EXPLORING THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES AMONG TOUR OPERATORS IN MALAYSIA

MAISARAH ABD HAMID*[1] AND SALMI MOHD ISA[2]

[1]*Faculty Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu, 23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia.*
[2]*Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia.*

Corresponding author: maisa179@tganu.uitm.edu.my

Abstract: Sustainable tourism is important issue in tourism industry, being one of the recent practices employed in hospitality industry. Tour operators are the stakeholders in tourism industry that have obligations towards sustainable tourism due to their roles towards destination and business sustainability. However, studies related to involvement of tour operators in sustainable tourism practices are still limited, especially from Malaysian perspective. Therefore, this study intends to explore the sustainable tourism practices adopted by tour operators in Malaysia. A preliminary study of qualitative approach was undertaken to identify sustainable tourism practices adopted by tour operators in Malaysia, focusing on sustainable business management and sustainable destination management. Ten semi-structured interviews were used in this study, focusing on tour managers and tour business owners who are directly involved in tour operators' operations. A content analysis was used in data analysis to identify sustainable tourism practices adopted by tour operators in Malaysia. 31 sustainable tourism practices were identified under the sustainable business management and sustainable destination management. In conclusion, the results of this study have the potential to contribute towards the knowledge on sustainable tourism practices for tour operators in Malaysia as well as practically helping tour operators to adopt sustainable tourism practices in their daily operations.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism practices, sustainable business management, sustainable destination management, tour operators, Malaysia.

Introduction

Sustainable tourism has emerged as an important consideration in the development of tourism industry. The term "sustainable tourism" refers to tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005). This definition is debated as vague (Butler, 2015). Therefore, scholars may interpret and use this term in different perspectives of their studies. In Malaysia, the study on sustainable tourism is growing and it is used in many aspects, including destination management, stakeholder involvement, environmental studies and the use of sustainable tourism in tourism products. From the business perspective, studies related to sustainable tourism are mainly focused on the hotel industry. This highlights the need of further studies from other industry players in sustainable tourism.

The involvement in sustainable tourism requires participation by all the stakeholders in tourism industry (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005). Tour operators are the tourism businesses that have responsibility towards sustainable tourism (Budeanu, 2005; Schwartz *et al.*, 2008; Sigala, 2008). They are a pivotal link between tourist and destination, thereby representing a leverage point for leading the move towards sustainability (Fredericks *et al.,* 2008).The relationship between tour operators are not only between tourists and destinations, but also with local communities and suppliers in the tourism industry. Even though previous studies have indicated the importance of involvement by tour operators in sustainable tourism, the study and implementation of this type of tourism development is relatively minimal.

Realising the importance of tour operators' involvement in sustainable tourism, this study is conducted to explore the adoption of sustainable tourism practices related to tour operators in Malaysia. Studies related to sustainable tourism practices among tour operators in Malaysia from business and destination perspectives are still limited. Several studies have been conducted that focused on tour operator roles at specific destination. This highlights the need of studies conducted on tour operators' involvement in sustainable tourism from both business and destination perspectives.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism has emerged as an important consideration in tourism industry. In Malaysia, sustainable tourism has been highlighted since the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–2005) until now. The focuses of this type of development are to achieve sustainable growth and to realise potential income at national, state and local levels. Between the Eighth Malaysia Plan and the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, the focus on environment is the priority in tourism development. The involvement by government on sustainable tourism mainly focuses on preservation and conservation of the destination. This can also be seen in the existence of national ecotourism policies. Therefore, this highlights that tourism development in Malaysia is focusing on the environmental perspectives at ecotourism destinations.

In Malaysia, studies on sustainable tourism have also been conducted by researchers in different areas and subjects. Among them are on destination (Aminu *et al*., 2013; Choy, 2015; Jaafar *et al*., 2015; Leman *et al*.,2016; Bhuiyan *et al*., 2016; Ng *et al*., 2017), government (Khalid *et al*., 2008; Yusnita *et al*., 2012), tourist (Marzuki, 2011; Marzuki *et al*., 2014; Noor *et al*., 2015), and tourism products. Studies related to tourism products are among the highlighted topics and these include studies on ecotourism (Bhuiyan *et al*., 2012; Yusof *et al*., 2014; Bhuiyan *et al*., 2016), rural tourism (Tay & Chan, 2014; Wen Keat & Musa, 2014; Mura & Sharif, 2015;

Nair & Hamzah, 2015), urban tourism (Razali & Ismail, 2014), accommodation (Kasimu *et al*., 2012; Salehudin *et al*., 2013; Khalique & Mansor, 2016), homestay (Rasid *et al*., 2012; Ramli *et al*., 2014; Hussin & Kunjuraman, 2014; Kayat *et al*., 2015), food (Leong *et al*.,2012), and MICE Tourism (Hamid *et al*., 2012; Ahmad *et al*., 2016).

