

## The Influence of Tour Activities on Tourist Satisfaction : Mapping the Tourism Activities in Highland Bario

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**Abstract:** There are more prevailing issues with tour activities especially in rural areas today. On thing for sure, tourism in rural areas offers its own uniqueness which attracts and satisfies tourists. This paper defines tourist issues and satisfaction levels are and how a homestay operators' role can be transformed to support value creation. This paper's objective will facilitate to determine what tourists' expectations are, what their recent satisfactions are and how homestay operators can make more to enhance the tourism activities in Bario. The quantitative research method is used to ascertain the present expectation and satisfaction levels of tourists in Bario. It is based on a number of tourism components and features. A survey with mainly closed ended questions was established and delivered. 235 legible and acceptable responses were gathered. Respondents gave feedbacks of why they visited Bario . A Likert scale driven questionnaire was used. The results from hypothesis testing was fully accepted after detailed analysis and testing. The study demonstrated a strong correlation between tourist expectations and satisfaction. The pivot which prevails between tourists and their satisfaction levels principally lies in the impact and roles of homestay operators. The later can be said shows a very significant aspect in tourism delivery. Homestay operators which run the activities for tourists are primed as an additional substance for tourism development for Bario and its community.

**Key words:** *Bario, Ecotourism, Tourist Satisfaction*

### INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has endowed in a broad array of tourism destinations for tourists. It is fortunate with disparate cultures, traditions and histories, together with unique landscapes and natural resources. Malaysia has created a solid and captivating appeal for both local and international tourists. Tourism sector, hence, is of wonderful value to Malaysia's economy as one of the main foreign exchange income or revenues after the manufacturing industry. The state of Sarawak contributed an average of 13.5% to tourism revenue for the same period.

The Ministry of Tourism Sarawak reported a steady growth in tourism receipts from RM 7.91 billion in 2011, RM 8.74 billion in 2012 and RM 9.26 billion in 2013. In the same years the number of tourists grew from 3.795 million in 2011 to 4.371 million in 2013. Tourism revenue for Sarawak is expected to increase to

RM10 billion in 2014 from 4.7 million tourist arrivals [1], [2].

The past decade, saw the beginning of the tourism industry to take place in Bario. The major opening point would have to be the maiden introduction of the Bario Annual Food and Cultural festival, in 2005 [3]. It denotes another crucial milestone for the Kelabit community who lead this highland in Borneo. Bario is famous for its highland rice, salt and delicious pineapple . Bario's natural attraction is in its landscapes of paddy fields, rolling hills and a year round temperate climate of 12°C to 24°C. There are abundant trails and rivers which permit for outdoor adventure activities such as hiking, mountain biking, kayaking and trail running. This makes Bario a natural attraction for ecotourism, rural tourism and cultural tourism [4].

### **Objectives**

This research contains a single main objective that is to identify satisfaction levels of tourists who have visited Bario.

### **Research Questions**

The research problem includes the following:

What are the satisfaction levels of tourists on specific service quality dimensions?

A change in Bario's tourism landscape can lead to positive development opportunities in this village's social and economic status. This research is to bring about understanding the issues of tourist satisfaction and how this congregates the enhancements for the homestay operators.

### **Hypothesis**

The hypotheses to be tested is as follows: -

Tour activities have a positive influence on tourist satisfaction.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Researchers discovered that homestay operators in Malaysia provide limited services, limited accommodation and food arrangements [5]. There is a broader aspect in the tourism value chain where homestay operators can extend its services by developing and packaging homestay programmes for their guests. [6] stated there are opportunities for homestay operators to reposition themselves as tour planners and not just service providers for accommodation and food.

[7] added that consumer trust and hospitality have linkages to rural tourism. The community benefits created are through socio economic factors which include the achievement of sustainable income and lifestyle. This is directly linked to the Bario homestay operators' motivation in moving closer towards being a progressive and developing community. The research study includes a combination of tourist and homestay operators' expectations in the value chain and how tourism plays a role within a community based tourism industry.

[8] research on tourism destination competitiveness, highlights that it is important for tour or homestay operators to know and understand which products and services they provide must lead towards meeting tourist satisfaction. This helps with the positive influence in a particular tour destination. The research further raised

the need for an organisational and/or policy framework to govern or regulate sustainable tourism activities.

