

Tourism Management at Taman Negara (National Park), Pahang, Malaysia: Conflict and Synergy

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Abstract

Many developing countries successfully use the attractions of nature to promote tourism in protected and unprotected areas. The attainment of sustainable tourism requires careful management of tourists to prevent deleterious effects on the environment, the host community and tourist satisfaction. The emphasis on conflict management and sustainable development is based on the diligent usage of available resources, especially in the context of planning, commitment and the involvement of management as well as the interested parties.

The focus of the study is on 'Taman Negara' or National Park in Pahang, Malaysia which is a protected area of international importance as reflected in its listing as an Association of South East Asian (ASEAN) Heritage Site (DWNP, 1987). The main goal is to develop synergy and conflict management among the local government, communities and private sector strategy in order to realize the sustainable high quality nature based tourism that is promised by Taman Negara. To achieve this goal, the following objectives will be looked into. First, the characteristics of synergy and conflict among the departments related to Taman Negara; second, to examine the development by private sector and motivations of visitors to Taman Negara; third, to explore the issues that impact the local communities and tourists; and fourth, to ensure the preservation of nature and to promote the concept of sustainable use of resources at Taman Negara to ensure its sustainability both for the present and the future.

This paper examines the management role of various departments over this national park. Among the elements examined are the ability to increase the place integrity based on the location, to generate the local economy and to protect the nature. Without proper management, over time, the number of visitors would decrease resulting in reduced income.

Keywords: tourism management, conflict, synergy, sustainable tourism, protected area, Taman Negara.

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1. Introduction

Many developing countries successfully use the attractions of nature to promote tourism in protected and unprotected areas. However, the achievement of sustainable tourism requires careful management of tourists to prevent deleterious or damaging effects on the environment, the host community and tourist satisfaction. The emphasis on conflict management and sustainable development is based on the diligent usage of available resources, especially in the context of planning, commitment and involvement of management as well as the interested parties. The existences of many authority bodies involve in the management of the parks also create unclear division of tasks, therefore unveil conflict between them. The tourist behaviour and the local community interests added up to the conflict.

Taman Negara or National Park in Pahang, Malaysia is among the popular eco-tourism destination in Malaysia. Over the past few years, their management has become increasingly more complex as the increase number of visitors, the limited facilities and the changes in the natural environment. Therefore, the conflict of interest and values between the stakeholders of tourism industry need to be addressed and managed carefully to prevent deleterious effects on the environment, the host community and tourist satisfaction.

This paper hopes to contribute to the general goal of understanding what is conflict among the local government, communities, and the private sector in tourism at the national park and how to manage tourist and at the same time make Taman Negara 'a national parks as a national tourism priority'. Taman Negara needs to be recognized as a major asset for Malaysian tourism, both domestic and international. However, fully realizing the value of these assets requires a careful balance between the protection and conservation of their natural and cultural values and taking actions which are deliberately designed to enhance their tourism functions.

2. National Tourism Development

The development of tourism in Malaysia has been influenced, moulded and implemented in conjunction with the integrated national development policies such as Vision 2020 and the 9th Malaysian Plan (2006–2010) or NMP. The plans have evolved over time to suit the economic changes. In the NMP, the strategy was to realize the potential of tourism as an important source of income, to encourage more entrepreneurs in this sector as well as to create employment opportunities. In line with that, the core

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strategy is to ensure the sustainability of tourism development, to increase the development of products and innovative tourism services, to encourage domestic tourism, to intensify the marketing and promotion activity, to promote human resource development and to ensure the comfort, security and welfare of tourists. In addition, NMP focuses on products and tourism services such as eco-tourism, agro tourism and Homestay Program, heritage tourism, tourism based on culture, entertainment and arts, selection of film-shooting location, sports and recreation, education, entertainment and 'Malaysia My Second Home' program.

Table 1. Tourist arrivals & receipts to Malaysia

Year	Arrivals (Million)	Receipts (RM-Million)
1998	5.50	8,580.50
1999	7.90	12,321.20
2000	10.20	17,335.40
2001	12.70	24,221.50
2002	13.20	25,781.10
2003	10.50	21,291.10
2004	15.70	29,651.40
2005	16.40	31,954.10
2006	17.45	36,271.10
2007	20.90	46,070.00
2008	22.05	49,561.20
2009	23.60	53,367.70

Source: Tourism Malaysia 2010

Table 1 shows that tourist arrivals to Malaysia has been certainly increasing in number. Malaysia recorded a total of 22.5 million tourist arrivals for the year 2008 and it increased to 23.6 million for 2009. Malaysia has made it into the top 10 countries with the most tourist arrivals for 2009. Total receipts from tourist arrivals in 2008 was RM 49,561.20 million and this increased to RM 53,367.7 in 2009.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNTWO), Malaysia secured the ninth position, just below Turkey and Germany (refer to Table 2). Table 3 shows the top 10 Most Visited Cities by Estimated Number of International Visitors 2009 which KL was at the position number 4 after Singapore.

