

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF WILDLIFE TOURISM IN MALAYSIA; A REVIEW

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: 9 Jan 2022 Revised: 20 Jan 2022 Accepted: 11 March, 2022 Published: 1 April 2022</p>	<p>Malaysia's tourism industry is a key foreign exchange earner, providing the country with a significant source of revenue, jobs and resources. Therefore, it is important to ensure tourism sector stays environmentally and economically sustainable. Majority of wildlife-watching tourism takes place in protected areas. For tourists travelling to Malaysia, nature, national parks, and wildlife are regarded the most valuable tourism assets. The discussion on this paper will be focused on three aspect of economic and social benefits; 1) economic advancement of wildlife tourism, 2) potential contributions to poverty reduction and community development and 3) raising revenue for conservation management. However, as tourism authorities, hotels, and tour operators place a greater emphasis on mass tourism and economics, environmental degradation and other issues are having a detrimental impact on tourism. The required policies and regulations for sustainable tourism growth should be enforced by the government.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Wildlife is one of the components of biodiversity. The term is commonly used to cover all kinds of species, including all kinds of insects and marine life (Tapper, 2006). Tourism is ‘the theory, practice of touring and travelling for pleasure’ (Leiper, 1979). United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) describes tourism as an overall phenomenon which comprises the migration of people to other country other than their regular surroundings for personal or business purposes. Tourism is also defined as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon involving the movement of people for personal or business reasons to places beyond their normal environment (Mamahooana *et al.*, 2013). Moscardo *et al.* (2004) view tourism as the quantity of activities of the government and private sector that formed and served the needs and handle the effects of holidays, business and other travel.

UNWTO defined ‘tourist’ as a domestic or an overnight visitor. It is estimated approximately 40 to 60% of international tourists are nature tourists, while the remaining 20% to 40% are wildlife related tourists (Swarbrooke *et al.*, 2003). Nature tourists are described as people who visit a destination to explore and enjoy nature while wildlife-related visitors visit a place to view wildlife (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). A ‘tourist’ is an individual who ventures away for 40 km or more from their home for some reason other than engaging in paid employment in the visited area (Moscardo *et al.*, 2004). Tourists can be distinguished into 5 categories which are explorers, backpackers, special interest tourists, general interest tourists, and mass tourists (Roe *et al.*, 1997). The tourist can also be seen as a participant, performing tourism through physical participation such as walking, observing, and photography (Edensor, 2000; Molz, 2010; Larsen & Urry, 2011).

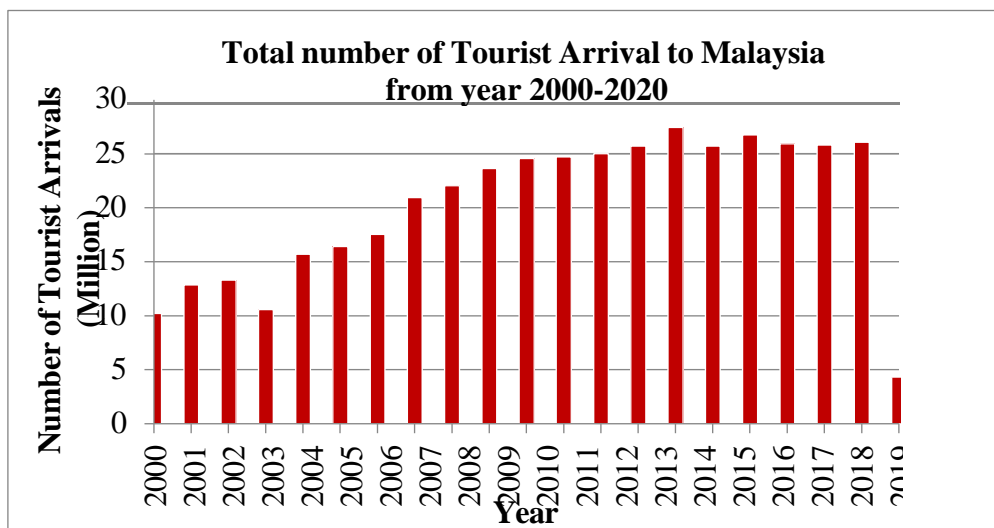
TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