The focus in this study is related to tour operators and sustainable tourism practices. A tour operator is a company that specializes in the planning and operation of prepaid, pre-planned vacations and make these available to the public, usually through travel agents (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). According to Malaysia Tourism Industry Act 1992, a tour operating business is a business that provides all or any of the following services:

a) arranging for sale or commission of any transportation, accommodation, tour services, or any other incidental services for tourists within or outside Malaysia,

b) organising or conducting for sale or commission of inbound or outbound tours,

c) providing conveyances for hire to tourists and

d) any other services incidental to any of the services enumerated above.

Studies related to tour operators in Malaysia have been conducted by several researchers, focusing on sustainable tourism (Tay & Chan, 2014) and ICT (Iffah *et al*., 2015). The limited sources on studies related to tour operators require further studies conducted on this tourism stakeholder's perspective, especially in Malaysia.

From the tour operator's perspective, several studies have been conducted on the relation between sustainable tourism and tour operators. In the study by Budeanu (2005), the potential that tour operators have in promoting sustainable tourism is discussed. The paper suggests that tour operators could do much more in sustainability by expanding their influence onto their suppliers and customers and steering them to adopt more responsible attitude towards

nature and society. Another paper by Budeanu (2009) explores the adoption of Environmental Supply Chain Management (ESCM) by tour operators. This paper concludes that the tour operator's adoption on this ESCM is slow and it involved a lengthy process. It is suggested that to increase the adoption of ESCM in tourism, the factors of regulatory and institutional frameworks need to give consideration in the context of sustainable tourism. However, in the study by Khairat and Maher (2012), the actual experience of tour operators who adopt sustainability practices in their business was examined. The results showed that although the principles of sustainable tourism are beneficial, their implementation in tour operator business is a difficult task to achieve since there is still a major gap between strategy and implementation. Therefore, based on the literatures, the involvement of tour operators in sustainable tourism is still insignificant, especially on the implementation of sustainable tourism. This highlights the need to strengthen the concept as well as to identify factors that may influence the implementation of this type of tourism development.

Sustainable tourism practices are mostly related to environmental conservation and protection for the future survival of the tourism industry (Park, 2009). In studies related to tour operator business, sustainable tourism refers to all types of tourism (conventional or alternative forms) that are compatible with or contribute to sustainable development (Liu, 2003). Additionally, Le (2005) added that it not only for tourism firms that operate in the niche market of green tourism or ecotourism, but also suggested to all businesses to adopt environmentally friendly practices. Therefore, in studies related to tour operators, sustainable tourism includes the combination of several terms including ecotourism, corporate social responsibility, supply chain management and green tourism (Hamid & Isa, 2016). In sustainable tourism practices, several areas have been used in previous research including sustainable business management and sustainable destination management. Both

areas are important as they highlight the tour operators' roles in their business sustainability and destination sustainability. The study on sustainable business management has been conducted by several researchers including (Van Kleef & Roome, 2007; Seidel *et al.*, 2010). It reflects on the internal management capabilities that reflect the business sustainability, focusing on economic, social, cultural and environment perspectives. Another area of sustainable destination management has been studied by Curtin and Busby, 1999; Fredericks *et al.*, 2008 and Poudel and Nyaupane, 2013. It highlights the extent of company deals with local communities at destination and destination management during the tours on a sustainability basis.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative methods to explore sustainable tourism practices adopted by tour operators in Malaysia. A convenience sampling was used to identify the respondents for this study. There were ten active and licensed tour operator businesses that participated in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and an interview guide was used during the interviews. Each interview took between 30 and 45 minutes. The respondents for this study were from Terengganu, Selangor, Kelantan, Kedah, Penang and Putrajaya. The longest establishment was from 1988 and the latest was 2016. Six respondents operated with full license of inbound, outbound and ticketing, three respondents with inbound tour and one respondent with inbound and outbound licensed.

Data analysis method used in this study was adopted based on the strategy suggested by Braun and Clarke, 2006 that consists of six phases. The first was familiarising with the data, in which all data were transcribed and translated into English. The second step was generating initial codes based on clean data from the first step. The initial codes consisted of all the sustainable practices that exist during the interviews. The third step was searching for related themes; sustainable business management and sustainable destination management. All

the coded items were separated into these two main themes. Then, the themes and all the coded items were reviewed again, and peer checking was included during this stage. The next step was defining and naming the items to improve the sustainable tourism practices. Then, the new items were submitted to an expert panel for final evaluation. The new improved items consist of 31 items in sustainable tourism practices for tour operators in Malaysia.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study identified 31 items for sustainable tourism practices related to sustainable business management and sustainable destination management. The sustainable business management concerns about tour operators' responsibilities to sustain their businesses while the sustainable destination management is related to tour operators' responsibilities to sustain the destinations that they offered. There were 31 sustainable tourism practices highlighted in this study. These practices were taken from outputs from the interviews and from the literature.

