
MANAGING BEACH TOURISM IN LANGKAWI GEOPARK: FROM THE INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Beach tourism is one of the major attractions in tourism development in many parts around the world. While there are numerous developmental approaches that often destinations, managers and planners seek as alternatives, revitalizing these areas within the context of experience economy and beach management is one of the recent challenging tasks. One example is the development of Cenang Beach of Langkawi Island that aims at providing experiences that meet the international tourists who visited the Geopark Langkawi. This article, therefore, aims to explore on the changing beach tourism within the context of experience economy from the tourists' perspective and beach management. The findings show that the beach tourism has provided more international-oriented experiences compared to local authentic experiences. In conclusion, inclusive beach management should be enhanced in managing Cenang Beach, making the 'construct of experience economy' be easily transformed into beach tourism.

Key words: Beach tourism, Experience economy, Beach Management, Langkawi Geopark

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1. INTRODUCTION

Beaches have long served as a source of inspiration, health, beauty, fun, relaxation, entertainment and recreation [1, 2, 3]. Today, beach tourism is one of the main attractions in many coastal countries. Besides dominating the '3 S' attraction, the beaches offer exciting experiences which likely to influence repeated visitations. In fact, the presence of quality beaches is one of the most important factors in determining preferences for holidays or vacation destinations [4, 5]. Beaches and near shore waters offer opportunities in numerous

soft and adventure activities, including sunbathing, relaxing, swimming, surfing, yachting, fishing, jet skiing and sun set watching. Beaches, today, are also significant in the economics of coastal regions and countries [6, 7]. On the international scale, tourist arrivals to these attractions accounted more than other attractions[8].

In Malaysia, beach tourism has extensively been attracting local and international tourists as well as visitors or day trippers [9, 10, 11]. Beach tourism has indeed a long history, with some behavioral trend and developmental changes have influence the country's tourism industry. It can be tracked ever since its introduction and exploration of tourism during the British era until the recent beach tourism development. During those early days, it was only the elite tourists who have the privileges to experience beautiful and scenic beaches. The Feringgi Beaches in Penang and Tanjung Tuan Beach in Port Dickson were the exemplars. In fact, after more than five decades, beach destinations have been developed and transformed into various types, scales and concepts, ranging from an open or public beach to a thematic resort beach; villas and holiday villas, marinas and water chalets. Of recent tourism development, the Riviera concept was initiated to enhance beach tourism, island, straits and riverine tourism in Malaysia.

One of the attractive beaches in the country is the Cenang Beach, which is located in the Island of Langkawi. Endorsed as the pioneer of the Malaysian Geopark in 2007, all beaches of the island are to be carefully planned and developed with facilities that meet the sustainable tourism standards. However, as the beach tourism is one of the competitive destinations, ensuring a real beach experience of the island tourism is not without a challenge. Cenang Beach has a special revitalized plan under the Langkawi Blue Print 2015. It sets a vision to become the premier public beach for family fun in Asia. Six strategies have been outlined in the blueprint: incorporating upgrading of facilities to efforts in improving sanitation and safety and creating a new waterfront would ease Pantai Cenang to achieve its targets in 2015.

On the other hand, a scenario analysis showed that the beach offers a wide range of international-local experiences comprising "Arabic; Mexican and Thailand to local authentic beach activities and services. The beach is also reviewed as the top beach destination in the social media, making it an influential attraction of Langkawi. While this trend is positive in nature, it raises fundamental questions that need to be uncovered in Pantai Cenang: Are these experiences that the tourists seek for when they visited this popular beach? Are the changes bringing an implication to beach management? While these issues are crucial to the context of experience economy [12] and in the context of the revitalized Cenang experiences as stated in the Langkawi Blue Print (2010-2015) [13], there is no attempt in investigating it empirically, especially from the lens of the international beach users and beach management needs. This article, therefore, aims to analyse the international tourists' responses on what signifies the provision of the beach tourism with respect to the experience economy and implication to beach management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Beach Tourism and Beach Management