Dr. Ng Yen Yen, Tourism Minister of Malaysia in her speech during the National Tourism Organisations Seminar in January, 2010 stated that, "another target set by the country is to increase the number of repeat visitors and the average length of stay. Currently, the average length of stay is 6.4 days and the ministry would like to increase to eight days, and to increase the percentage of repeat visitors from developed countries,

from the current 17 per cent (of overall tourist arrivals) to 30 per cent, and gradually to 50 per cent in five years."

Table 2. International tourist arrivals by country of destination: 2009
(most visited countries by international tourist arrivals)

Rank	Country	UNWTO Regional Market	International tourist arrivals (2009)	International tourist arrivals (2008)
1	France	Europe	74.2 million	79.2 million
2	United States	North America	54.9 million	57.9 million
3	Spain	Europe	52.2 million	57.2 million
4	China	Asia	50.9 million	53.0 million
5	Italy	Europe	43.2 million	42.7 million
6	United Kingdom	Europe	28.0 million	30.1 million
7	Turkey	Europe	25.5 million	25.0 million
8	Germany	Europe	24.2 million	24.9 million
9	Malaysia	Asia	23.6 million	22.1 million
10	Mexico	Latin America	21.5 million	22.6 million

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism#International>

Table 3. Top 10 Most visited cities by estimated number of international visitors: 2009

City	Country	International visitors (millions)
Paris	France	14.8
London	United Kingdom	14.1
Singapore	Singapore	9.7
Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia	9.11
Hong Kong	China	8.95
New York City	United States	8.7
Bangkok	Thailand	8.45
Istanbul	Turkey	7.51
Dubai	United Arab Emirates	6.81
Shanghai	China	6.29

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism#International>

3. Taman Negara as a Recreational and Protected Area

3.1. Background of Taman Negara

Taman Negara or National Park was established in 1938/1939 as the King George V National Park. It was renamed Taman Negara after independence, which literally means “national park” in Malay. It was declared for conservation as protected area in 1939 and has become Malaysia’s premier national park and the largest in the country, and has a reputation as the world’s oldest tropical rainforest in the world. It is located in three states, Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan, which each with its own legislation enforced by each state. Taman Negara Pahang is the largest at 2,477km², followed by Taman Negara Kelantan at 1,043km² and Taman Negara Terengganu at 853km².

Taman Negara Pahang is located in the heart of Peninsular Malaysia in the state of Pahang. Tourists can access Taman Negara by land or water, as air travel is not available (see Figure 1). The highest point in the National Park is Tahan Mountain which is the main attraction. With the height of 2,187 meters above sea level, it is regarded as the highest mountain in Peninsular Malaysia.



Figure 1. Location of Taman Negara

Source: www.nigelstott.net/malaysia_taman.html

The stated purpose of Taman Negara is “to utilize the land within the park in perpetuity, for the propagation, protection and preservation of indigenous flora and fauna”. Due to its location, which covers three states (Pahang, Kelantan and Terengganu) there are 4 ways to access to the area. Tourists can access to Taman Negara by land or water as air travel is not available so as to preserve and conserve the natural environment.

3.2. Protected area

As a protected area, Taman Negara falls under a few legislations such as Protection of Wildlife Act, 1972; Taman Negara Act, 1980; Enactment Taman Negara (Kelantan); Enactment Taman Negara (Terengganu); Enactment Taman Negara (Pahang); and Forestry Act, 1984. As such, there are a few departments involved in the management of the Taman Negara. For example in managing the Taman Negara Pahang, among the department involved are Department of Wildlife and National Park Pahang, Department of Orang Asli Affairs, the Jerantut Municipal Council, Forest Department, Department of Irrigation and Drainage and Ministry of Tourism.

The conservation of the wildlife has become a global concern, though Taman Negara offers tourists the opportunity to explore the rich natural wonders of unspoilt rainforest. It has a range of action and adventures mostly revolve around trekking through the rainforest and boat ride into the park. There are many attractions in terms of geological and biological whereby many types of rare and almost distinct mammals such as tiger, tapir, elephant, deer and boars can be found there which is under conservation effort.