The first theme is sustainable business management. There were 15 items related to this theme and it comprised eight subthemes related to sustainable practices in the tour operators' businesses. For the first item, the tour operators' business includes the elements of local culture in their company and this item has been used in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and in a study by Khairat and Maher, 2012). This practice is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. Six participants already implemented this practice, where they included the elements of local culture in their company. As stated by participant 1: "*We searched for art pieces from the Malay culture in the east coast and turned the ground floor into a museum. It's like a gallery where tourists can come and sit*".

The second item is the tour operators' business provides specially designed facilities for the disabled. This item has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and in a study by Khairat and Maher (2012). It is

related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. However, none of the participants interviewed in this study adopted this practice.

The third item is the tour operators' business has written standard operating procedure for all sustainability activities in business operation. This practice has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard. It is related to economic and environmental impact in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, six participants have adopted these practices in their businesses.

The fourth item is the tour operators' businesses follow regulations set by the government on tourism activities. This practice has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard. It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews, all the participants have adopted this practice.

The fifth item is the tour operators' businesses hires local staff for managerial and non-managerial position. This practice has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and in a study by Le (2005). It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, all participants have adopted this practice in their businesses. As stated by participant 1: "*We try to get local and we have more local staff.*"

The sixth item is the tour operators' businesses offer salary which exceeds the minimum wage regulated by government. This practice has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and in a study by Le (2005). It is related to economic and social impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, all the participants have adopted this practice in their businesses.

The seventh item is the tour operators' businesses involved in energy-saving activities. This practice has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and Green Practices standard in Malaysia. It is related to environmental impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, eight participants have adopted this practice in their

Table 1: The items of sustainable tourism practices

Theme 1: Sustainable business management		
Subtheme	**Items**	**Interviews participants**
Facility Design (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; Khairat & Maher, 2012)	1. Company include elements of local culture in office landscape and design	P1, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
Facility Design (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; Khairat & Maher, 2012)	2. Company provides specially designed facilities for disable people	-
Sustainability System (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013)	3. Company has written standard operating procedure for all sustainability activities in business operation	P1, P2, P7, P8, P9, P10
Legal Compliances (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013)	4. Company follow regulations set by government on tourism activities	P1, P2,P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
Employee Development (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; Y. Le & Hollenhorst, 2005)	5. Company hired local staff for managerial and non-managerial position	P1,P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
Employee Development (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; Y. Le & Hollenhorst, 2005)	6. Company offers salary which exceeds the minimum wages regulated by government	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9,P10
Conserving Resources (CCM, 2015; Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013)	7. Company involved in energy saving activities	P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10
Conserving Resources (CCM, 2015; Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013)	8. Company participated in reduce, recycle and reused the material in the office	P1, P2, P7, P8, P9, P10
Customer Satisfaction (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; Manente, Minghetti & Mingotto, 2014)	9. Company provides briefing and discussion with customer on tour packages including terms and condition	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
Customer Satisfaction (Thailand)	10. Company provide insurance coverage for all tour package	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10
Customer Satisfaction	11. Company provides tour leader for group package that exceed 15 people	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
Sustainable Marketing (Y. H. Le, 2005)	12. Company use nature related tagline for marketing purposes.	P1, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10
Purchasing Strategy (Y. H. Le, 2005; Manente *et al.*, 2014)	13. Company purchase local products and services	P1, P6, P9, P10
Purchasing Strategy (CCM, 2015; Young & Dhanda, 2012)	14. Company purchase environmentally friendly products	P1, P9, P10

Purchasing strategy (CCM, 2015; Young & Dhanda, 2012)	15. Company purchase green products for corporate gifts	P10