Studies on beach tourism and beach management have been explored in various issues and locations. From the literature reviews, three major themes have emerged significantly. Firstly, studies on the beach tourist or beach users' behaviors. Using the coastal tourist interchangeable with the beach tourist, demographic, motivation, activities and satisfaction remain the focus of behavioral studies. Beach's natural properties remain the attraction and holiday purposes are the principal reason for visitation [14]. Beach quality does influence people visit. In fact, good weather is more influential than the peak season while crowding is the factor than the visitor avoided. Secondly, studies are centered towards valuing the beach

tourism resources and attraction. The social, economic and multi-modal approaches were introduced in valuing the beach resources. In fact, crowding [15], image of beach attraction and beach quality had a value in determining vacation destination and beach visits [16, 17]. Besides physical factors, social values attributed to the natural setting, ocean beaches and the coast are also emphasized [18]. Thirdly, studies that focused on the beach sustainability, impacts and introduction of man and natural approaches on beach management and host community [19, 20]. These include the blue flag influences on beach attraction, coastal development, climate change and competitive beach positioning [21, 22].

In Malaysia, beach tourism is rather a new research area, although their existences as tourism sites have been recognized since decades. The existing literatures explore topics on the visitors' or users' trends, impact of tourism and beach/coastal resources, crowding factor, cleanliness and debris, and beach quality [23, 24]. On sustainability concern, studies focus on the viability of the integrated coastal zone planning, shoreline management plan and seaside resort rejuvenation [25]. In area studies of Langkawi especially, themes concerning the island's tourism sustainability, impacts, environmental and social change, tourist satisfaction, crowding and carrying capacity, and behaviors as well as Geopark influences on the local community; economic and geological resources have been ventured [26].

2.2. Beach Tourism and Experience Economy

In tourism, the emergence of the experience economy has spawned a plethora of studies dedicated to the understanding of tourist experiences and tourism products/experiences. . From these studies, the influence of experience economy has resulted tourists seeking for affective memories, sensation and symbolism, which combine, will enable a holistic and long lasting personal experience. They are in search of experiences that 'dazzle their senses', 'engage them personally', 'touch their hearts' and 'stimulate their minds' [27, 28], whilst indulging in 'fantasies, feelings and fun' [29, 30, 31].

According to Pine and Gilmore [32], tourists undergo four 'realms' of experience, which are differentiated in terms of the level of involvement and participation. The four dimensions are: entertainment; education; esthetics and escapism. The entertainment and esthetics dimensions entail 'passive participation', and the consumer does not affect or influence the experiential outcome. In contrast, the education and escapism dimensions involve 'active participation' whereby consumers play a key part in their subsequent experience. Each of the four dimensions, ultimately, combines to form the optimal consumer/ tourist experience.

In the context of beach tourism, the four realms of experience are explained as follows: Educational: Being involved in educational experience. In this respect an education experience will engage the beach tourist to 'learn something new'. The experience is active and absorptive, in other words, tourists play a vital role in co-determining their experience. They appreciate the learning experience in various activities, spontaneous or programmed, especially at the public space and with the locals.

Escapism: Diverging to a new self. An escapist experience is defined as the extent to which an individual is completely engrossed and absorbed in the activity. Escapist experiences are highly immersive and require active participation. In the context of beach tourism, the escapist had an extraordinary experience from the ordinary or past beach travel or holidays. In fact, beach tourism provides numerous escapist experiences, such as 'escape aids, problem solvers, suppliers of strength, energy, new lifeblood and happiness', psychological escape from the daily routine of life' and to enjoy a life of privilege to 'escape' the daily routine and to be in a different world [33].