[9] research emphasised that caring for the environment can influence tourism growth. In the course of tourism growth, the natural environment or better known as the ecosystem cannot be neglected and must be preserved. It includes natural habitats, flora and fauna, rivers and forests. The research pointed out that tour operators must be aware of natural aesthetics of an environment so that they can attract tourists back for return visits. In the study of tourism governance, [10] pointed out that a firm collaboration is required between tourists, tour operators and local authorities to ensure sustainability of the geological environment.

Tourists participating in rural tourism, ecotourism and cultural tourism have a preconception that the physical and atmospheric preservation and conservation are significant factors in meeting their expectation levels during visits [11]. [12] research on tourism destination and stakeholders state that leading conservationists claim that combining environmental conservation and ecotourism development are contradictory. To bridge this divide, many ecotourism initiatives, State Tourism Boards and non-government organisations (NGOs) appeal that customised approaches are needed to address issues of development and conservation.

[13] who studied homestay operators in Malaysia support the notion that tourism service providers must realise that to better host means tour operators must be authentically concerned for the environment. Tourists expectations show that taking care of the environment itself can deliver better satisfaction compared to mainstream mass tourism, as mentioned in [14] study on adventure tourism in rural surroundings.

[15] highlighted that satisfaction surveys are important sources to determine tourist opinions on negative and unsatisfied tourists perceptions. The research concluded two distinct measurements, i) internal and ii) external. In similar reports, [16], [17] research identified that internal measurement refers to internal processes within the value chain and the external measurement were specifically targeted at the quality of products or services based on customer satisfaction. [18] research on tourism authorities and their influence on service quality, stated that authorities need to create a strong incentive to influence, monitor, and control the development of tour programmes in specific tour locations. The research highlighted that homestay operators play a key role in delivering a standardised tour programme which can become catalysts for meeting

tourist satisfaction easily. [19] study on sustainable tourism in a small China province called Suzhou, reported that the success of homestay operators in sustaining growth is through standardisation of tour programmes.

In [16] research on tourist satisfaction and dissatisfaction in Bario, imply that customer comments, complaints and suggestions are excellent sources of ideas for improvement and innovation. The report also underlined that the idea of tour programme regulation and product standardisation can promote product quality.

[20] research study on sustainable infrastructure and conservation ideas on homestay modification states that regulation is necessary for two reasons i) for conservation of the environment and ii) to steer homestay operators and the community to improve delivery of tourism activities. [21] research of Mesilou homestay in Sabah, help the second finding, that the management attitude of the homestay and product quality are key factors for meeting tourist expectations and promoting frequent tourist visits.

There is negligible research on how homestay operators can cope with the changing preferences of customers today. [22] research in tourism flexibility state that community's empowerment and ownership play an crucial role in enhancing the tourism value chain, although the degree of empowerment and how it relates to tourist satisfaction is still unknown today.

### **Community Based Tourism (CBT) in Malaysia**

The Malaysian Government Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) has emphasized the position of offering wide tourism products and packages involving homestay programmes in Malaysia [23]. The ETP is run by a ministry in the government known as the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU). [10], [19] proves that there is on-going traction among rural communities of an increasing presence of homestay tour programmes offered in rural communities in Asian countries, particularly in Malaysia. [24] point out that Malaysian rural communities have turned to tourism, as a way of diversifying their economic activities. Communities in these studies stated that economic reasons and community progression are their motivation for running homestay programmes.

In line with tourism development, [23] reported that homestay businesses offered not only an option choice

for lower accommodation to the tourists, but also additional sources of revenue to the operators. The Malaysian Homestay Programme (MHP) reports that there are 159 communities throughout Malaysia which run 3,424 registered homestay accommodation businesses in the country. The MHP is an important tourism catalyst and co-educator for homestay operators.

In [25] study of ecotourism in Sabah, homestay tourism, in this location, employs a community based approach and is highlighted as a different concept from other homestay programmes in neighbouring countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. Homestay programmes boost rural tourism as it generates an opportunity for visitors to get closer to the countryside beauty of a destination, to its culture and heritage, as reported by [26] research on community-based tourism in Malaysia. The aim of the homestay tourism is to assist visitors in a village with a local family, allowing the visitors to see local life, nature, and culture as stated in [22] research on rural tourism.

