

## A Comparison Study Between Domestic and International Rural Tourist Profile and Travel Expenditures in Semporna, Sabah

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses the subject by comparing tourist's profile and travel expenditures between domestic and international tourists to Semporna, Sabah based on socio-demographic characteristics, trip related variables and travel expenditures. Furthermore, travel expenditures are compared based on six different expenditure groups: accommodation, foods and beverages, transportation, diving services, others and total expenditure. This study uses face to face interview to obtain the results and the data was analysed using SPSS. The finding shows that the differences in socio-demographic characteristics, trip related variables and travel expenditures between domestic and international tourists are noteworthy. Compare to domestic tourists, international tourists prefer scuba diving and majority of them are first timer. They prefer to travel in a small group, with friends and spouse by bus and stayed at budget lodging. Also, international tourists stayed longer and know Semporna through words of mouth but they are less likely to purchase a package tour. Most of the international respondents are female, single, aged 19 to 40, had higher education background and work as private employees or self-employed. The average income for international tourists is RM7535 and they spent average RM1927. Finally, the main conclusions and implications for tourism marketing are discussed following by the recommendations.

**Key words:** Profile • Expenditure • Semporna • Socio-demographic • Trip-related

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism sector provides opportunities for economic development in many developing countries. It has been used as an instrument to reduce poverty [1]. Also, it has the potential to improve the rural economy (e.g. agriculture) and development, increase the income and employment in many small regions [2-3]. The global destination competition drives many destination marketers to find out the distinctiveness of their tourist destinations in order to find competitive advantages over other tourist destinations [4]. As a result, money has been invested to attract tourists [5]. In order to achieve sustainable tourism, understand the characteristics of visitors is vital [6].

Visitor surveys allow local communities to understand out how important different types of visitor's expenditure and visitor characteristics and preferences [7]. This is vital for marketing purposes especially to find out what percent of visitors' expenditure and how money is spent during visitor's stay in Semporna. This allows business operators to recognise potential business prospects. While most tourism marketers and local authorities in Semporna recognize the importance of information from visitor surveys, the information is seldom being used for detail analysis.

While most tourism marketers and local authorities in Semporna recognize the importance of information from visitor surveys, there is unknown of visitor survey conducted in Semporna and the information is seldom

being used for detail analysis. Thus, there is a need to carry out visitor surveys in Semporna to obtain the tourist’s information. This information is deemed as crucial for future planning and segmentation purposes.

**Rural tourists:** Some researchers [8-12] commented that rural tourists take a trip to rural areas to search for relaxation, run away from overcrowded and stressful urban life, to learn and explore culture and nature. Rural tourists prefer to participate in nature related activities. A study conducted by Farmaki [13] found out that the main motive rural tourists travelled to Troodos, Cyprus were to run away from the city life to enjoy the nature and culture. On the other hand, Molera and Albaladejo [14] found that enjoy the family togetherness in a nature setting is the key reason rather than experience the rural lifestyle.

A number of researchers [15-17] attempted to summarise the profile of rural tourists based on few variables. Cai and Li [15] reported that rural tourists are normally dominated by female and they are normally travelled with families or couples. Also, rural tourists have middle or upper class background and are professional workers, stay short. In Europe, rural tourists are generally viewed as domestic visitor travel not far from their home using own vehicle [18]. Rural tourists are characterised as middle aged, travel in small party [16] educated, middle income and professional workers. As different people travel with different interests and characteristics [14], identifying them based on their travel behaviour and socio demographic characteristics are crucial for future promotion and segmentation purpose [14].

**The Economy of Sabah:** Sabah is the second largest and the third most populous state in Malaysia. In 2012, Sabah’s state economy registered RM44.4 billion GDP, which ranked the sixth (5.9%) in term of percentage share after Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Sarawak, Johor and Pulau Pinang. An economic corridor entitled The Sabah Development Corridor (SDC) was launched at the beginning of year 2008 for 18 years (2008-2025) to

leverage natural endowment to accelerate the economic growth and ensure maximum resource allocation. The corridor aligns the national program under the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) and the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) to transform Malaysia into a high-income nation by the year 2020. The objectives of Sabah Development Corridor are to create sustainable economic growth, improve income and socio-economic standards by reducing regional imbalance and income inequality. The development of SDC has been planned, promoted, monitored and coordinated by Sabah Economic Development and Investment Authority (SEDIA) regarding to economic growth and impacts. By 2025, the development is forecasted to triple the GDP per capita and to increase GDP by four times, created at least 900,000 new employments during implementation the period.

