

**DOMESTIC VISITOR TRAVEL PERCEPTION IN DETERMINING
DESTINATION IMAGE OF KOTA TINGGI DISTRICT, JOHOR**

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DESTINATION IMAGE OF KOTA TINGGI DISTRICT, JOHOR

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To Abah and Mama who constantly encouraged and supported their daughter
psychologically and financially

To the siblings who believed in their sister's ability

To loyal friends that never stop supporting through up and downs of this journey

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ABSTRACT

This study reviews on the multi-projected image of a tourism destination through travel perception of domestic visitor and how the variety range of tourism attractions within a destination can be concluded to determine the actual image of that particular destination. In view of little research about how visitors formulate destination image, this study is executed with aim to determine the actual image of Kota Tinggi district supported with the objectives of identifying visitor travel motivation, evaluating visitor travel behaviour, and examining visitor travel perception towards Kota Tinggi district. Kota Tinggi district is chosen as the study area due to its multiple projected tourism images with its variety range of tourism attractions. Kota Tinggi district is currently branded as “*Historical Tourism District*” but visitor choice of attraction is more towards the natural resources within the destination. A suitable promotion of this destination topped with upgrading better tourism services and facilities deemed essential to cater the need of tourist and reach potential visitors. A series of questionnaire is distributed to domestic visitors of Kota Tinggi district. The results showed that the highest visitor’s motivation in visiting Kota Tinggi district is to rest and relax (38.1%) and nature elements (47.01%) of Kota Tinggi district attract them the most. In planning their trip based on recommendations of friend and relatives (42.7%), the result also shows that Desaru (22.9%), Tg. Balau (16.8%), and Kota Tinggi waterfall (12.3%) are among the attractions that have high percentage of visitor arrival. Visitors also pictured of beaches and waterfall (36.0%) the most when thinking of Kota Tinggi (cognitive image) and felt peaceful and relaxing (48.7%) atmosphere during their actual visit to Kota Tinggi (affective image). As a whole, both cognitive image and affective image complement one another, supported by the visitor’s motivation and travel behaviour making Kota Tinggi destination image deviates more towards nature than historical. This study concludes that the affective image component perceived by visitor can be used as a tool by marketers to position tourism destinations in more effective way.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengkaji pada kepelbagaian unjuran imej destinasi pelancongan menerusi persepsi perjalanan pelawat domestik dan bagaimana kepelbagaian tarikan pelancongan di sesebuah destinasi disimpulkan dalam menentukan imej sebenar destinasi tersebut. Memandangkan sedikit penyelidikan tentang peranan pelawat dalam merangka imej destinasi, kajian ini dilaksanakan dengan tujuan untuk menentukan imej sebenar daerah Kota Tinggi disokong dengan objektif untuk mengenal pasti motivasi perjalanan pengunjung, menilai tingkah laku perjalanan pelawat, dan mengenalpasti persepsi perjalanan pelawat ke daerah Kota Tinggi. Daerah Kota Tinggi dipilih sebagai kawasan kajian kerana kecelaruan imej pelancongan yang diunjurkan berikutan kepelbagaian tarikan pelancongan di dalamnya. Kajian dijalankan melalui edaran boring soal selidik kepada pelawat domestik daerah Kota Tinggi. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa motivasi lawatan yang tertinggi adalah untuk berehat dan bersantai (38.1%) dan unsur-unsur alam semulajadi (47.01%) dalam daerah Kota Tinggi menjadi tarikan. Pelawat merancang perjalanan mereka melalui cadangan daripada rakan dan saudara-mara (42.7%), dan hasil menunjukkan bahawa Desaru (22.9%), Tg. Balau (16.8%), dan air terjun Kota Tinggi (12.3%) adalah antara tarikan yang mempunyai peratusan tinggi ketibaan pelawat. Pelawat menggambarkan pantai dan air terjun (36.0%) apabila memikirkan Kota Tinggi (imej kognitif) dan merasa suasana aman dan santai (48.7%) semasa lawatan sebenar mereka ke sana (imej afektif). Secara keseluruhannya, kedua-dua imej kognitif dan imej afektif melengkapi satu sama lain, disokong oleh motivasi dan perjalanan kelakuan pelawat lantas menjadikan imej destinasi Kota Tinggi menyimpang lebih kepada alam semula jadi daripada sejarah. Kajian ini merumuskan bahawa unjuran imej afektif yang dipengaruhi oleh persepsi lawatan pelawat dapat digunakan sebagai alat pemasaran yang berkesan dalam usaha menaikkan taraf destinasi pelancongan ke tahap yang lebih tinggi.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction of Research