Tourism is among the leading points that contribute to the regional growth of a country. Chen & Tsai (2007) states that effective tourism can enhance tourist receipts, wages, jobs, and government revenues in that destination. Besides, Boyd *et al.* (2014) agrees that foreign exchanges, trading activities, and job opportunities are among tourism benefits that strengthens economy of a country. Being one of the world's most diverse nations, Malaysia is blessed with forested habitats that are host to at least 306 mammal species, 150,000 invertebrate species, and 4,000 marine fish species (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Malaysia, 2016). Furthermore, growth in the tourism sector aided the expansion of other economic sectors, especially the hotel, tour industry, restaurants, as well as transportation which boosts domestic demand and the national economy through foreign direct investment in infrastructure expansion (Economic Planning Unit, 2006; Proença & Soukiazis, 2008).

Malaysia acknowledges that tourism can play an important role in development, economic, and social growth along with the promotion of national integration and unity. However, initially our country's tourism sector was remained relatively unknown destination after the 1980's. Thus, Malaysia government launched Visit Malaysia Year campaign in 1990 and often advertised their neighbouring countries as an aspect of a larger 'tourist circuit' (King, 1992). Despite the efforts, Malaysia faced many challenges such as diseases and environmental problems in the mid-1990s which includes Cocksackie's B in Sarawak, haze, and bird flu in Thailand, which culminated in a decrease in tourist arrivals. In addition, in the wake of the Gulf War during 1991, there was a significant drop in global travel. The number of tourists arriving decreased moderately as a result of the war. The second Visit Malaysia Year, which began in 1994, saw a rise in tourist arrivals, but the growth rate remained well below that of the first campaign in 1990.

However, the tourism industry in Malaysia experienced positive growth in the early 2000s, with major international conventions such as the Union of Forestry Research Organization Congress in 2000, the 50th PATA Annual Conference in 2001, the NAM meeting in 2005, the OIC meeting in 2004, and the

Monsoon Cup in 2005 all taking place in Malaysia. Besides, events like the *CITR AWARNA* Malaysia Festival, the Malaysia Mega Sale Carnival, and international exhibitions increased tourist arrivals in Malaysia (Nanthakumar *et al.*, 2010). All the efforts by Malaysian government paid off when tourism become among the fastest growing industries in the services sector and the second biggest gross domestic product (GDP) contributor for the country. This industry performed favourably as reflected in the growth of tourist arrivals and tourist receipts (Kadir & Karim, 2012). For instance, tourism receipts alone has successfully generated around RM86 billion to the Malaysia economy in 2019 (Tourism Malaysia Corporate Site, 2020). Malaysia's strategic location is another added advantage of the future tourism growth as it located at the centre part of South East Asia. In addition, Malaysia has the benefits such as price effective, offers sentimental friends and relatives visits from neighbouring countries as it is a multicultural country (Nair & Thomas, 2013). Nevertheless, as shown in graph below (Figure 1), there is tremendous decline in the number of tourist arrival for the year 2020. This is most probably due to international travel ban by Malaysia government due to outbreak of pandemic Covid-19.



Source: Tourism Malaysia Corporate Site (2021)

King & Nair (2013) states that tourism has become a dynamic industry amended from its traditional sun, sand and sea holidays to niche tourism. Malaysia, ranging from beaches, has diversified tourism capital, towns, culture, history, jungles, food, resorts, fitness, shopping and industry. According to Sabah Tourism Board (2019), about half of Malaysia's population is involved in nature-based tourism. Scuba diving, jungle trekking, photography, and fishing are the area development of wildlife tourism in Sabah (Ancrenaz *et al.*, 2007; Bennett & Reynolds, 1993; Chan & Baum, 2007; Musa, 2002). Wildlife tourism experiences provide opportunities for endangered or threatened animals to be seen and form interaction (Cousins, 2007; Orams, 2002; Woods & Moscardo, 2003). This form of tourism takes place in a multiple of places, including areas where animals are kept captive or where animals are not held captive in natural habitats.