The first five years (2008-2012) of the projects has a noteworthy impact in rejuvenating the economic growth, generating new employments, enhancing socio welfare, increasing employment rate and household income and diminishing the poverty rate. As a result, the poverty incident had reduced almost half during the implementation period. In rural areas, the poverty rate has witnessed a dramatic declined almost 20.0 per cent to 12.9 per cent during the 2009-2012 period [20]. In year 2013, the unemployment rate for Sabah was recorded at 5.2%. Nevertheless, the average household income was RM4, 013, poverty rate 8.1% and Gini Coefficient 0.428. Table 1 demonstrates the economic performance for Sabah from year 2007-2012.

There are six key focus areas to attract a total investment of RM77.5 billion by the year 2020. Semporna is part of the Marine Integrated Cluster, where it leverages the potential of marine resources to expand the marine related industries (aquaculture and fishing) and manages it in a sustainable manner [21]. Semporna attracts FDI from United States for setting up in the integrated Lobster Aquaculture Park. It involves RM2 billion in investments and forecasted to bring RM3 billion in annual sales by

Table 1: Economic performance for Sabah from year 2007-2012

Year	GDP growth (%)	Unemployment rate (%)	Household Income (RM)	Poverty rate (%)	Gini Coefficient
2007	3.2	5.5	2837	19.5	0.450
2008	10.7	4.9	-	-	-
2009	4.8	5.5	3102	19.7	0.453
2010	2.7	5.5	-	-	-
2011	1.3	5.6	-	-	-
2012	4.1	5.4	4013	8.1	0.428
2013	5.9	5.2	-	-	-

Adapted from Economic Planning Unit, Sabah and Department of Statistic Malaysia [26]

Table 2: Sabah tourist arrival from year 2009-2013

Year	Malaysian	International	Total Tourist Arrival	Changes (%)
2009	1,683,924	562,144	2,246,068	-
2010	1,708,716	795,953	2,504,669	10.3
2011	1,998,687	845,910	2,844,597	11.9
2012	1,933,996	941,765	2,875,761	1.1
2013	2,293,923	108,9320	3,383,243	17.6

Adapted from Sabah Tourism Board [27]

2030. Sabah targets to increase tourism receipts to RM16.8 billion by 2020, which is the 10.0% of the national tourism receipts [22]. In 2012, tourism receipts were RM 5.3 billion to the Sabah's economy (Table 2). Among other sectors, tourism sector has attracted the highest 29.1% of the planned investment. Semporna – Borneo Marine Paradise aims to generate RM854.0mil GNI, create 2232 jobs and attracts RM1.8billion in investments.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Semporna is a traditional fishing town situated on the east coast of Sabah. The town was once a well-known 'crime' town where illegal activities were carried out [23]. Semporna is divided into mainland and islands, with land coverage 442 sq km and forty-nine islands surroundings [24].

This paper utilised the information provided by Hartawan Stabil [25]. The jetty usage indicates the frequency of jetty usage for tourism activities. The jetty usage has increased almost a quarter compare to year before. It was reported that almost 85.0% of the usage are foreigners. However, the statistic showed that the usage of domestic visitors has dropped about 19.0% while there was an increase of 27.5% for international visitors compare to previous year. Data were collected using face to face interview with the help by three enumerators during the end of the year 2013. The boundary of the data collection was set within 5km radius from the town, including some islands. During the data collection, tourists were asked to participate in survey at various points such as restaurants, beaches and resorts. On top of that, merely tourists who had stayed for at least one night were qualified for survey. Local communities were disqualified since their expenditure would not generating new tourism dollars to the local economy.