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">Theme 2: Sustainable destination management</td></tr>
<tr><td>Community Development (Dodds & Kuehnel, 2010; ESRT, 2013; Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013)</td><td>1. Company develops a win-win business relationship with local people</td><td>P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Community Development (Dodds & Kuehnel, 2010; EA, 2016)</td><td>2. Company involves the local people during tours</td><td>P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Community Development (GSTC, 2011; Mannente, 2014 ; Dods & Kuhnell, 2010)</td><td>3. Company contributes to local community projects including tourism and non-tourism activities</td><td>P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Contribution for Conservation (Ahmad, 2014; EA, 2016)</td><td>4. Company contributes to wildlife conservation at the destination that they offer</td><td>P1, P4, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Community Development (EA, 2016; Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013)</td><td>5. Company creates social dialogues with local communities when developing new tourism products/tour packages</td><td>P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interpretation & Education (EA, 2016; Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; Ministry of Tourism, 2015)</td><td>6. Company gives advice to customers on local activities at the destination that they offer</td><td>P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interpretation & Education (EA, 2016; Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; Y. H. Le, 2005)</td><td>7. Company ensures that customers have life experiences on nature, culture and heritage during the tour</td><td>P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Preserve Environment (ESRT, 2013; TEATA, 2011)</td><td>8. Company develops new packages for places that already mess or crowded</td><td>P1, P6, P8</td></tr>
<tr><td>Benefits of Cultural Heritage (TEATA, 2011)</td><td>9. Company develops complex and a variety of tour packages related to nature, culture and heritage</td><td>P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Preserve Environment (ESRT, 2013; Sigala, 2008; Tay & Chan, 2014)</td><td>10. Company conducts a thorough evaluation on the destination that they offer</td><td>P3, P7, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Contribution for Conservation (Budeanu, 2005b; EA, 2016; ESRT, 2013; Y. H. Le, 2005)</td><td>11. Company provides financial and in-kind assistance for preservation and conservation of the ecosystem of the destination</td><td>P1, P4, P6, P8, P9, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Preserve Environment (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; Tepelus, 2005)</td><td>12. Company ensures the packages that are offered do not interfere with the ecosystem of the destination</td><td>P1, P4, P6, P8, P10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Benefits of Cultural Heritage (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; Y. H. Le, 2005; Ministry of Tourism, 2015; TEATA, 2011)</td><td>13. Company purchases items that are legally allowed only and avoids purchasing items from rare or threaten species of animals, culture or heritage items</td><td>P9, P10</td></tr>
</table>

Supply Chain Efforts	14. Company maintains the contract rate with hotels/ accommodation which are certified and practice sustainability	P4, P9, P10
Supply Chain Efforts	15. Company creates contracts with external outbound tour operators that are certified in their respective countries	P1, P2, P3, P7, P8, P9, P10
Supply Chain Efforts (Schwartz *et al.,* 2008; Tepelus, 2005)	16. Company creates strategic partnership with suppliers in implementing sustainable tourism	P1, P3, P9

business. As stated by participant 2*: "In the manager's room, we switch the air-conditioner off if it is not being used"*.

The eighth item is the tour operators' businesses participates in reducing, recycling and reusing materials in the office. This practice has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and Green Practices Standard in Malaysia. It is related to environmental impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, six participants have adopted this practice in their business. As stated by participant 2: *"We do practice recycle. We buy items that can be recycled such as boxes."*

The ninth item is the tour operators' businesses provide briefing and discussion with customers on tour packages including terms and conditions for the sold packages. This practice has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and in studies by Le (2005) and Manente, Minghetti and Mingotto (2014). It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, nine participants have adopted this practice in their business operation.

The tenth item is tour operators' business provide insurance coverage for all tour packages. This practice is used by the Sustainable Tourism Standard in India. It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. Nine participants interviewed have adopted this practice while the other one makes it optional for the customers.

The eleventh item is the tour operators' businesses provide a tour leader for group packages that exceed 15 people. This item is not discussed in literature, but all the participants

have adopted this practice and it is related to their efforts toward customer satisfaction. This practice is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism.

The twelfth item is the tour operators' businesses use nature-related tagline for marketing purposes. This item has been discussed in a study by Le (2005). It is related to economic impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, seven participants have adopted this practice in their business.

The thirteenth item is the tour operators' businesses purchase local products and services. This item has been discussed in studies by Le (2005) and Manente *et al.* (2014). It is related to economic and social impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, only four participants have adopted this practice in their business.

The fourteenth and fifteenth items are related to the purchasing strategy of the business; the items are tour operators' businesses purchase environmentally friendly products and green products for corporate gifts. These items have been discussed in a study by Young and Dhanda (2012) and in Green Practices Standard in Malaysia. It is related to economic and environmental impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, only three participants have adopted the practices related to the purchase of environmentally friendly products and one participant adopts the purchase of green products for corporate gifts.

