences related to self development. Interaction and relationship identified through volunteers sincere communication with host community and fellow volunteer tourists. The sense of satisfaction attained by most of the participant where they satisfied with their contributions to conservation effort and local community well being. Lastly, the role of appreciation and recognition is important elements in showing gratitude towards volunteer tourists' contributions because it helps to increase volunteer tourist's motivation and morale. Based on the results, this study concludes that appreciation and recognition towards volunteer effort plays an important role in volunteer tourists' experiences and it help to differentiate volunteer tourism from other volunteer tourism experiences.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneroka fenomena pelancongan sukarelawan dan kepentingan penghargaan di dalam pengalaman pelancongan sukarelawan. Walaupun terdapat kajian-kajian terawal yang menjurus kepada motivasi, pengalaman dan kepuasan pelancong sukarelawan, kajian ini memberi fokus kepada nilai penghargaan yang diberikan di dalam program pelancongan sukarelawan. Kajian ini mengenalpasti sebab disebalik penglibatan dalam program pelancongan sukarelawan, tanggapan awal mengenai program dan apa yang mereka perolehi dari pengalaman tersebut. Hasil kajian telah mengenalpasti motif yang berbeza berbanding kajian terdahulu di mana kebanyakan individu yang terlibat dalam pelancongan sukarelawan ini bermotifkan; ‘ untuk menimba pengalaman baru di negara lain’ dan ‘membantu golongan yang memerlukan’ sebagai motif utama. Walaubagaimanapun, kajian ini telah mengenalpasti bahawa ‘untuk berjumpa dan berinteraksi dengan masyarakat. Tiga tema utama berkaitan pengalaman pelancong sukarelawan telah dikenalpasti seperti; ‘interaksi dan hubungan’, ‘sumbangan dari penglibatan’ dan ‘pengalaman berkaitan pembangunan jatidiri’. ‘ Interaksi dan hubungan telah dikenalpasti melalui komunikasi yang ikhlas antara sukarelawan dengan penduduk tempatan dan rakan sukarelawan yang lain. Akhir sekali, penghargaan merupakan elemen penting dalam menghargai sumbangan pelancong sukarelawan kerana ianya membantu dalam memotivasikan mereka supaya lebih bersemangat untuk melibatkan diri dalam aktiviti sukarelawan yang lain. Dapat disimpulkan bahawa penghargaan dari masyarakat tempatan terhadap sumbangan pelancong sukarelawan memainkan peranan penting dalam pengalaman mereka dan ianya membantu dalam membezakan antara pelancongan sukarelawan dengan pengalaman pelancongan yang lain.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Since the early 80's, a new form of tourism began to emerge in the tourism sector. This type of tourism also called "alternative tourism" where the activities are more focus on assisting local community in preservation of the natural environment (Weaver, 1998). Volunteer tourism, ecotourism and wildlife tourism are all emerging form of alternative tourism that has gained popularity in the last twenty years (Wearing, 2001). This form of sustainable tourism have now become more dominant for many countries due to the realization that the "mass tourism" has damaging effects on the environment and the local community (Spenceley, 2005).

Thus, due to the increase of awareness among nowadays society on the environmental effect created by the "mass tourist", the traditional way of travel (mass tourism) has changed to the "alternative tourism" or "new tourism" where this type of travel is more environmental couscous. Volunteer tourism can be classified as alternative tourism, it involves travellers to contributing their time and income to a wildlife conservation and community projects. Many travellers nowadays are seeking

for a vacation that acquire them to spend some but contributing to something “more” especially for the environment and local community development.

This research will discuss on the connection of motivations, perception and experience in relation to the level of appreciation and recognition received by volunteer tourists. Despite exploring volunteer tourists’ motivations, perceptions and experiences, understanding the appreciation level of volunteer tourists’ is not a major interest in tourism research. Authenticity in appreciating volunteer tourists is useful for both volunteers and host because it help to value the meaning and important of volunteer tourism experiences. Taylor (2001) argued that the concept of authenticity is only valuable when someone notices that an experience may not be ‘authentic’. To it safe to say that most of the volunteer tourists still seeking for authentic tourism experience and the concept of authenticity of appreciating volunteer tourists is important to the host community.

This dissertation focuses on the volunteer tourists who pay to volunteer abroad rather than focusing to the local community. Due to time constraints, this dissertation only focuses on the recent volunteer tourists in Kampung Mengaris, Kinabatangan who participated in Community Based Eco-Tourism Conservation Program from one to ten weeks.