The survey asked information on: 1) trip related information; 2) socio demographic information; and 3) travel expenditure. A descriptive-statistics analysis was executed to investigate the overall sample profile using SPSS 22.0. Additionally, a cross tabulation analysis was run to compare the trip related information, socio

demographic information and travel expenditure. Tourist's nationality was grouped into two groups, namely domestic and international for comparison purpose.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The well trained and experience enumerators and the willingness to participate in the survey resulted in a total of 380 (return rate = 97.0%) valid questionnaires were utilized for the data analysis. There were 112 domestic respondents while the remaining 268 respondents were from overseas (international). Table 3 presents the findings based on trip related variables. The result showed that majority of the domestic respondent (39.3%) chose diving as the main leisure activity they did in Semporna while scuba diving (27.7%) and snorkelling (22.3%) are the another two main activities. Only few respondents mentioned that they travelled to marine protected areas, rural livelihood and ethnic minorities, cultural event and others. Conversely, the top three motivations of international tourists travelled to Semporna are scuba diving, snorkelling and holiday/vacation. However, none of the international respondents visit rural livelihood and ethnic minorities and others.

Majority of the respondents from domestic and international are first timer, with over 90.0% of international respondents travelled to Semporna for the first time while the remaining been to Semporna for 2-5 times. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents (60.7%) are first timers while approximately 30.0% been to Semporna for 2 to 3 times while the remaining 10.0% been more than 4 times. The findings reported that majority of the domestic respondents (63.0%) stayed between 1 to 3 day in Semporna; 37.0% stayed from 4 to 6 days and none stayed more than 7 days. In contrast, majority of the international respondents (41.0%) stayed between 1 to 3 days; 40.0% stayed from 4 to 6 days and the remaining proportion (20.0%) stayed more than 7 days.

Respondents were asked how they arrived at Semporna, majority of the domestic tourists (62.5%) mentioned they came by taxi and others while only a small

Table 3: Comparison between domestic and international tourists based on trip related variables

	Domestic (n=112)	Percentage (%)	International (n=268)	Percentage (%)
<b>Purpose of visit</b>				
Marine protected areas	1	0.9	6	2.2
Scuba diving	31	27.7	146	54.5
Snorkelling	25	22.3	56	20.9
Rural livelihood and ethnic minorities	1	0.9	0	0
Honeymoon	1	0.9	4	1.5
Holiday/vacation	44	39.3	53	19.8
Visit family and friends	4	3.6	3	1.1
Others	5	4.5	0	0
<b>First/repeat</b>				
1	68	60.7	249	92.9
3-Feb	33	29.5	17	6.3
5-Apr	5	4.5	2	0.7
≥5	6	5.4	0	0
<b>Mode of transport</b>				
By taxi	34	30.4	91	34
By rental car	24	21.4	8	3
By bus (including tour bus)	18	16.1	104	38.8
Others	36	32.1	65	24.3
<b>Length of stay</b>				
3-Jan	71	63.4	106	39.6
6-Apr	41	36.6	109	40.7
≥7	4	0	53	19.8
<b>Type of accommodation</b>				
Hotel	25	22.3	45	16.8
Budget hotel/guest house	64	57.1	165	61.6
Luxury resort	14	12.5	57	21.3
Staying at friends/relative house	9	8	1	0.4
<b>Party size</b>				
1	8	7.1	40	14.9
3-Feb	46	41.1	185	69
5-Apr	27	24.1	34	12.7
≥6	31	27.7	9	3.4
<b>Source of information</b>				
Word of mouths	47	28	124	37.5
Travel agents	13	7.7	18	5.4
Magazine/Newspapers	28	16.7	26	7.9
Electronic media (TV, internet)	61	36.3	138	41.7
Tourism fair	10	6	7	2.1
Others	9	5.4	18	5.4

portion came by bus (16.1%). However, international tourists demonstrated slightly different in choosing mode of transport. Approximately 73.0% of the international tourists chose taxi and bus as preferred transport. The rest (n=73) said they came either by rental car or others. While in Semporna, respondents stay in different kinds of accommodation. For instance, over half (57.1%) domestic respondents said they were on budget lodging. Another 34.8% stated that they occupied at the hotel and luxury resorts, while only about 8.0% claimed they stay at friends and relative house. Similar to domestic tourists, a large

number of international tourists (69.0%) chose budget lodging while another 38.1% stayed at the hotel and luxury resorts while only one respondent stayed at friends and relative house.