The second theme is sustainable destination management. There were 16 items related to this theme and it consists of 6 subthemes of

community development, contribution for conservation, interpretation and education, preservation of the environment, benefits of cultural heritage and supply chain efforts. The first item for this theme is tour operators' businesses develop a win-win business relationship with local people. This item has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard, in Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism Programme in Vietnam and in a study by Dodds and Kuehnel (2010). It is related to economic and social impacts in sustainable tourism. From the interviews conducted, seven participants have implemented this practice in their business. Participant 3 stated that *"We are also involved with villagers and will bring visitors there. We support the local products at destinations that we offer."*

The second item is tour operators' businesses involve local people during tours. This item has been discussed in a study by Dodds and Kuehnel (2010) and in Ecotourism Standard in Australia. It gives social impacts in sustainable tourism. From the interviews conducted, all participants stated that they implement this practice in their business operation.

The third item is tour operators' businesses contribute to local community projects including tourism and non-tourism activities. This item has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and in studies by Mannente *et al.* (2014) and Dods and Kuhnell (2010). It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. From the interviews conducted, eight participants have adopted this practice in their business. Participant 9 stated that *"We have our fund called Good Care; we get money from this fund through some percentage of our tour packages."*

The fourth item is tour operators' businesses contribute to wildlife conservation at the destinations that they offer. This item has been discussed in Ecotourism Standard Practices in Australia and in a study by Ahmad (2014). It is related to environmental impacts in sustainable tourism. From the interviews conducted, only three participants have adopted this practice.

The fifth item is tour operators' businesses creates social dialogues with local communities when developing new tourism products or tour packages. This item has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and Ecotourism Standard in Australia. It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. From the interviews conducted, six participants have adopted this practice. Participant 6 stated that *"The process started with a meeting with the Village Head. Then, we decided to choose one date for the Village Head to gather the villagers for a briefing (of the idea). We explained that they don't have to worry as we will get the visitors to come to the market."*

The sixth item is tour operators' businesses give advice to customers on local activities at the destinations that they offer. This item has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard, Ecotourism Standard in Australia and Sustainable Tourism Standard in India. It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, all participants agreed that they have already implemented this practice. As stated by participant 4: *"We will bring groups to local attractions, sometimes using rental cars. We create packages and advise customers on where they can go."*

The seventh item is tour operators' businesses ensure that customers have life experiences on nature, culture and heritage during the tour. This item has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard, Ecotourism Standard in Australia and in a study by Le (2005) in Vietnam. It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, nine participants have adopted this practice. As stated by participant 6: *"We provide explanations of a place to customers. We also relate with educational values to allow our customers to get in touch with their surroundings."*

The eighth item is tour operators' businesses develops new packages for places that are already mess or crowded. This item has been discussed in ESRT (2013) and TEATA (2011) and it is

related to environmental impacts in sustainable tourism. From the interviews conducted, three participants have adopted this practice. As stated by participant 1: *"Carrying capacity; we are not selling the high group market at destinations that are already mess. We bring [the visitors] to new places."*

The ninth item is tour operators' businesses develop complex and a variety of tour packages related to nature, culture and heritage. This item has been discussed in Sustainable Thai Tour Operators Standard in Thailand. It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. All the participants interviewed have adopted this practice.

The tenth item is tour operators' businesses conduct a thorough evaluation on the destinations that they offer. This item has been discussed in Sustainable Tourism Standard in Vietnam and in studies by Sigala (2008) and Tay and Chan (2014). It is related to environmental impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, only three participants have implemented this practice. As stated by participant 6: *"Usually, we will evaluate a place. If it is interesting, we will return with more visitors, but if not, we won't go there anymore."*

The eleventh item is tour operators' businesses provides financial and in-kind assistance for preservation and conservation of the ecosystem of the destinations. This item has been discussed in Ecotourism Standard in Australia, Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism Programme in Vietnam and in studies by Le (2005) and Budeanu (2005). It is related to environmental impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, six participants have already implemented this practice in their business.

The twelfth item is tour operators' businesses ensure that the packages offered do not interfere with the ecosystem of the destination. This item has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard and in a study by Tepelus (2005). It is related to environmental impacts in sustainable tourism. From the interviews

conducted, five participants have implemented this practice.

The thirteenth item is tour operators' businesses only purchase items that are legally allowed and avoids purchasing items from rare or threatened species of animals and cultural or heritage items. This item has been discussed in Global Sustainable Tourism Standard, Sustainable Thai Tour Operator Standards in Thailand, Sustainable Tourism standard in India and in a study by Le (2005) in Vietnam. It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, only two participants have adopted this practice.