Over the last fifty years tourism has grown to be one of the major industries in the world. According to United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) (2011), tourism plays an important role in the economics of many countries; in view of service industries have taken place of other traditional industries in being the supplier for job opportunity as well as to Gross Domestic Profit (GDP). Tourism has also become a social phenomenon as a result of people's increased leisure time, rising disposable income and the development of more efficient transport, whereby making more countries accessible (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

Destination image is a key marketing tool that can have a powerful influence over tourists' decisions about where to take vacation (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). The importance of the tourist destination's image is universally acknowledged, since it affects the individual's subjective perception and consequent behaviour and destination choice (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002). Destination image is an effective medium in determining the strengths and weaknesses of a destination especially when it is associated with visitors' perception. It has been recognized that destinations with strong infrastructures, sufficient investments, positive images and different products gain much more shares from the market (Aksoy & Kiyici, 2011).

Owing to the importance of destination image in tourism research, several studies on destination image have been conducted during the past two decades. These studies include the role of destination image (Chon, 1992); the measurement of destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993); components of destination image (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997); formation of destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999); factors influencing destination image (Beerli & Martin, 2004); importance of destination image (Greaves & Skinner, 2010); beneficial image of a destination (Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000); as well as impact of promoting destination image (Govers & Go, 2007). One of the major aspects of tourism geography is to examine tourist activities and tourist travel movement in relation to the physical and the built environment of the destination. At a global level, tourists move from the generating region to destination regions or between destination regions (Leiper, 1979). At the local level, tourists travel within a single destination from attraction to attraction, or shifting from activity to activity.

Changes in the tourism sector, competition among tourism products and tourist destinations as well changes in tourist's expectations and motivation provide indication that tourist destinations must be conceived as brands that have to be managed from a strategic point of view. From that perspective, brand image plays a fundamental role in the successfulness of tourist destinations. Since image is seen as a mental picture formed by a set of attributes that define the destination in its various dimensions (Aksoy & Kiyici, 2011), it became a strong influence on consumer behaviour towards the destination.

Beerli and Martin (2004) in their research states that tourists usually have limited knowledge on tourism destinations they have not previously visited. Therefore destination image plays an important function as destinations with strong, positive, and recognizable images have more probability of being chosen by the tourists for visitation. Other than that, the destination image perceived after visitation also influences tourist satisfaction and their intention to repeat the visit in the future. This however depends on the destination's capacity to provide experiences that satisfy their needs and fit the image they had of the destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