WILDLIFE TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

Wildlife tourism is interpreted as a tourism to view and experience wildlife in a natural environment (Aihara *et al.*, 2016; Tapper & Waedt, 2006). Wildlife tourism in natural environment can be described as tourism involving the consumptive and non-consumptive utilization of wild animals. It can turn out to generate high impact tourism, sustainable, and high economic returns focused on day trips or vice versa (Roe *et al.*, 1997). Wildlife tourism is sometimes also used to refer to hunting or fishing tourism and viewing captive wildlife in zoos or confined parks (Mamahooana *et al.*, 2013).

Visitor engagement with nature environment is a significant component of tourism marketing and the experience of modern tourism (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). Both mass and specialist tour operators are seeking fresh wildlife itineraries and expeditions to lure their customers. Combined with the interest in the natural environment and media depictions of wildlife, this mix of product creation and marketing drives the supply and demand for experiences in wildlife tourism (Curtin & Wilkes, 2005). Besides, most of the forests have been declared as protected areas, including forest reserve protection, state parks and national parks to ensure continuous protection of such resources. In line with this, national parks combined with wildlife tourism have been redefined to be a prominent part of presenting cultural diversity in a natural environment (Louis *et al.*, 1997).

Ahmad (2009) concluded that many forest in Malaysia had been declared as national park and they become some of the famous places to visit in Malaysia (Figure 2). This combination of flora and fauna can become a component of a 'genuine' holiday where tourists are introduced to new cultures and natural endowments in the form of non-consumptive wildlife tourism activities (IUCN, 2012). An example of these includes the on-going Miso Walai Homestay Program in Sabah which initiated by Ecologically Sustainable Community Conservation and Tourism Model (MESCOT) (King & Nair, 2013). One of the strongest arguments for the continued growth of attractions for wildlife tourism is that they help to ensure the long-term preservation of wildlife and wildlife habitats (Higginbottom, 2004; Newsome, Dowling, Moore, 2006; Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001).

However, every coin has two sides. Even though tourism have so many positive impacts, it is proven that recreation leaves a lasting adverse consequences on wildlife and their ecosystems (Marion & Reid, 2007). These effects include animal injury, stress or death; interruption of foraging, breeding behaviour; human habitation; disruption or alteration in animals habitat; and modification in animal feeding habits by deliberate or accidental provision of food (Chin *et al.*, 2000). Nevertheless, wildlife tourism has the capability to influence the conservation skills, attitudes and behaviour of tourists if properly planned and delivered (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2007; Ballantyne & Packer, 2005). To establish a sustainable wildlife tourism industry, planning and management approach is crucial in reducing detrimental effects of animals (Higginbottom, 2004; Newsome *et al.*, 2005; Rodger *et al.*, 2007). The real obstacle is not only to create engaging environments that connect closely with wildlife but also protect animals and their habitats. To accomplish this, wildlife tourism with a conservation-themed interpretation are needed to increase awareness among tourists and encourage them to comply with conservation practices while engaging in the experience (Mason, 2000).