In a more centered context, [13] emphasised that homestay operators in Bario are starting to concentrate on tourism while slowly moving away from the decades of economic dependence on paddy farming, salt processing and growing pineapples as the community's key source of income.

### **Homestay operators' expectations in Malaysia**

Researches consistently state that home tourism is a new value chain service in the tourism industry [16], [4], [22] especially since Malaysia has various cultures to excite tourists. The homestay accommodation business is rapidly changing and tourists' needs and anticipations are moving very fast. The motivators in the push-pull model, researched by [27] for homestay operators and entrepreneurs, keep shifting over time. The effect of the change is mainly affected by growing tourist expectations which emphasises on offering more hospitality experience including efficiency, quality, experience, play and environmental aesthetics, as pointed out by [28] who researched tourism features.

In researching consumer trust and hospitality in tourism, [7] stated that the emphasis for rural tourism benefits the community through economic, socio economic and sustainable lifestyles. This is linked to the Bario homestay operators' motivation in moving closer towards being a progressive and developing community.

[29] research on guided package tours, highlight three main attributes of expertise which is required in tourism services, i) employees' expertise, which is associated with creativity, flexibility, and responsibility to customers; ii) employees' attitude, which relate to their openness and friendliness and empathy; ii) the demography of the service provider which is the ability to discharge services adequately.

[15] research on sustainable growth, state that repeat visitors are required to stabilise tourism activities for a destination. Repeat visitors also provide free advertising in the form of word-of-mouth recommendations to family members and friends

**METHODOLOGY**

**Sampling**

This research used a non-random quota sampling technique to make inferences, with various degrees of confidence, about the larger study population. Instead of approaching the general population for information, sampling was conducted among tourists visiting Bario and those who had visited Bario within the last five (5) years. A total of 235 respondent samples were collected.

The data collection instrument used for this research consisted of a survey questionnaire distributed to the identified sampling population. Primary data collection was conducted through questionnaires consisted of open and closed questions.

The respondents were attained in two manners. Firstly, the researcher travelled to Bario and distributed the questionnaires to on-site tourists. Secondly, through email circulation to past tourists who had visited Bario and then collecting completed questionnaires from respondents or groups of friends.

**FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis was conducted from 235 respondent questionnaires collected over a four month period and representing a 73% of total cleaned and deemed as reliable data by the researcher.

**Descriptive statistics**

The descriptive statistics analysis (descriptive and frequency) was performed to conclude respondent's socio demographics and travel profile. The gender participation was 135 females (57.4%) to 100 male

(42.6%). The respondents were placed in three age wise categories. Respondents from the below 35 categories was the majority with 105 participants (44.7%). Second highest was respondents from the 36 to 55 age category (34%) and the remaining, age 56 and above was 50 (21.3%). Malaysian nationals made up the majority of respondents at 210 (89.4%) with non-Malaysian nationals, 25 (10.6%) making up the remainder.

The travel profile revealed that 125 respondents visited Bario with their friends or colleagues (53.2%), 70 respondents (29.85) visited with family and 40 respondents (17%) were travelling alone. The three main reasons for visiting Bario were ranked as follows. The majority of respondents visited to rest and recuperate, 115 respondents (48.9%), the second highest group of 55 respondents (23.4%) visited family or friends, and the third highest group of 25 respondents (10.6%) made a visit to experience the Kelabit culture. Most of the 125 respondents (53.2%) visited Bario for the first time, 80 respondents (34%) had visited Bario six (6) or more times, while the remaining respondents of 30 (12.7% had visited Bario between 2 to 5 times. A final summary on the travel profile was on the preferred method of making travel arrangements. 120 respondents (51.1%) made direct reservations with homestay operators, 85 respondents (36.2%) used on-line travel websites for their bookings and the remainder of 30 respondents (12.8%) used tour agents. This last fact provided supportive evidence on the importance of the homestay operators' role.