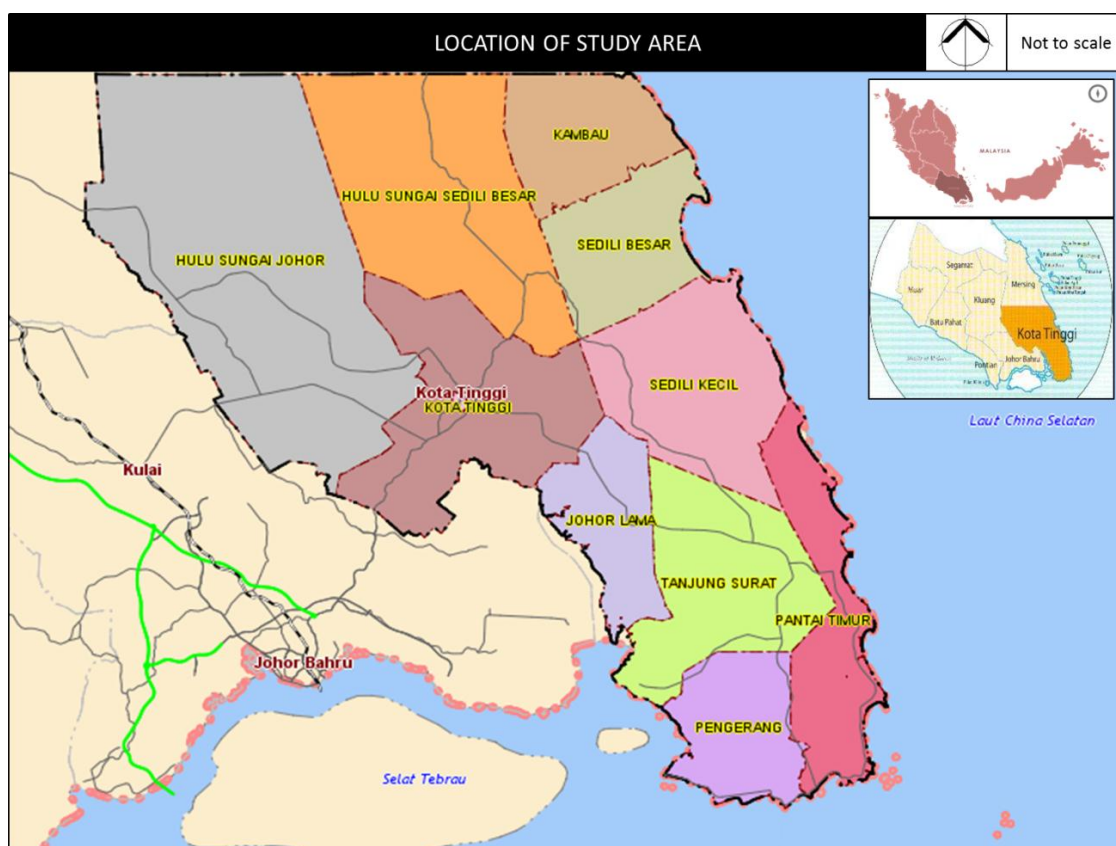


Figure 1.1 Location of study area

District of Kota Tinggi, Johor is chosen to be the study area for this research. The district of Kota Tinggi is renowned for its diverse of offered tourism attractions ranging from cultural and historical to nature. There are valuable remaining artefacts especially from the era of Malacca Malay, Johor-Riau, Singapore and Linggi available to be seen within this district (Kota Tinggi District Council, 2016). Besides the historical attributes, Kota Tinggi is also famous for its nature offerings such as waterfall as well as number of beaches. Due to the variety of tourism attractions to offer within Kota Tinggi district, it is quite a challenge in determining the actual image projected by this destination. Furthermore, the author did not find any academic researches regarding destination image context in Kota Tinggi district, except for the context of natural disaster impact towards tourism provider in the destination (Hamzah *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, this location is a good choice of study area in executing a study on destination image based on the guidelines of research aim and research objectives that can be found further through the reading.

1.2 Problem Statement

Destination image is an effective medium in determining the strengths and weaknesses of a destination. It can be seen within two different dimensions which are projected image by the destination and the perceived image by visitors towards the destination.

Kota Tinggi district has been re-developed after a massive flood back in late 2006 until early 2007 with variety of attractions offered and activities to be executed by visitors (Hamzah *et al.*, 2012). Kota Tinggi district is then been branded as a “*Historical Tourism District*” (Kota Tinggi District Council, 2016). Nevertheless, majority tourist destination choice is more towards to nature attribute (TripAdvisor, 2016) such as Kota Tinggi Waterfall beaches, hence distracting from experiencing the historical element of the city. According to the Strategic Review Rebranding of Bandar Penawar – Desaru (2011), historical site of Kota Johor Lama is an iconic attraction of Kota Tinggi, however the product only able to attract school students segment with the purpose of educational visit.

