

## Application of Leiper's Tourist Attraction System to Small-Scale Sport Event Tourism in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** There is a lack of literature on sport tourists attending small-scale sport events and their travel behaviors in Malaysia. This lack of data makes it difficult for tourism authorities in to implement effective market segmentation and targeting. Thus it is necessary to conduct a study to explore the potential of small-scale sporting event as tourist attraction in Malaysia using Leiper's (1990) tourist attraction system as framework. A study is conducted on participants and spectators attending a mountain bike race and motor cross events in Lake Kenyir Malaysia. Data were collected quantitatively from 400 subjects using the Leisure Motivation Scale developed by Ragheb and Beard (1983). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression. Visitors to sport event at Lake Kenyir fall into three categories: (1) sport excursionist, (2) active sport tourist and (3) passive sport tourists and the majority of the respondents (81.75%) were sport tourists. The results indicate factors such as competence mastery and intellectual factors are significant variables which motivate people to seek active sport-oriented vacations. Passive sport tourists are motivated by social factors and the need to escape from over stimulating situations. This study confirmed the usefulness of Leiper's tourist attraction theory in sport tourism.

**Key words:** Sport tourism • Tourist attraction system • Travel motivations • Tourist profiles

### INTRODUCTION

Researchers have recognized that people have been traveling to participate in sport or watch sports for centuries [1,2]. (Gibson, Attle and Yiannakis, 1998; Douvis, Yusof, and Douvis, 1998). In Malaysia, sport tourism has increased in popularity and it is becoming an important economic activity. The growth in sport tourism has been attributed to the increase in the number of sporting events held worldwide [3] (Getz, 2003) and aided by improvement in transportation and advances in information technology. Other factors such as increased awareness of the importance of healthier lifestyles [4] (Standeven and DeKnop, 1999), changes in sociodemographic factors marked by a rising population of single adults and active aging populations [5] (Sung, 2004) and attempts to escape from routine [6] (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie and Pomfret, 2003) have also contributed to the popularity of sport tourism.

One theory that can be used as a framework to understand how sport event may function as a tourist

attraction is Leiper's tourist attraction system [7]. According to Leiper, a tourist attraction is "a system comprising of three elements: a tourist or human element, a nucleus or central element and a marker or informative element. A tourist attraction comes into existence when the three elements are connected"[7]. The first element consists of people travelling away from home in search for satisfying leisure related activities. In the sporting context, the tourist or human element is diverse and varied and may include spectator and participant-based sport events. The second component of Leiper's tourist attraction system is the nucleus or the site of a sport event. Leiper described the nucleus as any characteristic of a destination that a tourist considers visiting or actually visits and is a place where a tourist experience is created, experienced and consumed. The nucleus may also be described in terms of an attraction hierarchy where some sport events may be more important than others in terms of influencing the decision to travel. The final element of the attraction systems consists or markers. Leiper described a marker as "items of information, about

any phenomenon that is a potential nuclear element in a tourist attraction” [7]. Markers can also take the form of news item or publicity regarding a competition and commercial activities of sponsors.

Most of the literature on sport event tourism has tended to focus on mega sporting events such as the Olympic Games or World Cup [8] (Gibson, 2002) at the expense of small-scale sport events. While some of the literature has characterized the impacts of mega sport events as positive [9] (Gratton, Shibli and Dobson, 2000), others have pointed out that mega sporting events frequently results in huge debts for host communities [10] (Whitson and Macintosh, 1993), corrupt practices during the bidding process [11] (Jennings, 1996) and displacement of local residents [12] (Hiller, 1998). Given the problems associated with mega events, Higham suggests that small-scale sport events can produce more positive impacts for host communities [13]. Small scale sport events include regular season sporting competitions in a community such as soccer, rugby or ice-hockey or adventure/outdoor events such as cyclethon or skiing. Higham explained small-scale sport events require reduced investment of funds, usually operate within existing infrastructure and are more manageable in terms of crowding and congestion compared to mega sport events.

**Purpose of Study:** The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of a small-scale sport event as tourist attraction in Malaysia using Leiper’s tourist attraction system as framework. The study seeks to address the following research objectives:

- To examine the demographic characteristics and motives of sport tourists (tourist element) attending a small scale sport event in Lake Kenyir.
- To determine the sport tourist preferred destination attributes (nucleus element).
- To examine sport tourist source of information about a small scale sport event in Lake Kenyir (marker element).