The final three items are related to supply chain efforts. The items of (1) tour operators' businesses maintain the contract rate with hotels or accommodations which are certified and practice sustainability and (2) create contracts with external outbound tour operators that are certified in their respective countries are not highlighted in literature but have response from the interviewees. The last item of tour operators' businesses creates strategic partnership with suppliers in implementing sustainable tourism has been discussed in studies by Tepelus (2005) and Schwartz *et al.* (2008). It is related to social impacts in sustainable tourism. From the interviews, three participants have adopted this practice.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The purpose of this study was to explore sustainable tourism practices that have been adopted and can be adopted by tour operators in Malaysia. This study identified 31 practices related to sustainable tourism practices that were segmented into sustainable business management and sustainable destination management. The results of the study indicate that the adoption of sustainable business management among tour operators in Malaysia is still limited in certain areas such as in facility design and purchasing strategy. Meanwhile, from sustainable destination management, more involvement by tour operators is required especially in the areas of preservation and conservation and

supply chain efforts. The interviews showed that limited practices have been implemented by tour operators at sustainable destination management. Therefore, the practice has to be highlighted for tour operators so that they can implement sustainability in their business and destinations that they offer.

This research extends the knowledge on sustainable tourism practices especially from the context of tour operators. It also provides practical knowledge for tour operators to implement sustainable tourism in their business operation and destinations that they offer to the customer. It will serve as a base for future studies on the level of adoption among tour operators in sustainable tourism in Malaysia.

Acknowledgements

References

AAhmad, N. L., Rashid, W. E. W., Yunus, N. A. M., Mahmood, N. H. N., & Shamsuddin, S. (2016). Examining the Demand for Green Events to Promote Sustainable Practices in Tourism: A Concept Paper. *Advanced Science Letters*, 22(5–6): 1402–1405.

Ahmad, A. (2014). The Disengagement of the Tourism Businesses in Ecotourism and Environmental Practices in Brunei Darussalam. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 10: 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2013.12.002

Aminu, M., Matori, a.-N., Yusof, K. W., & Zainol, R. B. (2013). A Framework for Sustainable Tourism Planning in Johor Ramsar sites, Malaysia: A Geographic Information System (GIS) based Analytic Network Process (ANP) Approach. *Research Journal of Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology*, 6(3): 417–422.

Bhuiyan, M. A. H., Azizul Bari, M., Siwar, C., Ismail, S. M., & Islam, R. (2012). Measurement of Carbon Dioxide Emissions for Eco-tourism in Malaysia. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, 12(9): 1832–1838. https://doi.org/10.3923/jas.2012.1832.1838

Bhuiyan, M. A. H., Siwar, C., & Ismail, S. M. (2016). Sustainability Measurement for Ecotourism Destination in Malaysia: A Study on Lake Kenyir, Terengganu. *Social Indicators Research*, *128*(3), 1029–1045. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-1068-5

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Braun, V ., Clarke, V .Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology., 3:2 (2006), 77-101. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3: 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Budeanu, A. (2005). Impacts and Responsibilities for Sustainable Tourism: A Tour Operator's Perspective. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 13(2): 89–97. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2003.12.024

Budeanu, A. (2009). "Environmental Supply Chain Management in Tourism: The Case of Large Tour Operators." *Journal of Cleaner Production* 17.16 : 1385–1392. Web.

Butler, R. (2015). Sustainable Tourism – Paradoxes, Inconsistencies and a way forward? In M. Hughes, D. Weaver, & C. Pforr (Eds.), *The practice of sustainable tourism. resolving the paradox* (pp. 130–149). Routledge Taylor & francis group.

CCM. (2015). *A Toolkit to Implement Green Business*.

Choy, E. A. (2015). Societal and Environmental Drivers Affecting the Sustainable Development of Coastal Tourism in Kudat. *Journal of Food, Agriculture and Environment*, 13(3–4): 147–149.

Curtin, S. C., & Busby, G. (1999). Sustainable Destination Development: The Tour Operator Perspective. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 1: 135–147.

Dodds, R., & Kuehnel, J. (2010). CSR among Canadian Mass Tour Operators: Good

Awareness but Little Action. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 22(2): 221–244. https://doi.org/10.1108/09596111011018205

EA. (2016). EcoCertification: A Certification Program for the Australian Nature and Ecotourism Industry. Retrieved May 19, 2016, from http://www.ecotourism.org.au

ESRT. (2013). Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism Programme VIETNAM. Retrieved June 15, 2016, from www.wtmlondon.com

Fredericks, L., Garstea, R., & Monforte, S. (2008). *Sustainable Tourism Destinations: A Pathway for Tour Operators*. Blekinge Institute of Technology, Karlskrona, Sweden. Abstract.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council. (2013). *Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria AND Suggested Performance Indicators FOR Hotels and Tour Operators*. Retrieved from http://www.gstcouncil.org.

Goeldner, C. R., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2006). *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies*. John Wiley & Sons.