In view of the multi-projected image of Kota Tinggi district, it is a challenge to identify the actual image of the destination. The concern is how the overall image of Kota Tinggi district should be promoted in effort to bring variety of information to the visitors as well as potential visitors. Any image of a destination which has been formed by tourism associates should be delivered effectively towards visitors. It is deemed important due to visitors always require adequate information before bringing themselves to holiday. According to Mill and Morrison (1985), visitors normally obtain their source of information either formal or informal way. Such ways are through advertisement from tourism agency, physical surroundings, and also directly obtained through marketing team of the tourism industry.

Furthermore as a tourist destination, the authorized tourism bodies as well as the local authority are responsible in developing a set of marketing actions that can ensure best possible positioning is done to attract more visitors and able to compete in this highly competitive market. Baker & Cameron (2008) suggest that in order to be competitive, destination identity and image plays a key role as one of critical success factors of a destination. Nevertheless despite the interest aroused by this topic of destination image, MacKay & Fesenmaier (1997) and Baloglu & McCleary (1999) in their research have claimed that there has been little research about how visitors formulate distinction image.

Therefore, this dissertation covers to the extent of the participation of visitors within a destination; specifically visitors whom have visited Kota Tinggi district during their holiday trip. Through this study, the visitor's accumulated experience of their vacation travel is examined in effort to formulate a distinct image of Kota Tinggi district as a tourism destination.

1.3 Research Goal and Objectives

This research is done with the aim to identify the actual image of Kota Tinggi district as a tourism destination. Within this aim, the main objectives to be achieved are as listed below:

- i. To identify visitors travel motivation towards visiting Kota Tinggi district.
- ii. To evaluate visitors travel behaviour during visit to Kota Tinggi district.
- iii. To examine visitors travel perception on Kota Tinggi district as a holiday destination.

The first objective of this research is to identify visitor travel motivation in visiting Kota Tinggi district. According to Beerli and Martin (2004), motivation in general refers to a need that drives an individual to act in a certain way to achieve satisfaction. For example, when individuals decided to travel for leisure, they do so for different motives, such as reducing the state of tension in their daily life. In this

study, the visitor travel motivation is determined based on the factors that pushes visitor to travel to Kota Tinggi correlated with the tourism attributes within Kota Tinggi district that attract visitor to visit there.

The second objective of this research is to identify visitor travel behavior within Kota Tinggi district. Travel behavior according to Curtis and Perkins (2006) is affected by socio-demographic characteristic of a visitor such as age, gender, education, and marital status. These characteristics have influenced in travel behavior such as awareness, travel mode, travel frequency, and travel part which have been adopted in this research. Beerli and Martin (2004) have claimed that awareness is applied since the image of a destination is reflected in the awareness that potential tourists have of it.

The third objective of this research is to examine visitor travel perception of Kota Tinggi district. Travel perception has led to the formation of cognitive image and affective image of a destination (Son, 2005). In relating the visitor travel perception towards determining destination image, subjective statements about Kota Tinggi district is obtained from the visitor. Through the objective in this study, visitor is asked to provide the images or characteristics that came to their minds when they thought of Kota Tinggi as a holiday destination and the mood or atmosphere that they experienced in Kota Tinggi.

Through the formation of research aim together with research objectives, several research questions are formulated. These research questions act as answerable inquiry regarding the concerns elevated from this study of determining actual destination image of Kota Tinggi district as a tourism destination. The research questions are the fundamental core of this research project as it focuses the on the direction of research, determines the methodology which will be adopted, and guides the stages of data analysis later on. The formulated research questions can be found in the next section of this chapter.