In term of party size, only 7.1% of domestic respondents travelled alone and approximately 41.0% travelled with 2 to 3 companion while the remaining 52.0% travelled with more than 4 companions. Nevertheless, about 15.0% of international respondents travelled alone and 69.0% travelled with 2 to 3 companions while the remaining travelled with more than 4

Table 4: Comparison between domestic and international tourists based on socio demographic characteristics

	Domestic	International		Domestic	International
Gender			Education level		
Male	42.90%	45.90%	Primary school	0.90%	1.50%
Female	57.10%	54.10%	High school	15.20%	7.50%
			Diploma	28.60%	10.10%
			Bachelor degree	45.50%	54.90%
			Postgraduate	8.00%	24.60%
			Others	1.80%	1.50%
Marital status			Occupation		
Single	42.00%	64.20%	Government servant	33.00%	13.10%
Married	54.50%	35.40%	Self-employed	8.90%	14.20%
Divorced/separated	3.60%	0.40%	Private sector employee	36.60%	44.00%
			Student	12.50%	13.10%
			Unemployed	3.60%	6.00%
			Retiree	1.80%	0.40%
			Others	3.60%	9.30%
Age group			Income		
18 or less	5.40%	0.40%	<RM1000	12.50%	6.30%
19 - 30	40.20%	56.30%	RM1001 – RM3000	28.60%	12.70%
31 - 40	24.10%	34.00%	RM3001 – RM6000	24.10%	13.80%
41 - 50	20.50%	6.00%	RM6001 – RM9000	8.90%	9.70%
51 or older	5.40%	1.50%	RM9001 – RM12000	4.50%	6.30%
Not answer	4.50%	1.90%	> RM12001	1.80%	20.90%
			Not answer	19.60%	30.20%

companions. A significant proportion (36.3%) of domestic respondents claimed they learnt about Semporna through electronic media (TV, internet) while about 28.0% learnt about Semporna as a place to visit from word of mouths. The remaining (35.8%) were travel agents, magazine/newspapers, tourism fair and others. International respondents pose similar results like domestic respondents, where 41.7% claimed they learnt about Semporna by electronic media while 37.5% learnt from word of mouths. The survey found that less than 20.8% of the international respondents learnt about Semporna from tourism fairs and others. It is interesting to note that respondents quoted ‘Lonely Planet’ as others information.

Table 4 illustrates a demographic profile of the respondents. Majority of domestic respondents identified themselves as female (57.0%) and 43.0% as male. Also, there were more female (54%) than male (46.0%) for international respondents. The findings also revealed that domestic respondents were more likely to be married (54.5%) than non-married (45.5%) while international respondents were more likely to be non-married (64.6%) than married (35.4%). For some of the respondents, age is a sensitive issue. However, only 10 respondents did not report their age. Domestic respondents were predominantly aged between 19 and 30 (40.2%), following by aged between 31 and 40 (24.1%). There was only about 5.0% more than 51 years old. Also, international

respondents were predominantly aged between 19 and 30 (56.3%), following by aged between 31 and 40 (34.0%). There was only one respondent reported his/her age 18 or less and four reported age 51 or older. In sum, most respondents had at least university graduates or above only a small proportion were high school leavers. About 29.0% of the domestic respondents had diploma education level, while 53.5% had a degree or above education level. Roughly 80.0% of the international respondents had a degree or above education level. There was only one domestic respondent and four international respondents had attended only elementary school.

More than half of both domestic and international respondents were professionals in different disciplines. For example, about 36.6% domestic respondents and 44.0% international respondents worked in private sectors. On the other hand, 33.0% domestic respondents and 13.1% international respondents were in government work and nearly about 9.0% domestic respondents and 14.2% international respondents were self-employed. Fourteen domestic and thirty five international respondents identified themselves as student. Less than two domestic respondents and one international tourist were retired and the remaining four domestic and sixteen international respondents has no job. Approximately 27.0% respondents did not report their income.