1.2 Problem Statement

There are numbers of research on volunteer tourist, among the research focus on the volunteer tourist impact to local community and environment, the potential volunteer tourist and including the volunteer tourist motivations. But there is little research that identifies the satisfaction levels of past volunteer tourist after involving in volunteering projects. There is little concern on the volunteer tourist satisfaction

level and how the local community express their appreciation to the volunteers of their contributions and efforts. This study seek to answer is volunteer tourists being appreciated after all contribution and effort given for the host community causes? How host community express their gratitude towards volunteer's contributions? Is there any gap between volunteer's expectation and actual experiences? Base on the literature most of volunteer research are focusing on volunteer's motives and experiences, less attention are given on what volunteer want in terms of appreciation and recognition.

Thus, in order to analyze and examining the volunteer tourists level of appreciation and recognition. A deep understanding of volunteer tourist's motivations, expectation, satisfaction and how they perceived their volunteering experiences is crucial in this study. The impact of volunteer tourist's appreciation level to themselves can be seen as intangible or tangible that later will be analyze and discuss in the following chapter.

1.3 Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions;

- i. What is the major motivation of volunteer tourist base on their form of involvement in the study area?
- ii. What are their perceptions and perspective towards volunteering activity?
- iii. How is the level of satisfaction among volunteer tourist towards *Community Based Eco-Tourism Conservation Program* in Kampung Mengaris?
- iv. Do they feel appreciated from their contributions and involvement in eco-tourism conservation program?

1.4 Aims and Objectives

The objectives of this dissertation are formed on the basis that small numbers of volunteer tourism research explores a variety of volunteer tourism motivations and experiences and relating it with the level of satisfaction and appreciation perceived by volunteers. The main question of this dissertation is does volunteer tourists feel appreciated by locals from all their efforts and contribution to the local community? This dissertation initially seeks to explore the motivation behind volunteering, volunteers perceptions and how their attained experiences of volunteering. Then, this dissertation will hope to answer the main question by exploring the important of appreciation and recognition to volunteer tourists.

The specific aims and objectives of this study are;

- i. To explore the motivations of volunteer tourists according to their form of involvement;
- ii. To investigate the volunteer tourists perceptions and perspective towards volunteer tourism;
- iii. To measures the satisfaction level of volunteer tourist towards *Community Based Eco-Tourism Conservation Program* in Kampung Mengaris;
- iv. To analyse the appreciation level of volunteer tourists’.

1.5 Scope of the Research

Base on the objectives above, the scope of this research will be focus on;

1.5.1 Theoretical Framework

In order to have a clear picture on volunteer tourism and the characteristics of volunteer tourist, some of theories need to be reviewed. The theories and concept are important in giving the basic understanding that later will help this research to stay on the flow. Most of the theories and concept reviewed in this study is related to the history and concept of volunteer tourism, typology and motivations of volunteer tourist and also their expectation, experiences and satisfaction. All these theories and concept is explained in Chapter Two. Besides reviewing theories, these studies will also looking at previous research that related to volunteer tourist perception, experience and satisfaction that later will help to support the findings that related to; the characteristics and impact of this volunteering activity, the major volunteering motivator among the tourist in the study area and the level of satisfaction among volunteer tourist from volunteering activities involved.

1.5.2 Study Area

This research will focus on volunteer tourism program in Kampung Mengaris and managed by Batu Puteh Community Tourism Cooperative Ltd (KOPEL). Located at the bank of lower Kinabatangan Sanctuary (600 meter), Kampung Mengaris offered a wide range of volunteer tourism program that related to habitat and nature conservation, as well as introducing their culture of 'orang sungai' tribe. Located in the district of Kinabatangan, Batu Puteh consist of four main village; Kampung Batu Puteh, Kampung Mangaris, Kampung Perpaduan and Kampung Sentosa. This area was chosen because of the successful of the community in

forming and operating their own cooperative with less dependency on government funding. Besides that, they also able to form a good partnership with international NGOs and other volunteer tourism operators to give full effort in biodiversity conservation in lower Kinabatangan.

1.5.3 Data Collection Approach

Qualitative research approach is chosen as a data collection method. This approach hoped to help in achieving study aims and objectives through identification of volunteer tourist motivation, expectation and satisfaction from their involvement that later will reflect on volunteer's appreciation level. Past research shows a lack in identifying these volunteer tourists appreciation level, this approach therefore suitable as this study can be consider as exploratory study.