1.4 Research Questions

Referring to the previous significance of the formulation of research questions towards this study, the main consideration for this research is how the overall image of Kota Tinggi can be projected into one actual image. This is a consideration that was threaded through following questions:

- i. What does the visitor seek for in their visit to Kota Tinggi district?
- ii. Where does the visitor usually spend their holiday when visiting Kota Tinggi district?
- iii. What are the differences on the visitor's perception on Kota Tinggi district prior visitation and during actual visit?

1.5 Scope of Study

The scope of studies in effort of determining the actual image of Kota Tinggi district as a tourism destination is divided into three main areas. The scope of study is outlined to ensure this research is done by strictly fulfilling the goal and objectives of this study. The elaboration of scopes of study outlined is indicated as below.

1.5.1 Factors influence visitor destination choice

Kota Tinggi district offers variety of tourism attraction. This scope of study covers both tangible and intangible aspect of the attraction. Intangible attractions include the natural tourism resource in Kota Tinggi district such as mountain, waterfall, and beaches. In other hand, tangible attractions are the built environment and man-made attractions available throughout Kota Tinggi district such as museums, historical artefacts, and animal farms. With the multiple offerings and diverse tourism product available, this study will define reasons why visitor approach Kota Tinggi district and which significant attractions attract visitor the most supported with their personal reason for executing the holiday.

Under this scope of study, elements of motivation that analysed are as below:-

- i. Visitor travel motivations push factors
- ii. Visitor travel motivations pull factors

1.5.2 Visitor travel behaviour within a destination

Motivation is considered to be the cause of human behaviour. It is a state of need that drives individuals toward types of action that are capable to satisfy those needs. Travel motivation has always been considered as the essential part of the dynamic process of tourist behaviour (Sirgy & Su, 2000). In this study, it is important to determine how far the attractions of Kota Tinggi district is known to public and how the visitors spend their trip in Kota Tinggi district as a part of the research goal achievement.

Under this scope of study, elements of behavioural that analysed are listed as below:-

- i. Visitor travel reference
- ii. Frequency of travel
- iii. Mode of transportation
- iv. Visitor awareness on existence of tourism products within Kota Tinggi district
- v. Visitor travel part within Kota Tinggi district

1.5.3 Visitor travel perception in influencing destination image formation

Choosing tourism destination is not a simple process. One has to identify their purpose and what kind of activities they wish to carry during the visit. Kota Tinggi district has a multi-projected image within a single destination. As s part of determining the actual image portrayed by Kota Tinggi district as a single

destination, visitor perception is studied. In reference of a research by Son (2005) as a guideline, there are two main elements that will be extracted which are the visitors' knowledge and belief about the destination (cognitive component) as well as the visitors' feeling or emotions towards the destination (affective component).

This scope of study will cover the elements of visitor's perception as listed below:-

- i. Visitors' mental image or characteristics of Kota Tinggi as a tourism destination (cognitive component).
- ii. Visitors' overall impression of Kota Tinggi district in terms of destination mood and atmosphere (affective component).

1.6 Study Approach

Towards conducting this research, researcher has adopted four main study approach namely preliminary stage, data collection stage, data analysis stage, as well as discussion and conclusion stage. The research questions which have been addresses in previous section requires a more learning process as well as methodological actions taken in order to make the questions answerable. Therefore, this study approach will act as a brief explanation to readers on the research methodology executed by researcher in completing the study of domestic visitor travel perception in determining the destination image of Kota Tinggi district.

1.6.1 Preliminary Stage

The preliminary stage of this research involves the formulation of goal and objectives as well as outlining the scope of study. The preliminary understanding on the background of the research that been conducted together with the selected study area is required to obtain an in-depth understanding regarding the information that will be collected. Aside from that, understanding gained from both research

Before researcher conduct further data collection within Kota Tinggi district and distribute the constructed questionnaire online, a pilot test of the questionnaire is first conducted in order to access the feasibility of this research and identify any potential problems in following the real data collection procedure. This pilot test is run on several voluntary University Technology Malaysia (UTM) students. Then, several modifications been done accordingly to the feedbacks received from these volunteer respondents. Prior the actual data collection on site of Kota Tinggi district, approval is first achieved from respective authorized bodies at the destination.