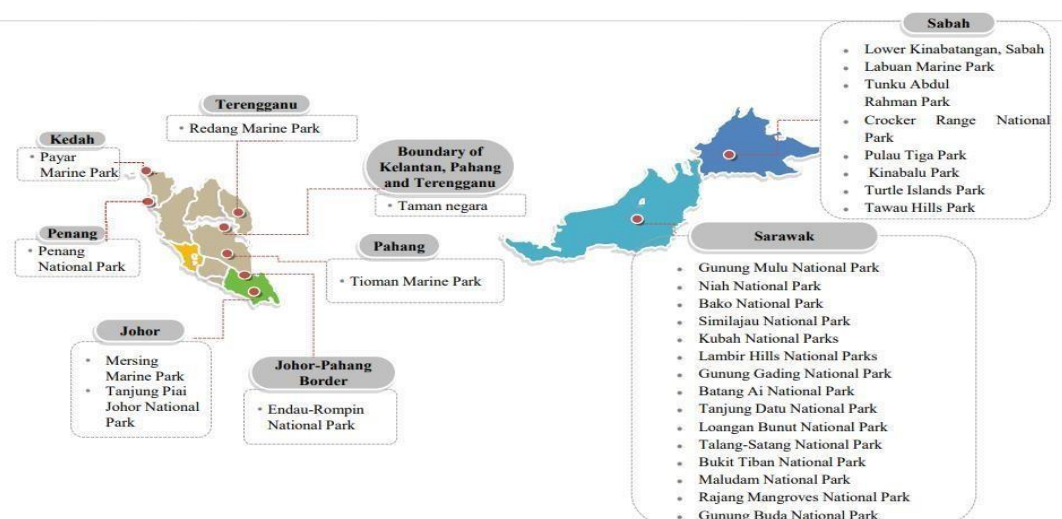


Figure 2 : Map of Malaysia indicating National park locations.
Source: Ahmad (2009)

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Wildlife-based tourism (WBT) is accessed by several different types of tourism because of its habits, surroundings, experiences and activities. Naturally, tourism based on wildlife has a similar association with tourism based on nature. According to Newsome *et al.* (2005), nature tourism is a rapidly growing and a trending sector field in the tourism industry. There are many studies carried out on the basis of human and animal connections. WBT can therefore be described as an area where nature-based tourism, ecotourism, wildlife consumption, rural tourism and human relationships with animals overlaps (Figure 3) (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). Key variables in classifying wildlife tourism are including Consumptive Wildlife Tourism (CWT) and Non-Consumptive Wildlife Tourism (NCWT) encounters (Table 1). CWT is when recreation involves the seize of animals and being killed, or make use of their body parts (Freese, 1998; Higginbottom, 2004). It can be by the means of recreational hunting, recreational fishing, trophy hunting, and fishing. Non-consumptive animal-based tourism, in turn, means experiences that do not require the capture or killing of animals, such as watching animals (Higginbottom *et al.*, 2001).

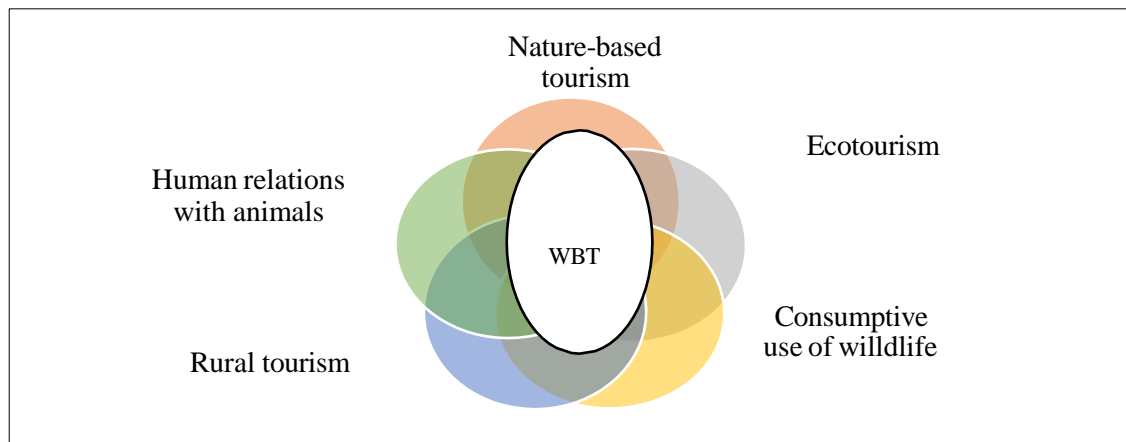


Figure 3 : Relationship of wildlife-based tourism to other types of tourism.
Source: Reynolds & Braithwaite (2001)

Table 1.0 : Classification of Wildlife Tourism

No	Category	Definition of Activities
(a) Consumptive Wildlife Tourism (CWT)		
1	Hunting tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a special type of selective tourism. • focused on sustainable tourism, while creating synergies between the postulates of eco, rural and sports tourism.
2	Fishing tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a series of professional activities aimed at : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ differentiating their wages ✓ promoting and enhancing their careers ✓ socio-cultural heritage ✓ improving the sustainable use of marine ecosystems by shipping fishing vessels to non-crew individuals.