The use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were chosen as a most appropriate data collection method where it can give a detail information on the participant of volunteer tourism motives, expectation and experiences that can help in developing sub theme for this study. The interview will be done to the volunteer tourist who joining volunteering program in Kampung Mengaris that being managed by KOPEL. The respondent is selected based on the criteria related to the most common volunteer tourist definition, 16 open-ended question asked to the respondents and recorded for the purpose of transcribing and data analysis that later will be discussed in Chapter Three: Methodology.

1.6 Research Framework

This study is done in four different stages; Preliminary stage, Literature Review, Data Collection Stage, Analysis and Findings and Discussion and finally a Recommendation Stage. All Phase of the research is described in Figure 1.1.

1.6.1 Phase 1: Preliminary Stage

The first stage of the research comprises the formulation of Goal and Objectives, this stage also will discuss on the scope and limitation of this study. Furthermore, this phase will also describe the research questions and assumptions. In order to give a preliminary idea, some literature review and reading also identified in this phase.

1.6.2 Phase 2: Literature Review

Detail literature reviews are done to give a better understanding of the theoretical background of the whole research. This stage requires the information collection from readings, references or documentation analysis in understanding the theories and principal behind volunteer tourism that later will help to support the research findings. Most of the theories and concept reviewed in this study is related to the history and concept of volunteer tourism, typology and motivations of volunteer tourist and also their expectation, experiences and satisfaction. All these theories and concept is explained in Chapter Two.

1.6.3 Phase 3: Data Collection

The third stage is the Data Collection Stage, involving the collection of primary and secondary data. Primary data will be obtained through semi-structured interview with volunteer tourist in the study area. This research is much relies on the qualitative data of volunteer tourist motivation where this data is collected through Structured and Semi-Structured Interview with the Volunteer Tourist in the study area. Secondary data will be gathered from record tracing method where it targeting the KOPEL management to give information regarding to volunteer tourist program, itinerary and also data related to tourists arrivals and total income generated.

1.6.4 Phase 4: Data Analysis

The fourth stage is the Analysis of data. All collected data will be analyzed by using the suitable method. Collected qualitative data from the interview will be analyzed manually in the form of theme and aspect needed. It first analyzed by transcribing each interview feedback word by word. The transcribe from the interview later analyzed line by line for initial coding in order to identify the emergence of sub-theme which later be compressed and organized as a relevant themes and sub-themes that later will help in achieving study aims and objectives.

1.6.5 Phase 5: Finding, Discussion & Recommendation.

The research findings are combination of all analyzed aspect such as volunteer tourist profile, volunteer tourist motivation and volunteer tourist satisfaction. This section also will reveal the findings from the interview conducted between researcher and volunteer tourist on their motivations and satisfaction level by involving in the volunteer tourism and conservation effort in the study area.