Hamid, M. A., & Isa, S. M. (2016). Measuring Sustainability Levels of Tour Operator Businesses using Sustainable Tourism Indicators: A Conceptual Perspective. In *Heritage, Culture and Society: Research Agenda and Best Practices in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry - Proceedings of the 3rd International Hospitality and Tourism Conference, IHTC 2016 and 2nd International Seminar on Tourism, ISOT 2016*.

Hamid, M. A., Ismail, N., Fuza, Z. I. M., Ahmad, K. N., & Awang, K. W. (2012). Sustainable Tourism Development Practices of MICE Venue Provider in East Coast Region, Peninsula Malaysia. *Current Issues in Hospitality and Tourism: Research and Innovations*, 87.

Hussin, R., & Kunjuraman, V. (2014). Sustainable Community-Based Tourism (Cbt) Through Homestay Programme in Sabah , East Malaysia. *Proceeding of the Social Sciences Research ICSSR 2014 (E-ISBN 978-967-11768-7-0). 9-10 June 2014, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, MALAYSIA, 2014*(June), 41–61.

Iffah, M. F. Z., Hairul, N. I., & Sulaiha, M. I. (2015). Tour Operators Malaysia: Virtue of Adapting ICT Changes Towards Business Resilience. *Advanced Science Letters*, 21(6): 1650–1654. https://doi.org/10.1166/asl.2015.6124

Jaafar, M., Rasoolimanesh, M., & Noor, S. M. (2015). An Investigation of the Effects Of an Awareness Campaign on Young Residents' Perceptions: A Case Study of the Lenggong World Heritage Site. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 13(2): 127–139. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2015.1096298

Kasimu, A. B., Zaiton, S., & Hassan, H. (2012). Hotels Involvement in Sustainable Tourism Practices in Klang Valley, Malaysia. *International Journal of Economics and Management*, 6(1): 21–34.

Kayat, K., Ramli, R., Mat-Kasim, M., & Abdul-Razak, R. (2015). Community-based Rural Tourism as a Sustainable Development Alternative: An Analysis with Special Reference to the Community-based Rural Homestay Programmes in Malaysia. In *Theory and Practice in Hospitality and Tourism Research - Proceedings of the 2nd International Hospitality and Tourism Conference 2014* (pp. 223–227). Retrieved from http://www.scopus.com

Khairat, G., & Maher, A. (2012). Integrating Sustainability Into Tour Operator Business : An Innovative Approach In Sustainable Tourism. *Tourismos: An International Multidisciplinary Journal Of Tourism*, 7(1): 213–233.

Khalid, S. N. A., Wahid, N. A., Amran, A., Haat, H. C., & Abustan, I. (2008). Towards a Sustainable Tourism Management in Malaysia. *Lex ET Scientia International Journal (LESIJ)*, (2): 301–312.

Khalique, M., & Mansor, S. A. (2016). Intellectual Capital in Malaysian Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Malacca. *International Journal of Business Performance Management*, 17(1): 103–116. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBPM.2016.073348

Le, Y. H. (2005). *Perception of Vietnamese Tourism Businesses Toward the Adoption of Sustainable Tourism Practices*. University of Idaho.

Le, Y., & Hollenhorst, S. (2005). Perceptions of Vietnamese Tour Companies Toward Adopting Sustainable Tourism Practices. *Anatolia*, 16(1): 79–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2005.9687166

Leman, N., Ramli, M. F., & Khirotdin, R. P. K. (2016). GIS-based Integrated Evaluation of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) for Land Use Planning in Langkawi, Malaysia. *Ecological Indicators*, 61: 293–308. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2015.09.029

Leong, Q. L., Othman, M., Mohd Adzahan, N., & Ab. Karim, M. S. (2012). A Model of Malaysian Food Image Components: Towards Building a Sustainable Tourism Product. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 20(2): 299–315.

Liu, Z. (2003). Sustainable Tourism Development : A Critique. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 11, 459–475. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580308667216

Manente, M., Minghetti, V., & Mingotto, E. (2014). *Responsible Tourism and CSR: Assessment Systems for Sustainable Development of SMEs in Tourism*.

Marzuki, A. (2011). Resident Attitudes Towards Impacts from Tourism Development in Langkawi Islands , Malaysia. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 12: 25–34.