### **Methodology**

**Study Site:** The study site was a mountain-bike and motor-cross event in Lake Kenyir, Malaysia. Located in the eastern state of Terengganu, Lake Kenyir is the largest man-made lake in South East Asia. The lake covers an area of 260,000 hectares and serves as another gateway to Malaysia’s National Park. Consisting of about 340 islands which were once hilltops and highlands, more than 14 waterfalls, numerous rapids and rivers, Lake

Kenyir is being showcased and promoted as a sport tourist destination. In addition, the lake’s outdoor and recreation opportunities, which include forest reserves, forest recreation areas, mountain ranges, wildlife and natural landscapes, are becoming popular tourist attractions. Lake Kenyir has hosted several sporting events such as the Kenyir Mountain Bike Challenge, the Kenyir Regatta and the traditional long-boat race, Kenyir Motocross Championship, Kenyir Lake Triathlon, Kenyir 4X4 Challenge and Kenyir Treasure Hunt.

**Sample:** A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to tourists attending a mountain bike race and motor cross event in Lake Kenyir in Malaysia. Out of the 1,000 that were given the surveys, a total of 400 respondents participated in the study. The majority of the respondents were males (59.6) and aged between 15-55 years (mean=29.7 years). With regard to ethnicity, about one-third of the respondents were Malays (36.5%) and the majority was foreign ethnic groups (outside Malaysia). As expected, most of the respondents were foreigners, with the majority coming from ASEAN countries (43%). Majority of the subjects were single and never married (52%).

**Instrument:** The survey instrument was divided into several different sections. The first section asked respondents whether they are: (1) non-tourist (2) active sport tourist and (3) passive sport tourist. In this section, a tourist is identified as a person who spends more than 24 hours from home for the purpose of watching (passive sport tourist) or taking part (active sport tourists) in events at Lake Kenyir. Section two examines the demographic element of Leiper’s tourist attraction system. Section three consists of a shortened version of the Leisure Motivation Scale developed by Ragheb and Beard [14] measuring the following dimensions of travel motivations: intellectual (the extent to which an individual is motivated to travel to be involved in activities such as exploring, discovering or creating), social (the extent to which an individual travels because of the need for friendship and interpersonal relationships), competence-mastery (the extent to which an individual engages in tourism activities that is challenging, achievement-oriented or competitive in nature) and stimulus-avoidance (the extent to which an individual needs to escape and get away from over-stimulating situations). The fourth part of the instrument measures destination attributes or Leiper’s nucleus element. It consists of a 23 pair semantic differential scale which measures various tourist destination attributes developed by Attle [15].

The fifth section of the instrument contains several socio-demographic questions. The final part of the instrument examine Leiper's marker element where subjects were asked their source of information on the sport events at Lake Kenyir

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were analyzed using SPSSx frequencies, correlations, t-test, ANOVA, stepwise regression and logistic regression. In the first analysis, data were analyzed for demographic characteristics according to type of sport tourists (active vs. passive). Sport tourists in this study represent the human element in Leiper's attraction system. They are the people who travel to Lake Kenyir in pursuit of leisure. In this study, visitors to sport event at Lake Kenyir fall into three categories: (1) sport excursionist, (2) active sport tourist and (3) passive sport tourists. The majority of the respondents (81.75%) were sport tourists and from this figure, a substantial number (n=163, 40.75%) were tourists who participated in the mountain bike and motor cross events at Lake Kenyir. With respect to demographic factors, a significant number of sport tourists at Lake Kenyir were from foreign countries (n=197, 49.25%). Most sport tourists in this study were males (n=219, 54.75%) and single (n=207, 51.75%). The sport tourists tend to travel more than 400km (73.2%), spent more than 7 days (57.5%) at Lake Kenyir and the most popular mode of transportation was the airplane (23%) Besides engaging in sport-related activities while on vacation, the extended length of stay suggests sport tourists also participated in other non-sporting activities such as sightseeing, visiting historic sites and shopping. This findings suggest that there might be some overlap or similarities between sport tourism with other tourist roles such as the organized mass tourist or the educational mass tourist.

Stepwise regressions were performed to examine the factors which motivate active and sport tourists to attend the small scale sport events at Lake Kenyir. The results (Table 1) indicate that competence-mastery contributes 54% of the variance in the dependent variables for active sport tourist followed by intellectual motives. The results suggest the need to achieve, master, challenge and compete played a major role in motivating active sport tourists to participate in sport events at Lake Kenyir. It is also interesting to note that intellectual motive is also statistically significant. This suggests factors such as exploring new outdoor adventure, discovering new places or learning new sports skills are also important motivators

Table 1: Stepwise Regression of Active Sport Tourists Motives

Variables	B	Sig	Increm R2
mastery	0.956	.001	0.541
Intellectual	0.162	.004	0.01

R-square = 0.551

Adjusted R-square = 0.549

Table 2: Stepwise Regression of Passive Sport Tourists Motives

Variables	B	Sig	Increm R2
mastery	0.546	.001	0.344
social	0.433	.001	0.031
stimulus avoidance	-0.249	.001	0.041