(b) Non-Consumptive Wildlife Tourism (NCWT)		
1	Wildlife-watching tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• watching or interacting with free-ranging animals
2	Captive-wildlife tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• observing wildlife in man-made confinement.• This includes zoos, wildlife parks, animal sanctuaries, aquaria and circuses.

Source: Higginbottom (2004); Milojica *et al.* (2014); Higginbottom *et al.* (2001)

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

Economic advancement of wildlife tourism

For several localities, wildlife watching is a valuable asset. This is proven when there are vast numbers of people routinely spends considerable sums of money in order to observe individual animal species and nature (Tapper, 2006). Tourism is a significant earning field in Malaysia. This sector is chosen as the second catalyst for the nation's growth to build global competitiveness and has a positive influence on the Malaysian economy and opened up new doors to many people for hope, a job, and a future (Bhuiyan *et al.*, 2011; Leana *et al.*, 2018). Tapper & Waedt (2006) states that wildlife tourism helps generate money in several ways. These include fees made by payee to visit wildlife watching places, such as entrance and permit fees, fees to the guides, lodging fees as well as other facilities. In addition, the economic effects of wildlife tourism might also stimulate other sectors of economy. For instance, tourists that make trips to wildlife watching might also interested in other tourism aspect such as history and culture of that particular country. This might actually motivate them to stay longer and invest more money in that country. Subsequently, the growth of tourism will enhance the individual's revenues and taxes for host countries (Ahn *et al.*, 2002).

Based on a survey conducted by Puah *et al.* (2018), the findings indicate that tourist receipts and tourism-related capital spending have an important positive effect on Malaysia's economic development. This tourism-led growth hypothesis was investigated by Lau *et al.* (2008) in Sarawak, Malaysia and was backed up by empirical evidence. For instance, one study in Semenggoh Nature Reserve in Malaysian Borneo found that orangutans contributed up to US\$23 million to the economy in 2011. The reserve attracts an average of 70,000 visitors a year (Zander *et al.*, 2014). International tourist spending will boost tourism development and human capital investment, contributing significantly to economic growth. Using approach of a trivariate model with real GDP, total tourist arrivals and consumer price index (CPI), Nanthakumar *et al.* (2010) revealed that there is a interdependent relationship between the GDP, CPI and tourist arrival to Malaysia. Therefore, governments and non-governmental organisations should collaborate more regularly to introduce a range of tourism items in order to draw more visitors and enable them to invest more money in the destination (Du *et al.*, 2016).

Tourism, in a more conventional context, brings in foreign currency which can be used to import capital goods to manufacture goods and services. This will results in economic development of a country (McKinnon, 1964). The production of tourism goods or services will be aided by increased economic growth in the host nation. This will draw in more visitors, increasing demand for tourism goods and services. Based on Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal (n.d.), the increasing trend of tourism GDP value in Malaysia can be observed from the year 2015 to 2019. The values had been simplified into a graph (Figure 4).

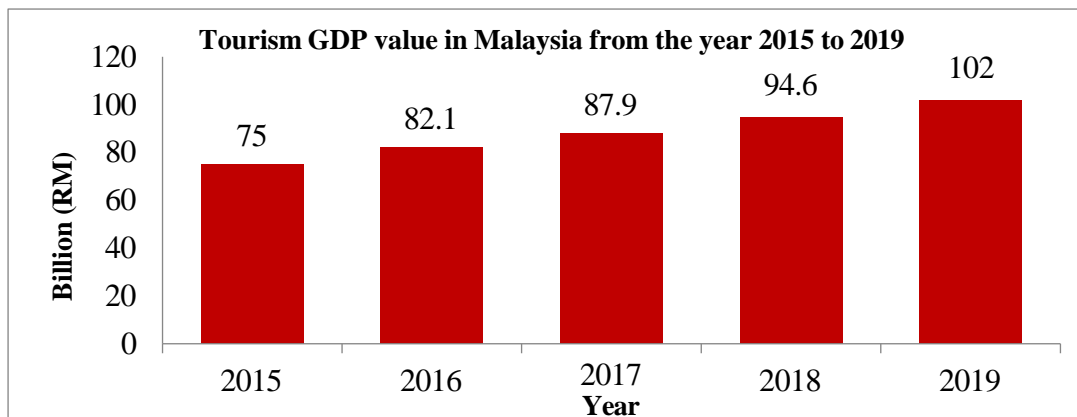


Figure 4 : Tourism GDP value in Malaysia from the year 2015 to 2019.
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal.