Another fascinating feature of Taman Negara is its inhabitants. Taman Negara is also home to several indigenous groups who live in the forest. Along with the local Malays who mostly live in Kuala Tahan, there are few aborigines group who stay in the rainforest and call Taman Negara home. The most common is the Negritos of Taman Negara. Always refer themselves as the Batek, they still live a nomadic lifestyle and depend largely on forest produce. Although these people are shy and gentle natives, they have accepted visitors at their settlement and willing to share their customs and forest knowledge with the tourists. They can usually be found along some of the forest trails or by the river.

As a protected area and also an ecotourism destination, conflict shall arise between the need to develop an area to accommodate tourist on one hand, and the need to protect and conserve the environment on the other. Thus, it is vital that Taman Negara is protected for its heritage importance both to the mankind and to the environment as a whole. If ecotourism in Taman Negara is not properly developed and managed, there shall be negative effects on the environment. Therefore, to ensure that all activities in Taman Negara are carried out as sustainable tourism, it must be included following elements;

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- undisturbed natural areas;
- appreciation of nature with learning component;
- promoting conservation;
- low impact;
- involve the local communities.

Information regarding the tourist flow forms the basis for decisions made in relation to tourist management; from attracting the type of tourist to the development of facilities in the park. Regarding the tourism developments, these are carried out within a framework of essential preconditions based on the carrying capacity and other natural aspects of the national park. Thus no development takes place that endanger nature. This means that the developments are resource-based; the attractions of the park are based on its natural features. Only tourists who are interested in nature and conservation are attracted. In order to have a nature-based experience some facilities and services should be provided. These facilities and services also should meet the demand of the tourist.

3.3. Visitors arrival

Of the foreign tourists that visited Taman Negara in 2008 approximately 36,000 were backpackers compared to 4,118 who arrived through tour packages (refer to table 4). For domestic tourists 25,000 came in tour packages, 11,000 were day visitors and backpackers numbered 8,304. Those who came through tour package stayed in Mutiara Park Resort in Taman Negara and the day visitors and backpackers stayed in the accommodation erected in Kuala Tahan.

Table 4. Profile of tourists at the National Park

International Tourists		Domestic/ASEAN Tourists		
Backpackers	Package tour	Package tour	Daily tour	Backpackers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approximately 36,000 per year• Majority stay at chalets in Kuala Tahan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approximately 4,118 per year• Majority stay at resorts such as the Mutiara National Park Resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approximately 25,000 per year• Majority stay at resorts such as the Mutiara National Park Resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approximately 11,000 per year• Most of them visit exotic places around Kuala Tahan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approximately 8,304 per year• Majority accommodated in chalets in Kuala Tahan

Source: Local Plan Research for Jerantut 2008–2020 and Pahang State's Tourist Action Council

3.4. The boat service

The arrival of tourists has benefited the locals. Visitors who wish to cross the rivers from Kuala Tahan to the Taman Negara use the boat service provided by the Park. Most of

the boat operators are locals who have been given special training by the National Park's Wildlife Department to ensure that the service is at a satisfactory level. The aborigines have also been trained to operate the boats used to transport tourists and at the same time to act as tourist guides, especially for international tourists since they are more familiar with the routes in the jungle. Currently, there are 93 boat operators at the Kuala Tahan Jetty, and they are given coupons for oil subsidy by the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs to reduce the operational cost and to increase their income.

In view of the fact that they have been living for years, the aborigines also have greater knowledge of the flora and fauna in the Park. Moreover, the aboriginal villages in the Park have been turned into tourism products. Tourists, who visit the villages, will be charged a fee and this contributes to their income.

4. The Abuse of Taman Negara

Even though Taman Negara is protected area and managed by many authorities, but as a recreational area being open for public, it also expose to abuse. The issues of abuse affecting Taman Negara are not new, but the initiatives taken by the authorities to overcome them are not so apparent. A site visit to Taman Negara and interview with a few interest parties in January 2010 reveals some abuse practices in the Park.

1. The quality and level of river water – those who arrive at the National Park would notice that the quality of water flowing through the National Park is low. According to the officer-in-charge, the source of contamination are from the uncontrolled logging activity, emission produced from passenger boats as well as locals and tourist who freely throw leftovers and rubbish into the river.
2. The state of hygiene – on the site, the negative impact of recreation and tourism activities could be observed everywhere. Littering seems to be uncontrolled practice since rubbish is seen everywhere, most of them thrown by the local tourists. The level of hygiene at any tourism site needs to be looked into because it would be a crucial factor that determines the visitors' return.
3. Unplanned development – even though there is a proper development plan by the state authority on Taman Negara, however it does not include other development activities carried out by the local communities around National Park. Most of the development in that area are carried out without approval from the council.