Table 5: Comparison between domestic and international tourists based on expenditure groups

Categories	Domestic	Percentage (%)	International	Percentage(%)
<b>Accommodation</b>				
RM1-RM750	98	87.5	205	76.5
RM751-RM1500	3	2.7	40	14.9
RM1501-RM2250	1	0.9	19	7.1
>RM2251	0	0	3	1.1
Not answer	10	8.9	1	0.4
<b>Foods and beverages</b>				
RM1-RM500	103	92	183	68.3
RM501-RM1000	6	5.4	55	20.5
RM1001-RM1500	3	2.7	25	9.3
>RM1501	0	0	5	1.9
<b>Transportation</b>				
RM1-RM250	55	49.1	160	59.7
RM251-RM500	29	25.9	65	24.3
RM501-RM750	13	11.6	32	11.9
>RM751	11	9.8	5	1.9
Not answer	4	3.6	6	2.2
<b>Diving activities</b>				
RM1-RM500	20	17.9	62	23.1
RM501-RM1000	13	11.6	33	12.3
RM1001-RM1500	8	7.1	22	8.2
>RM1501	9	8	43	16
Not answer	62	55.4	108	40.3
<b>Others</b>				
RM1-RM125	43	38.4	104	38.8
RM126-RM250	14	12.5	12	4.5
>RM251	14	12.5	8	3
Not answer	41	36.6	144	53.7
<b>Total</b>				
RM1-RM1500	75	67	120	44.8
RM1501-RM3000	30	26.8	96	35.8
RM3001-RM4500	7	6.3	44	16.4
>RM4501	0	0	8	3

About 13.0% of domestic respondents and only 6.3% international respondents earned less than RM1000. Over half (53.0%) domestic respondents had monthly earnings between RM1001-RM6000, about 13.0% earned between RM6001-RM12000 and only a small portion (1.8%) earned more than RM120001. About 30.0% of international respondents did not report their income. Only a few (6.0%) earned less than RM1000 while majority of them (26.5%) earned between RM1001-RM6000 and about 21.0% earned more than RM12001. Compared with the domestic visitors, the monthly earnings of foreign visitors were about 2.5 times higher.

Roughly 3.0% respondents (n=11) did not report expenditure on accommodation. Both domestic and international respondents spent similar expenditure pattern on accommodation, with majority of domestic respondents (87.5%) and international respondents (76.5%) spent between RM1-RM750. However, none of the domestic respondent spent more than RM2251 while there were three international respondents spent more than RM2251. Similar to accommodation group, majority of

domestic respondents (92.0%) and international respondents (68.3%) spent between RM1-RM500 for foods and beverages. Less than 10.0% of domestic tourists and about 30.0% of international paid between RM501 to RM1500. None of the domestic respondent spent more than RM1501 while there were only five international respondents spent more than RM1501. In total, only 2.6% did not pay for transportation. About half of both domestic (49.1%) and over 60.0% of international respondents spent between RM1-RM250. In addition, 37.5% domestic respondents and 36.2% international respondents spent between RM251-RM750 while the remaining spent more than RM750. Since most of the respondents came for diving, but about 47.0% of respondents did not report their expenditure on diving services. More than half (55.4%) domestic respondents and 40.3% of international respondents did not pay for diving service. Again, a large number of respondents from international and domestic spent between RM1-RM1000 on diving activities. It is interesting that international respondents were willing to spend more than domestic

Table 6: Comparison between domestic and international tourists based on average expenditure

Categories	Domestic	International
Accommodation	RM294(n=102)	RM562 (n=268)
Foods and beverages	RM234 (n=102)	RM454 (n=268)
Diving activities	RM595 (n=70)	RM1244 (n=159)
Transport	RM341 (n=112)	RM276 (n=268)
Other	RM154 (n=71)	RM81 (n=124)
Total	RM1314 (n=112)	RM1927 (n=268)