**Main reason for visiting Bario**

Respondents were asked what their main reason was for visiting Bario. There were seven (7) response categories such as to rest and relax, enjoy the homestay experience, ecotourism, experience the culture, visiting family or relatives, food experience and doing business. This is illustrated in Table below.

Table :Main reason for visiting Bario

		Main_Reason			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	rest and relax	115	48.9	48.9	48.9
	homestay experience	10	4.3	4.3	53.2
	ecotourism activities	10	4.3	4.3	57.4
	cultural experience	25	10.6	10.6	68.1
	visiting family or relatives	55	23.4	23.4	91.5
	food experience	10	4.3	4.3	95.7
	business	10	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	235	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary data

There were 115 respondents or 48.9% of the total population who visited Bario to rest and relax. This represented almost half the sample population to enjoy the atmosphere and natural attractions. The revenue generated from this segment is skewed towards homestay operator services. The second highest response was from those visiting family or relatives in Bario. This category had a response of 55 or 23.4% of the sample population. This segment depicted that a significant number of visitors to Bario may not necessarily be paying customers or tourist which can help generate revenue for homestay operators. The third highest were respondents who visited Bario for its rich cultural experience. 25 respondents (10.6%) stated their interest in cultural activities. There were four (4) categories of 10 respondents each (4.3% in each category) who visited Bario for the homestay experience, ecotourism, food experience and to conduct business.

**Tourist satisfaction measure**

The research study’s main objective was to identify satisfaction levels of tourists who have visited Bario. Out of 25 cases 13 were rated on or above the mean of 4 – Satisfied. This represented 52% of all cases. 12 cases or 48% of the ratings were at the mean value of below 4 which represented a moderately satisfied level. These 12 cases are highlighted in bold.

Table : Tourist satisfaction scoring a moderately satisfied rating

Case	Variable	Mean Statistic	Variable Translation	Dimensions of tourist expectations
1	<b>D6</b>	<b>3.77</b>	Fishing	Activities
2	<b>D7</b>	<b>3.98</b>	Nature walk	
3	<b>D8</b>	<b>3.81</b>	Cultural experience	
4	<b>D10</b>	<b>3.68</b>	Pricing of tour activities	Price / Affordability
5	<b>D11</b>	<b>3.49</b>	Pricing of miscellaneous purchases	
6	<b>D14</b>	<b>3.89</b>	Availability of toilets / bathrooms	Facilities
7	<b>D15</b>	<b>3.81</b>	Cleanliness of toilets / bathrooms	
8	<b>D18</b>	<b>3.81</b>	On-site transportation	
9	<b>D20</b>	<b>3.64</b>	Safety measures / practices	
10	<b>D21</b>	<b>3.91</b>	Handling of tour arrangements	Homestay Operator Services
11	<b>D22</b>	<b>3.96</b>	Airport pick-ups / drop-offs	
12	<b>D24</b>	<b>3.85</b>	Information for tourists	

Source: Primary data

**Hypothesis**

This hypothesis tested the influence of tour activities in Bario over tourist satisfaction. Tour activities are predominantly promoted and/or organised by homestay operators. In this section it states the main reason for visiting Bario, there were 30 respondents or 12.9% who stated their main reason was for visiting Bario was to experience ecotourism, cultural or food related activities. The activities listed in the survey questionnaire include the following:

ACTIVITIES IN BARIO	
D4	Hiking / trekking activities (e.g. Prayer Mountain, Pa Lungan)
D5	Sightseeing activities (e.g. Longhouse, Salt Springs)
D6	Fishing (e.g. Rivers or ponds)
D7	Nature walks (e.g. Korea Hill, Bario 360°) or cycling
D8	Cultural activities (e.g. traditional performance, beads art & craft)

This above lists the independent variables of activities while the dependent variable is represented by the overall satisfaction of respondents with tour activities in Bario (E2).

This dependent variable is shown as E2.