Potential contributions to poverty reduction and community development

Puah *et al.* (2018) states that human capital investment is also significant in the tourism industry because it needs various type of human resources both directly and indirectly. As most of the wildlife that visitors want to observe is found in rural areas, wildlife watching tourism will potentially provide an alternate source of revenue and significant amount of job opportunities for the local population which helps to increase their household income (Aynalem *et al.*, 2016). Based on a survey by Tiung & Othman (2010) in Sabah, they reported the establishment of resorts has created employment for locals. It has also improved the island’s crafts retail industry.

This multiplier effect can help stem rural-urban migration, improve infrastructure, contribute to the dynamism of arts and crafts in the world market (UNWTO, 2013). Rogerson (2014) reported that the local economy and economic growth support smaller businesses as they manufacture and sell local souvenir goods in the tourism industry. Croes & Vanegas (2008) and Altman (1998), support the finding that the position of local economic development generates jobs and business for the well-being of the community. According to Hirschmann (2020), there have been incline in the number of people employed in the Malaysia tourism industry from the year 2011 to 2019 (Figure 5).

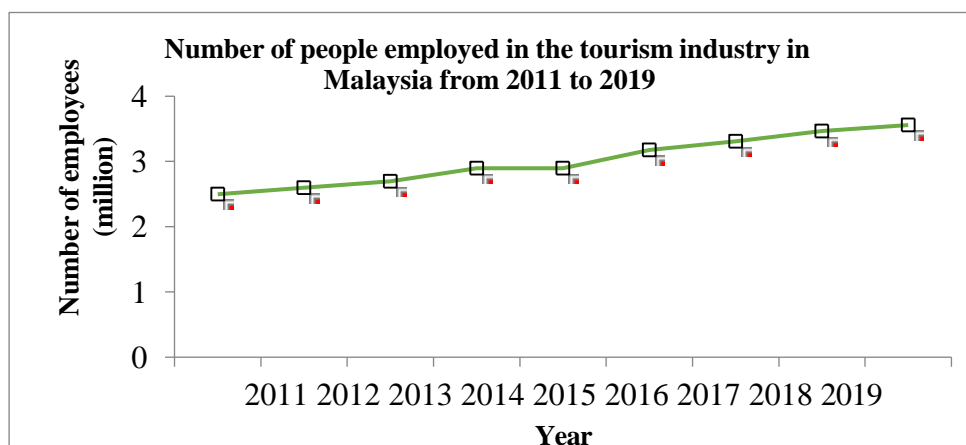


Figure 5 : Number of people employed in the tourism industry in Malaysia from 2011 to 2019.
Source: Hirschmann (2020)

Raising revenue for conservation management

Residents place a higher value on the environment and wildlife as a result of the high demand for nature-based tourism (UNWTO, 2017). Entry fees, user fees, concessions, the direct operation of commercial activities, taxes, volunteers and donations are the main mechanisms used to raise funds from tourism for conservation and community development. Charging tourists an entrance fee is believed to be the only viable solution to self-financing for many tourist areas, rather than depending on government budget allocations (Reynisdottir *et al.*, 2008). This revenue is generally inadequate, at least in relation to wildlife tourism occurring in protected areas, to even cover the costs of handling the effects of tourists. In any event, it is usually seen as a way of contributing indirectly to the expense of management, rather than as a positive contribution to conservation.