R-square = 0.416

Adjusted R-square = 0.412

Table 3: Active Sport Tourists preferred destination attributes using logistic regression

Attribute	Coefficient (B)	Sig. level
developed	0.601	.002
coastal	-0.389	.040
familiar	0.533	.002
hot	0.440	.018
family	-0.687	.001
safe	-0.702	.001
active	1.226	.001
natural	-0.398	.026
modern	0.386	.029

for active sport tourists to participate in the events at Lake Kenyir. Table 2 shows the results for passive sport tourists. Competence-mastery contributes the most variance (34%) in the dependent variable followed by the dimension of social (3%) and stimulus-avoidance (4%). The primary motivation for passive sport tourists at Lake Kenyir is to be involved in vacation activities that involve some form of competition. Even though passive sport tourists might not be a participant in an activity, their motivations are similar to a committed soccer fan that regularly travels to watch their team play. As for the social and stimulus avoidance factors, the results suggest passive sport tourists also travel to Lake Kenyir because of the need for friendship and the need to escape and get away from over-stimulating situations.

The second component of Leiper's tourist attraction system is the nucleus or the site of a sport event. Leiper described the nucleus as any characteristic of a destination that a tourist considers visiting or actually visits and is a place where a tourist experience is created, experienced and consumed. In the context of this study, logistic regressions were performed to determine tourist preferred destination attributes. The results (Table 3) showed positive coefficient for the following attributes: developed, familiar, hot, active and modern.

Table 4: Passive Sport Tourists preferred destination attributes using logistic regression

Attribute	Coefficient (B)	Sig. level
familiar	0.795	.001
expensive	-0.410	.048
hot	0.764	.001
domestic	-0.456	.001
family	-0.275	.049
indoors	-0.402	.009
urban	0.391	.031
natural	-0.487	.006

Table 5: Source of information about the small scale sport events in Lake Kenyir

	Active	Passive
Media advertisements	26	26
Newspaper articles	17	26
Brochures and leaflets	15	5
Travel guidebooks	5	3
Tourism Malaysia publications	20	20
Word of mouth	70	84

This suggests that Active Sport Tourists prefer tourist destination which are modern and developed in a hot and sunny environment (weather) with familiar surroundings. On the other hand, the negative coefficient for coastal, family, safe and natural suggests active sport tourists prefer destinations which are inland with risky and adult-oriented activities in a man-made surroundings. Passive sport tourists (Table 4) on the other hand prefer destinations which are familiar in a hot and sunny environment but in an urban surroundings. The negative coefficients for expensive, domestic, family, indoors and natural suggest passive sport tourists prefer foreign destinations which are cheap with an outdoor and adult oriented type of activities but in a man-made surroundings.

Table 5 reports the source of information about the small scale sport events in Lake Kenyir for both active and passive sport tourists. It is interesting to note that word of mouth from friends and relatives was the main source of information for both active (n=70, 49.1%) and passive sport tourists (n=84, 51.3%). Leiper described a marker as “items of information, about any phenomenon that is a potential nuclear element in a tourist attraction” [7]. In the sporting context, attraction markers is diverse and varied and may be positioned consciously such as advertisements about visitors involvement in a destination specific event; or unconsciously in the form

of live broadcasts of a sporting event. The function of a marker is to inform and encourage travelers to attend sport events and to connect the tourist with the nuclear elements of a potential sport attraction that is being sought for satisfying leisure experience. While a variety of promotional tools and media sources may be used to emphasize and communicate the uniqueness of the events at Lake Kenyir, the results of this study highlight the importance of positive word of mouth from friends and family members. Positive word of mouth not only provides information about Lake Kenyir, it may also improve the event and destination’s reputation and help create an image of a place where tourists should visit or for organizers to host more events. More importantly, positive event experiences may promote and generate future tourist activity where people who attend the event may return with other friends and family members.

Using Leiper’s tourist attraction system as framework, this study conceptualized small scale sport event as tourist attraction through a unique interaction between tourist, events and place. This study examined how this interaction motivate tourist behavior in relation to a variety of sport tourist profiles. The final conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that sport events are not just for big cities and much benefit can also be realized through small amateur sporting events similar to hosting a mega sporting event. More importantly, the small scale sport events at Lake Kenyir are an effective means of securing economic benefits in a rural community that might have limited attractiveness otherwise. However, we know little of the social, environmental and economic impact of small scale sport events in Malaysia. The lack of knowledge on these matters warrants additional and further research.

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