PART E: RATE YOUR OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH YOUR VISIT TO BARIO						
INSTRUCTION: PLEASE TICK ( / ) THE APPROPRIATE BOX						
~ Leave a blank/empty box if statement is not applicable ~						
1 = Highly Dissatisfied 2 = Dissatisfied 3 = Moderately Satisfied 4 = Satisfied 5 = Highly Satisfied						
No.	Overall Satisfaction AFTER Visiting Bario	1	2	3	4	5
E1	What is your overall satisfaction with your homestay operator? Consider accommodation, facilities, food & hospitality, etc.					
<b>E2</b>	<b>What is your overall satisfaction with the tour activities in Bario? Consider places visited / tour arrangements / tour guides, etc.</b>					

The Pearson correlation test was statistically significant at Sig. 0.01 level (2-tailed) while the correlation coefficient of D4=.424, D5=.421, D6=.173, D7=.465 and D8=.186 denoted a positive relationship. Each activity (D4, D5, D6, D7 and D8) had a large relationship strength as the range was above .05.

Table Correlation between tour activities and main reason for visiting Bario

Correlations						
	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	
E2	Pearson Correlation	.424**	.421**	.173**	.465**	.186**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.008	.000	.004
	N	235	235	235	235	235

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary data

The Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric statistic test was conducted to explore the influence of tourist activities by the various demographic groups visiting Bario and its rank.

Table :Kruskal-Wallis test for tourists’ activity interest

Test Statistics <sup>a, b</sup>					
	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8
Chi-Square	26.840	25.704	16.884	20.467	45.568
df	6	6	6	6	6
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.010	.002	.000

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: Main\_Reason

Source: Primary data

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in tourists’ activity interest among ecotourism, cultural or food related groups of tourists.

- i. Hiking / trekking (D4) ranked the highest (n=195) in the ecotourism activity.
- ii. Sightseeing (D5) ranked 4th (n= 131) and 5th (n=110.50) in the ecotourism and cultural experience activities, respectively.
- iii. Fishing (D6) was lowest ranked (n=96.75) among the ecotourism activity.
- iv. Nature walks (D7) ranked the highest (n=165.50) in the ecotourism activity.
- v. Cultural activities (D8) ranked the highest (n=165.50) and the 2nd highest (n=157) in the food and cultural activities, respectively.

The highest most ranked activities from the respondent samples were therefore, hiking/trekking, nature walks, and cultural (including food) activities. All of which promoted Bario’s unique activities in ecotourism and cultural tourism. This was supported by the extensive literature review which has been highlighted in the early part of the paper.

Lastly, the Kruskal-Wallis test presented also reported Asymp. Sig. level of between 0.00 to 0.01. This was less than the alpha level of .05 so these results suggest that there was a difference in interest in tour activities among tourists.

The results presented above supported the hypothesis that tour activities have a positive influence in tourist satisfaction. The research study sprang no surprises as the hypothesis was accepted. The researcher opined that this research study can be leveraged for further use to enhance value chain and delivery of services to tourists in Bario. A detailed assessment needs to be initiated to leverage the tour dimension satisfaction results of this study so that weaknesses in the tourism supply chain can

be narrowed. An example would be the availability of tourist information upon arrival or the lack of it.

This research is a fundamental check and balance on tourist expectations, satisfaction levels on the tourism dimensions and how this relates improving the value chain of the homestay operators’ performance.

A good number of journals during the literature review have reported how progressive the people in Bario were. Although this is very encouraging literature questions remain unanswered as to how tourism is assisting in developing and contributing to the social and economic stature of the community. There seem to be a lack of statistical evidence to support this hypothesis.

### CONCLUSION

Tourism in Bario is continues to advance in a positive direction. The researcher is positive that more improvements can be made to strengthen the value chain within pertinent aspects which this local industry needs. In particular, the offering of more organised tour programmes and value added services which encourage the creation of more jobs in this community. Once the source of revenue opportunities increases it is envisaged that more youth and working adults can be attracted back to Bario.

Like other countries, Malaysia too regards tourism as a very valuable sector that creates the much-needed foreign exchange, new jobs and opportunities.

The positive social economic impact on a tourist destination undisputedly is a blessing as Gartner (1996, pp. 64), “the money brought into an area through the process of hosting tourists provides more economic returns than simply the sum of the expenditures accruing to the few businesses that come in direct contact with tourists. The power of tourism in a country promotes all sectors of an economy as the advantages from all these sectors can also still be used nourishing the development practices of the host nation and in this case, the scenic highland Bario is not unexceptional.

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