1.6.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis conducted with the significance of assisting the researcher in structuring the findings from different responses gained during data collection phase. Besides, this stage also supported researcher to a conclusion of this study. This data analysis involves the implement of several types of method. Researcher has applied quantitative data analysis method as well as qualitative data analysis method.

For quantitative method, a descriptive analysis is used to summarize the data collected from previous questionnaire survey onsite and online. The raw data that researcher obtained from the data collection process is transferred into Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16.0 as well as Microsoft Excel to generate mean value, graphs, bar charts, and pie charts. Frequency analysis and cumulative frequency analysis are applied under this descriptive analysis.

For qualitative method, a content analysis is adopted to analyse subjective response from the questions. Researcher has evaluated the open-ended section of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents by applying content evaluation approach. Since the answers given by the respondent are diverse, the elements of the content are described and organized into categories. These categories are then been evaluated based on their frequency.

Researcher has used the descriptive analysis method in achieving the research objectives (i) to identify visitor travel motivation towards visiting Kota Tinggi district and (ii) to evaluate visitors travel behaviour during their visit. From this analysis, the major findings are extracted where the issues identified to be a matter for discussion further on the next stage. A more detail elaboration on data collection method can also be accessed through further reading Chapter 3, and the analysed results from data collection can be ridden through Chapter 4.

1.6.4 Discussion and Conclusion

In this stage of dissertation, summary of findings from the data analysis stage is elaborated and several discussions are done based on the major findings and issues obtained from the data analysis stage. The discussions which elaborated are later related with some literature reviews that support the outcome. Researcher has discussed on the overall destination image of Kota Tinggi district that resulted based on the visitor's travel perception inclusive of cognitive image and affective image. Researcher also further discuss on the influence of the visitor's travel motivation and travel behaviour that affect their travel perception. Based on the shortcoming of the study, several recommendations for future research are also included.

Referring to the all four stages of study approach elaborated, researcher has form a summary of these stages which has been illustrated in Figure 1.2 on the next page.