Marzuki, A., Mohammad, D., & Abdullah, S. (2014). Visitors' Satisfaction towards Geopark Attractions. *Anatolia*, 0(0): 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2013.870916

Ministry of Tourism, G. O. I. (2015). Sustainable Tourism Criteria For India- Principles And Indicators For Tour Operator And Accommodation Sector. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from http://tourism.gov.in

Mura, P., & Sharif, S. P. (2015). Exploring Rural Tourism and Sustainability in Southeast Asia through the Lenses of Official Tourism Websites A Benchmarking Exercise. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 7(15): 440–452. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09564230910978511

Nair, V., & Hamzah, A. (2015). Successful Community-based Tourism Approaches for Rural Destinations. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 7(5): 429–439. https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-06-2015-0023

Ng, S. I., Chia, K. W., Ho, J. A., & Ramachandran, S. (2017). Seeking Tourism Sustainability - A Case Study of Tioman Island, Malaysia. *Tourism Management*, 58: 101–107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.10.007

Noor, S. M., Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Jaafar, M., & Ganesan, V. (2015). What Influences Visitor Mindfulness at World Heritage Sites? *Tourism Culture & Communication*, 14(3): 139–150. https://doi.org/10.3727/109830415X14213698267271

Park, J. (2009). *The Relationship Between Top Managers' Environmental Attitudes and Environmental Management in Hotel Companies*. *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling*. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004

Poudel, S., & Nyaupane, G. P. (2013). The Role of Interpretative Tour Guiding in Sustainable Destination Management: A Comparison between Guided and Nonguided Tourists. *Journal of Travel Research*, *XX*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513478496

Ramli, R., Kasim, M. M., Ramli, R., Kayat, K., & Razak, R. A. (2014). Evaluation of Criteria for Sustainability of Community-based Rural Homestay Programs via a Modified Pairwise Comparison Method. In

AIP Conference Proceedings (1635: 651–656). https://doi.org/10.1063/1.4903651

Rasid, A., Mustafa, M. Z., Suradin, A., & Hassan, R. (2012). Community Capacity Building for Sustainable Tourism Development : Experience from Miso Walai Homestay. *Business and Management Review*, 2(5): 10–19.

Razali, M. K., & Ismail, H. N. (2014). A Sustainable Urban Tourism Indicator in Malaysia. *WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment*, 187: 133–145. https://doi.org/10.2495/ST140111

Salehudin, M. S., Prasad, D. K., & Osmond, P. W. (2013). Challenges To Sustainable Resort And Hotel Development In Malaysia. In *International Conference on Tourism, Transport and Logistics* (pp. 1–9).

Schwartz, K., Tapper, R., & Font, X. (2008). A Sustainable Supply Chain Management Framework for Tour Operators. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 16(August 2015), 298. https://doi.org/10.2167/jost785a.0

Seidel, S., Recker, J., & Pimmer, C. (2010). Enablers and Barriers to the Organizational Adoption of Sustainable Business Practices. *AMCIS 2010 Proceedings*, (August), 12–15. Retrieved from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/32286/

Sigala, M. (2008). A Supply Chain Management Approach for Investigating the Role of Tour Operators on Sustainable Tourism: The Case of TUI. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 16: 1589–1599. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2008.04.021

Tay, K. X., & Chan, J. K. L. (2014). Tour Operator Perspectives on Responsible Tourism Indicators of Kinabalu National Park, Sabah. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 144: 25–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.270

TEATA. (2011). Sustainable Thai Tour Operator Standards. Retrieved May 10, 2011, from https://www.gaiadiscovery.com

Tepelus, C. M. (2005). Aiming for Sustainability in the Tour Operating Business. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 13(2): 99–107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2003.12.018

The Government of Malaysia. (n.d.). Tourism Industry Act 1992. Retrieved from http://www.commonlii.org/my.

UNWTO, & UNEP. (2005). *Making Tourism More Sustainable A Guide For Policy Maker*. *Environment* (Vol. 54). Retrieved from http://scholar.google.com.

Van Kleef, J. A. G., & Roome, N. J. (2007). Developing Capabilities and Competence for Sustainable Business Management as Innovation: A Research Agenda. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 15(1): 38–51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2005.06.002

Wen Keat, K., & Musa, N. B. (2014). Responsible Tourism System Dynamic Planning Model for Rural Area. In *2014 the 5th International Conference on Information and Communication Technology for the Muslim World, ICT4M 2014*. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICT4M.2014.7020679

Young, S. T., & Dhanda, K. K. (2012). *Sustainability: Essentials for Business*. SAGE, 2012.

Yusnita, Y., Yahaya, I., Mohd Shaladdin, M., & Wan Abd Aziz, W. M. A. (2012). Government's role in Malaysian Homestay Program. In *Current Issues in Hospitality and Tourism Research and Innovations - Proceedings of the International Hospitality and Tourism Conference, IHTC 2012* (pp. 607–611). Retrieved from http://www.scopus.com

Yusof, N., Abd Rahman, F., Che Jamil, M. F., & Iranmanesh, M. (2014). Measuring the Quality of Ecotourism Services: Case Study-Based Model Validation. *SAGE Open*, *4*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014538270