4. The 'lost' rare species animal - various kinds of animals are found in the National Park, and this is one the main attractions for visitors. Some of these animals are endangered and protected species that can hardly be found in other places. However, the rare species available here can hardly be seen. Furthermore, poaching of the protected animals is not uncommon thus reducing the number of protected species in the area.
5. Overflow of tourists - the large number of tourist to Taman Negara, especially during holidays, creates problems in terms of the traffic congestion, litter and illegal trading, resulting in indirect contribution to the damage to the ecosystem in term of pollution. Furthermore, the overflow of tourists call for the need to increased security, parking and sanitation.

5. Conflict of Management in Taman Negara

Despite the immediate connotation of conflict being a destructive or inhibitive force, conflict can in fact be healthy for an organisation if managed constructively. It may bring to light previously unseen pressures or discontents, promotes problems to be addressed and may improve individuals' understanding of the goals and motives of others (Van Slyke, 1999; Capozzoli, 1999; Singh and Johnson, 1998; Klunk, 1997). Poor management of conflict, however, leads to the inevitable loss of team and organisational trust and bonds, and reduces the team motivation (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000; Capazzoli, 1999).

Conflicts occur because there is no clear demarcation of responsibilities among the relevant departments in terms of preserving the nature.

- The private sector involved in uncontrolled logging activities. The effect is reflected in the water quality in Kuala Tahan river, the main source of water supply within the area that is contaminated due to these activities. This results in low water quality.
- The Wildlife Department have not any authority to enforce the parties to adhere to safe logging practices.
- The Department of Irrigation and Drainage too does not seem to be able to do much.
- Illegal motels and chalets managed by the private sector without any approval from the District Council can be seen around the main entrance of Taman Negara. Some of the places might not be safe for occupation, as they are illegally

developed and have not been issued occupation certificate by the District Council.

Conflict management between the departments, communities and the private sector is required to ensure that there is a sustainable and co-ordinated approach to conservation and to minimise the human impact on the protected area. This includes:

- working with user groups and the local community,
- promoting nature conservation policies,
- running the visitor centre,
- providing interpretation service for guided walks and events
- closely collaborating at all levels of government and private sector
- fostering the formulation and implementation of tourism development programs
- preserving and protecting the environment against both over-exploitations of natural resources and pollution of the environment.

5.1. Managing conflict: collective action and synergy

Collective action emphasizes on participation on specific cause (Lee et al. 2010). The collective action approach has the advantage of immediately bringing to the fore the central issue of willingness to participate, thus creates synergy through cooperative action of two or more work together to make things work. According to Kelly and Breinlinger (1996), collective action requires three conditions; there must be a grievance, 'common consciousnesses' and awareness towards a cause.

In the case of Taman Negara, the degradation of protected area is the main grievance that every parties believe would negatively effects the flora and fauna as well as the aborigines group who stay in the rainforest. In short, the ecosystem disfunctioning of Taman Negara will definitely affect the tourism industry of the area as a whole. Therefore, participation by all parties involve is vital in conserving and managing the natural environment in Taman Negara and nurturing the eco-tourism activities in a more sustainable manners.

Figure 2 shows the collective action by the involved parties in managing and protecting Taman Negara leads by the Wildlife Department and National Park Pahang for the shared benefits that affect the tourists and the local communities including the indigenous people.

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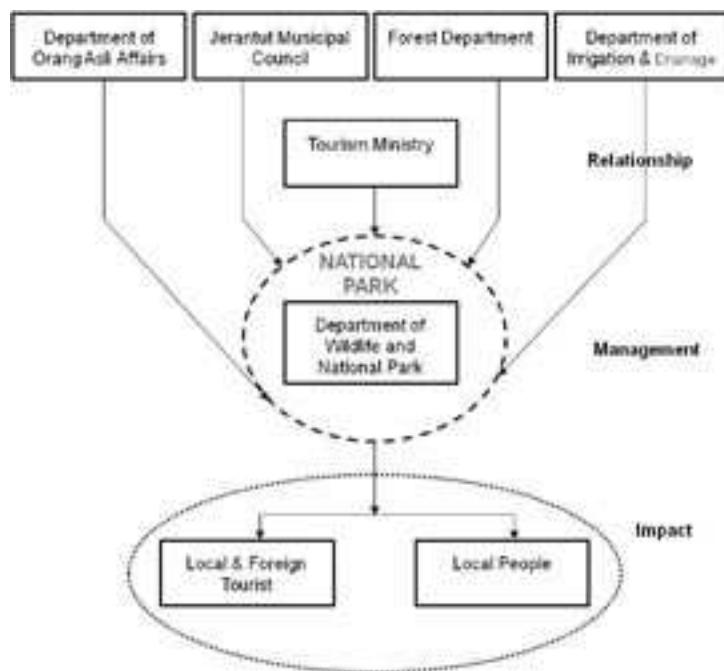