In addition, there is evidence that some tourists will be willing to pay more for wildlife experiences than they currently do, thus increasing additional conservation revenue. There also seems to be potential to gain further funds from donations and sponsorships for conservation and animal protection (Font *et al.*, 2004; Higginbottom *et al.*, 2001). An example of those conservation initiations are Heart of Borneo Project by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to help the survival of wild orang-utans in Sarawak national park (Zander *et al.*, 2014). In addition, GEF-UNDP funded a project titled "Enhancing Effectiveness and Financial Sustainability of Protected Areas in Malaysia". The goal of this project is to enhance the management and financing of national parks in the country (Ponziani & Khosravi, 2020). According to Font *et al.* (2004), Sarawak Forest Department had raised entrance fees of parks from USD 0.90 (RM 3.69) to USD 2.60 (RM10.67) in July 2002. This is in line with the effort to increase revenue from this source. However, some of the critics argue that the raise would deter tourists as it is too expensive for domestic visitors. The tourist's level of satisfaction and willingness to pay represents their level of appreciation towards park's existence (Harmon, 2004 ; Harmon & Putney, 2004). Based on a survey by Ern & Ching (2015) in Pahang National Park, they reported that both local and foreign visitors willing to pay a higher admission fee and other taxes if the money were used for conservation purposes. This finding is in line with research by Reynisdottir *et al.* (2008); Wang & Jia (2012) where most visitors were willing to pay if the money was used to preserve and upgrade the site. However, survey by Zander *et al.* (2014) at Orang-utan Conservation Centre in Sarawak reported that some domestic tourists confess that they could not afford to pay high amount of fees while some were unwilling to pay more because they believed that it is the government's responsibility to manage wildlife conservation.

Non-financial contributions for conservation

Wildlife tourism may have a beneficial impact on wildlife species and their ecosystems through non-financial contributions. This includes involvement of operators and visitors in management programs, monitoring or study that will contribute positively to the protection of wildlife and their habitats. In accordance with this, several zoos are active in projects for breeding and reintroduction of endangered animals (Higginbottom *et al.*, 2001). Some examples includes in-situ and ex-situ conservation attempts are being made in countries to preserve and prevent these mammals from becoming extinct in the near future (Ralls & Ballou, 2013; Redford *et al.*, 2011). For instance, 10 Milky stork birds have been successfully undergo captive breeding and reintroduced in Zoo Negara (Yaacob, 1994).

CONCLUSION

Individual animals and localized communities may be indirectly influenced by wildlife tourism. Research on these issues should start with the creation of standards for assessing the importance of various impacts. Relevant analyses of the consequence of leisure on these organism and ecosystems, including an estimation of the proportion of animals and habitats affected, could then be carried out. These research should be long-term and aim to understand developments in terms of population and

society. Long-term changes are especially significant at these higher levels of the biological hierarchy because they involve a wide variety of interactions and processes in the environment. Study designs must be able to provide the broad spatial and long-term perspectives that are required for such studies. Conservation learning measures need to be both adaptive and multidimensional in order to identify subtle shifts in information, effect and behaviour in response to these challenges. The required policies and regulations for sustainable tourism growth have been enforced by the government. Despite these accomplishments, it is important to resolve many problems, including the need to improve to lure visitors, ecotourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism and other potential tourist items. Besides, sharing opportunities for the community benefit, luring outsider investors and developing region-based tourism are crucial in upgrading tourism sector in Malaysia. The government must take initiatives to develop adequate human resources and entrepreneurship, education as well as training programs to boost Malaysia's economic sector. More significantly, the attractions need to be maintained to ensure sustainable tourism in the long run. Tourist arrivals should not be the government's principal concern. Instead, both the tourism issue and the wildlife conservation must be discussed by and taken care by the government. In addition, to ensure a higher quality of life for the local population, protection and maintenance, traditional areas should be preserved and enhanced. To establish the upgrading and adaptive reuse of historical structures, architectural and cultural sites, continuous support from the federal government is required. All stakeholders, including hotels and resorts, tour operators, boat operators, tourist guides, visitors and locals must cooperate with government agencies to overcome these challenges. It is important to provide adequate quality accommodation, facilities and services at tourist attraction sites, particularly for the elderly and physically disabled. Food rates, entrance fees and public transit charges must be levied in compliance with the ceiling pricing policy that is fair for tourism goods. However, without any action plan and implementation, recommending such measures would not be successful.

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