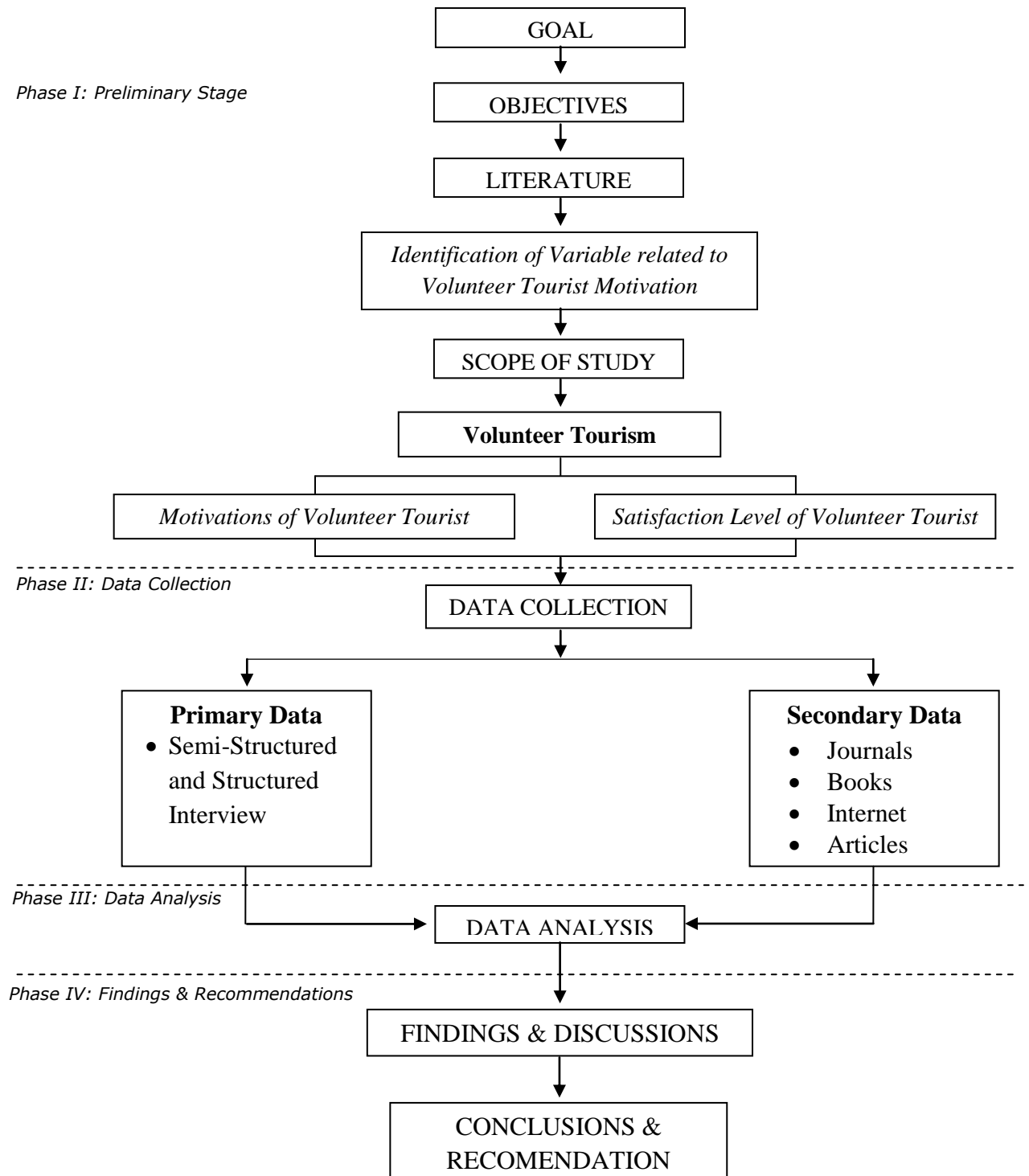


Figure 1.1: Framework of the Research

1.7 Structure of the Dissertation

In fulfilling this study aims and objectives, Chapter Two of this dissertation reviews literature from various readings in order to give background to the research. This section will discuss on the concept of volunteer tourism in relation to the definition, history and it's increasing in popularity and what make volunteer tourism different from the traditional mass tourism. This section also will discuss on the general volunteer tourists motivations, experiences and organizations related to volunteer tourism. Besides that, the benefit and criticism behind volunteer tourism will also be included in this section.

Chapter Three of the dissertation outlines the methodology of in obtaining data to fulfil the research aims and objectives. This section will explain the reasons why qualitative technique and semi-structured interview choose as a most suitable method in obtaining data from volunteer tourists in the study area. The next section in Chapter Three will elaborate how the sample was selected and how the interview questions designed. Next, this chapter will also discuss on the process of interview as well as how the data analysed. This chapter will conclude with the limitations in data collection process.

Later in Chapter Four, the results from data collection and analysis will be discusses. In this section, theme regarding to motivation will be reveals, simplified and compares with literature review in order to identify the difference in participants' motives base on their background. In the next section, what volunteer tourists gain from their experiences will be discusses, and this experiences can be divided into three sub themes; experience related to interaction and relationship, experience related to their contributions in involvement and experience related to self development. Each theme will be explained and supported with quotations from the interviews. Lastly, this section concludes with the willingness of these volunteer tourists to participate in another volunteer tourism program.

Next in Chapter Five, it contains a discussion on the value of appreciation and recognitions to these volunteer tourists. For each of the feedbacks regarding their dissatisfaction or complains will be elaborate more and discuss with further assumptions and supported with literature reviews or previous volunteer tourism research and data from internet search.

The overall conclusion of this dissertation will be discusses in Chapter Six where the major findings for each of the objectives will be summarize. The main research questions of this study will also be answered in this chapter. Finally, this chapter will also outline the limitations of this study and possible suggestions for future research.

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