Figure 2. Department involved in managing the National park

5.2. Managing conflict: local communities involvement

Tourism must be planned, managed and undertaken in a way that avoids damage to biodiversity, and is environmentally sustainable, economically viable and socially equitable; local communities have the right to maintain and control their cultural heritage. The active participation of other players, however, should be encouraged to help address significant issues which are strongly related to tourism.

The Department of Orang Asli Affairs runs three main programs for the Orang Asli: arranges placement programs, economic development programs and social development programs. The Jerantut Municipal Council is responsible for approving all types of development. The Forest Department in general protects the park from illegal trespassing or destruction by unauthorized parties. The Department of Irrigation and Drainage is responsible for flood mitigation, river management, coastal management, water resources management and urban storm water management. The responsibility of the Tourism Ministry is promoting the National Park, both locally and internationally.

To further ensure the survival and sustainable of Taman Negara and also to avoid conflict, the local communities of villagers, private agencies and government agencies work together to establish the Local Conservation Committee. It is a non governmental

and non-profit organization and consists of three main elements: Conservation Agent, Promotions and Public Awareness Agent, and Monitoring and Enforcement Committee.

Conservation agent team is lead by a villager of Kuala Tahan. The functions of the committee are to ensure the growth of animal populations; to ensure conservations and act as liaison agent between the local people and local authority in ensuring the success of this conservation.

The Promotions and Public Awareness agent is lead by an agency, engaging in marketing of the National Park. The committees' functions are to implement awareness and educational program campaign among the locals, to promote conservation program to the tourists and to convince them to get involved and contribute. To attract more tourists and at the same time generate additional income for the locals, the committees also involve in creating new tourism products based on this conservations program.

The last group known as The Monitoring and Enforcement Committee is made up of locals and the local authorities. The members of the committees are categorized by their functions. The Local Village Committee, Passenger Boat Association and Tourist Guide Association are responsible for monitoring and observations, while Fishery Department, Police Department and Wildlife Department are responsible for the enforcement with its functions are to ensure no breach of law especially in the designated zone, to ensure action is taken against those who are guilty and to support all conservation programs and activities

6 . Conclusion

Managing the conflict between the local government, private sector and local communities well and effectively is essential for tourism at the National Park to reach its goals. Good tourism management will help to preserve and conserve the flora and fauna. Furthermore, tourism activities have to meet the expectations of tourists and local communities.

In order for Taman Negara to achieve its conservation goals with effective conflict management it must establish, develop and improve its relationship with other departments like the Jerantut District Council, Forest Department, Wildlife Department, Department of Orang Asli Affairs and Tourism Ministry and other conservation boards, the wider community and recreation organizations. The provision of high quality tourist services without compromising conservation goals will largely depend on receiving help and investment from these organizations and individuals.

Although there is a common perception that getting all parties to work together in a conflict management, arrangement would be the proper approach to sustainable forest

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management (e.g. Fisher, 1995; Buck et al., 2001), it seems that the problems associated with all department management go beyond such a simple model. For example, conflicts among departments stemming from some management practices such as those causing river and no approval for development, denial of access to forest resources, and so on would not be resolved by simply providing alternatives to the same goods and services.

Relationships work both ways, educating tourists is a role that can effectively be carried out by all organizations involved in the tourist service industry. The Department of Wildlife values feedback from tourists, the community, the tourist industry and from local authorities. Better co-ordination of services is needed and also funding assistance for the provision of facilities and services. Moreover, conflict management in itself can set into motion new conflicts. For that reason it is necessary to go beyond conflict management and not get trapped in it if the intention is to seek better and sustainable conflict management and at the same time reduce conflicts. Consequently, what is needed in dealing with all, conflicts is not only conflict management but also wider and integrated approaches to conflict management in a proactive manner (FAO, 2000).

In order to ensure the sustainable practice in a protected area such as Taman Negara, there should not be any conflict occurs between the managing authorities, and if there is, the conflict should manage effectively to benefit the involved parties. In the case of Taman Negara, an effective conflict management will definitely enhance Taman Negara as a distinctive recreational and protected area for the benefit of tourist, government and local communities.

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