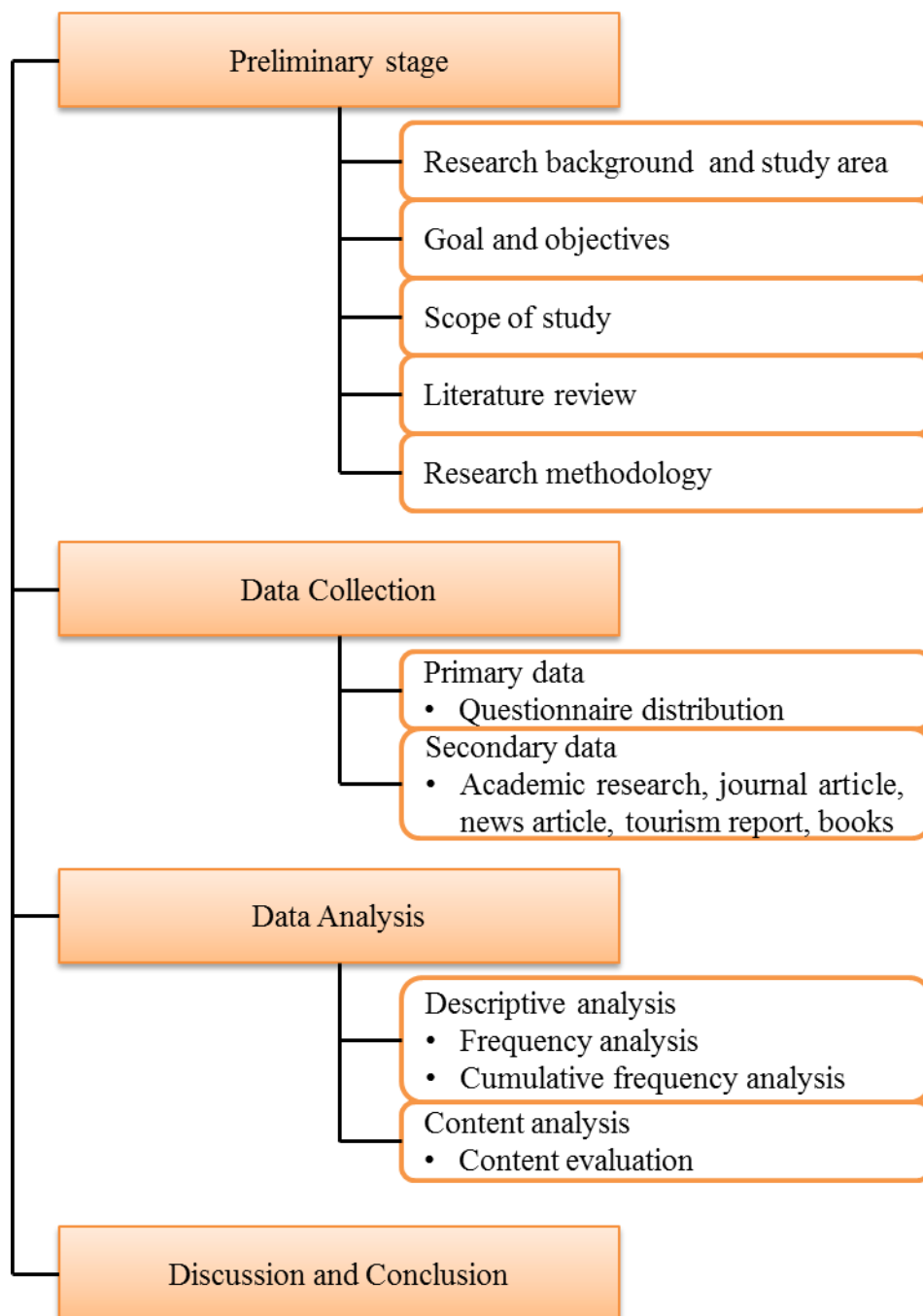


Figure 1.2 Summary of Study Approach

background and study area able to assist researcher to plan on how to design this research. As an effort to determine on what information will be collected throughout this research, scope of study is determined and outlined in reference of the constructed goal and objectives. The elaboration of scope of study is as per written in previous section of this chapter. Through the determination of research goal, research objectives, research questions and scope of study, the research method which later been implemented during the data collection and data analysis are selected. As a summary, this preliminary stage involves the execution of process as listed below:-

- i. Preliminary research on study background
- ii. Formulation of goal and objectives
- iii. Scoping of study
- iv. Prioritization of data and information collected
- v. Formation of research methodology

1.6.2 Data Collection

The process of data collection for this research is carried out based on the researcher's formulation of research design. The research design is constructed by referring to the previous academic study regarding visitor influence on destination image and series of modifications are made in order to align to the suitability for this research. The importance of accurate data collection is essential in maintaining the integrity of this research. The detail explanation on the process of data collection can be ridden further through this dissertation in Chapter 3.

To explain in brief, there are two types of data collection method which are applied in this research that are primary data and secondary data. The primary data is collected based on series of questionnaire distribution through ground face-to-face with the domestic visitors within Kota Tinggi district, and also through online distribution by using Google Forms application. In other hand, secondary data is obtained through literature reading of previous academic researches, journal article, tourism related reports, and news articles.

1.7 Significance of Study

This research examines the role of visitor through their travel perception towards determining the actual image of Kota Tinggi district, which is supported by the visitor travel motivation towards the destination and travel behaviour before visiting and during their visit at the destination. By studying the effects of these variables, important outcome about visitors' perception on Kota Tinggi district can be provided to state tourism officials to assist in planning marketing strategies and effectively utilize tourism resources within Kota Tinggi district. Philips *et al.* (2013) stated that these information can help destination managers develop appropriate marketing tactics to increase the number of visitors, as well as enhance the overall visitor experience within the destination and increase visitors' likelihood of returning back to visit the destination.