Table 7: Summary of the comparison between domestic and international tourists

	Domestic tourist	International tourist
Travel motivation	Holiday	Scuba diving
First/ Repeat	61% first time/39% repeat	93% first time/7% repeat
Mode of transport	Taxi	Bus
Accommodation type	Budget lodging	Budget lodging
Length of stay	3.2 nights	4.7 nights
Party size	5.9	2.5
Travel companion	Prefer to travel with friends and spouse	Prefer to travel with friends and spouse
Source of information	Electronic media & words of mouth	Electronic media & words of mouth
Purchase of package tour	69%	46%
Gender	More female than male	More female than male
Marital status	Married	Single
Age	Majority age 19-40	Majority age 19-40
Education	Bachelor degree or above	Bachelor degree or above
Occupation	Private employees & government servants	Private employee and self-employed
Income	Average RM3060	Average RM7535
Expenditure	Average RM1311	Average RM1927

respondents since there were 43 respondents reported expenditure more than RM1501. Compare to domestic respondents, over half (53.7%) of international respondents did not pay for others expenditure. Most of the respondents spent between RM1-RM250 and only fourteen domestic respondents and eight international respondents spent more than RM251.

Table 5 compares the expenditure of domestic and international tourists. Looking at the total expenditure in Semporna, expenditure between RM1-RM1500 was still the dominant category for both groups. Domestic respondents spent less than international respondents across all expenditure categories, where over half (67.0%) of them paid between RM1-RM1500 while the rest spent between RM1501 to RM4500. However, none of them spent more than RM4501. On the other hand, despite there were more international respondents spent between RM1-RM1500, over half (52.2%) were willing to spent more than RM1501.

Table 6 outlines the comparison of average expenditure categories by domestic and international tourists. Overall, international respondent spent more on accommodation, foods and beverages, diving activities and total expenditures except for transport and other expenditures. Domestic respondents spent average less RM268 than international respondents on

accommodation. In addition, international respondents spent almost 2 times than domestic respondents on foods and beverages and diving activities. In addition, domestic tourists spent average RM65 and RM73 more than international respondents on transport and other expenditure, respectively. In term of total expenditure, domestic respondents spent average RM1314, an average RM613 less compare to international respondents.

Finally, the summary of the comparison between domestic and international tourists is presented in Table 7.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Being a world class diving destination with a number of well-established tourism attractions; Semporna attracts large number of international tourism market [25]. Identifying who are the tourists, the behaviours, the characteristics and the expenditures are vital for tourism planning. This paper offers tourism stakeholders and policy makers with a resource that detail the behaviour, characteristics and expenditure of tourists visiting Semporna for future tourism development.

A number of conclusions can be reached from the results presented in this paper. Nearly 70.0% the people visiting Semporna are foreigners. The majority are young

to middle-aged adults with far fewer older people. Many are on scuba diving and vacation and are visiting for the first time. In this paper, an analysis was made to explore the different in tourist expenditure between domestic and international tourists. The mean values show that, on average, international tourists spent more than domestic tourists for all types of expenditure, except for transport and others expenditure. The absence of domestic visitors in the RM3060 monthly income group merits mention here. In Malaysia, people in this income category would be described as 'middle income' with a relatively higher standard of living and possibly some extra income to spend on leisure. Therefore, the potential of domestic tourists should not be neglected. The study is expected to help the tourism development in Semporna by studying the tourist's profile and their expenditures.

The results recommend a number of potential marketing strategies. This study facilitates destination marketers and local authorities to get substantial information regarding to tourist's expenditure and understand particular tourist segments in enhancing the economic development of the area. The results show that the main motivation for domestic tourists is holiday while international tourists prefer scuba diving. This might due to the short stay (3.2 nights) of domestic tourists compare to international tourists (4.7 nights). Local operators should extend the length of stay as discussed in one of the study conducted in Malaysia [28] on both tourist groups by diversifying the tourism products. Other than the marine managerial policies suggested by several researchers [29-32] the local authorities (e.g. Sabah Parks, district office of Semporna) should promote the potential tourism activities, such as cultural events [33-34], proboscis monkey cruise and hiking.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This work/research was partially funded by Ministry of Education's (Malaysia) Long Term Grant Scheme (LRGS) Programme [Reference No.: JPT.S(BPKI)2000/09/01/015Jld.4(67)].

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