Furthermore, previous study from Baloglu and McCleary (1999) showed that destination image have influence to tourists in the process of choosing a tourist destination, the evaluation of their trip and have affect in the visitor future intentions to visit the destination. A positive destination image derived from positive travel perception and experience from the visitor would result in an overall positive evaluation of a destination. The researchers also claimed that destination image also affects tourists' behavioural intentions where a more favourable image of a destination will lead to higher probability of tourist to return to the same destination in future.

Subsequently, an understanding of visitor travel perception supported with their travel motivation and travel behaviour within Kota Tinggi district can help tourism policy makers, tourism management bodies and the local tourism authorities of Kota Tinggi district to provide better services and facilities to cater the need of visitor inclusive of existing visitors as well as potential visitors. At the same time, marketing plan and suitable promotion can also be drawn up to reach potential

visitors. The findings from this study also help existing tourism operators to look further in improving their services to attract more visitors towards the attraction provided. Besides, this study shall be a reference for future researchers who are interested in conducting this field of study.

1.8 Limitation of Study

Despite the attempt to alleviate problems with the study, there are still some limitations. First, all respondents are domestic tourists hence making the results specific to one culture. Furthermore, the size of sample is rather small. Further research is advisable to take a larger sample group that includes international visitors within the same destination.

Second, the main target respondent for this research is solely relying on visitors of Kota Tinggi district. Whether there respondents participate in answering the questionnaire on ground face-to-face or online, the responses received are based on their interest to answer, the amount of the time they wish to spend, and the sincerity of these respondents in answering this questionnaire. There are several amount of responses that could not been accepted due to incomplete answers.

Third, this research focused on perceptions of past visitors and current visitors of Kota Tinggi district. A more exploration of destination image in this study area should also incorporate local tourism operators as well as local residents on their affective and personality perceptions of the available tourism attractions. Locals are an important stakeholder group uniquely placed to build a strong destination image for a city as an attractive tourist destination (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2009).

1.9 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation paper has five chapters in total. The first chapter which is Chapter 1 explains in the general focus and direction of this research through the explanation of research background, problem statement that led to the execution of this research, formulation of goal and objectives, outlining the scope of study, and also determining the significance of the research as well as defining the limitations in conducting this research.

The second chapter which is Chapter 2 further discuss the outline of this research through detail review of related literatures by referring to previous related dissertation, academic papers, scholar articles, books, reports, and some other references. The review helps the researcher and future readers to be clarified on the matters that related to this study. This chapter covers the basic definition, principles, process, and several other information and understanding pertaining destination image and travel perception of visitors.

The third chapter which is Chapter 3 outlined and explains the methodology adopted in conducting this research. The method of data collection of primary and secondary data is further elaborated in this chapter. The method used for data analysis is also elaborated in providing a guideline on the procedure undertaken in this research. The background as well as justifications of selected study area was also included in this chapter.

The next chapter which is Chapter 4 provides analysis and findings of this research according to the data that has been collected. A detail analysis on the data is done and further described in this chapter. Several discussions regarding the findings of this study which then been supported by the outcomes of previous similar field of researches are also included in this chapter. The output from this chapter would be used in formulating suitable recommendations in relation to the projected issue.

The final chapter which is Chapter 5 presents the recommendations as well as conclusion for this research. The recommendations proposed are based on the

findings extracted from the previous chapter, and that the recommendations are mainly to solve the problems that have been outlined earlier in Chapter 1.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has indicated the outline and direction of this research through the explanation of study background, problem statement, as well as the goal and objectives. Several scopes has been determined and elaborated to meet the goal and objective of this research, which include factors of visitor choice of tourism destination, visitor travel behaviour, as well as perception of visitor towards a destination.

This chapter is extremely important as it clarifies the main components of research. It is important for researcher to be clear on these research components as it will be the main guidance for researcher throughout the completion of this research.

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