Entertainment: Being Entertained. Entertainment is probably one of the oldest forms of experience and usually involves a passive involvement of the individual. Considering the fact

that in experience economy, product is now a 'stage' to 'delight and entertain patrons', beach tourism follows similar mechanism. In essence, entertainment remains an essential component of the beach tourism. This means that, with diverse range of beach sector, be it as recreational or other subsectors including accommodation, food and shopping, beach tourists will have all ways to enjoy entertainment during their stay/visit.

Aesthetics: Indulged in Environment. The esthetics dimension refers to visitors' interpretation of the physical environment around them. Some authors classified physical environment in terms of three dimensions: 'ambient conditions'; 'spatial layout and functionality'; and 'signs, symbols and artifacts' and recognize the role of aesthetics in consumer behavior, decision making and service evaluations. Looking into the esthetics in the context of the beach tourism, esthetics can be experienced through the physical environment as well as the hospitality aspects, including during dining, shopping and cultural shows. All in all, the beach tourists can appreciate and expressed their experience that the beach tourism offers.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in November 2014 at Pantai Cenang, Langkawi. Renowned as one of the most popular beaches in Malaysia; Pantai Cenang has its own attraction and reputation. Its 2.2 km sandy wide beach is among the longest beach in the country. In terms of planning and development, Pantai Cenang has a special revitalizing plan outlined in the Langkawi Blueprint 2015. There are six strategies that set up its vision to become a premier beach for the family fun in Asia, comprising the followings: improve sanitation and safety, create a new waterfront, preserve and beautify Kampung Tanjung Mali and farm lands, improve vehicle and pedestrian mobility and upgrade existing and develop new commercial areas. The Cenang Beach houses many attractions ranging from the accommodation sector, food and gastronomy to a simply beach activity, night life and international events. It is highly accessible from several routes, and its location from the airport only needs 10 minutes to drive.

3.1. International Tourist Survey, Research Design and Data Analysis

The study employs both secondary and primary data collection with regard to answer the objectives of the study. The secondary data mostly dealt with the understanding of beach tourism and experience economy as well as past studies on the Pantai Cenang as the case study. The primary data were collected through a face to face interview conducted in November 2014; and were administrated by the authors and well trained interviewers to minimize problems with the international tourists. A convenient sampling of 230 respondents was used during the three-day intensive survey. Of the target, 200 respondents were successfully interviewed, providing 87% of the total convenient sampling. Due to a 2. 24km stretches of beach area, the survey was conducted in four cells, displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 Location of the study cell and number of respondent interviewed.

Study site: Cell of Pantai Cenang	Beach area coverage	Frequency	Percent
CELL 1	Istanbul Beach to the Underwaterworld	39	19.5
CELL 2	Beyond Underwaterworld to Sandy Beach	36	18.0
CELL 3	Beyond Sandy hotel to Grand Beach Hotel	73	36.5
CELL 4	Beyond Grand Beach Hotel to Laman Padi	52	26.0
Total		200	100.0

The questionnaire was divided into five parts, comprising section A with demographic details; section B captured tourists' activities. Section C focused on the evaluation of beach services and Section D on beach experience from the perspective of experience economy. The Final part of the questionnaire, E, was on overall experiences and recommendations for beach tourism development. Section D contains questions pertaining beach experiences, namely entertainment, education, escapism and aesthetic, were captured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 - very important to 1 not important at all. Reliability test was conducted, and Cronbach alpha was .879 for the 21 construct of beach tourism.

The data were analysed using SPSS 21, deriving beach profiles and beach activities from descriptive analysis and construct of beach tourism from the factor analysis. The following steps for factor analysis were used. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is 0.872 and the Barlett's test of sphericity (approximate chi square = 1719.542, d.f= 210.000 and sig 0.000) support the validity in the data for factor analysis. The Principal Component analysis (PCA) and Varimax rotation are then employed for extracting factors. Utilizing factors having Eigen values greater than 1 accepted into the study, four statements were dropped, and 17 statements are accepted for the analysis. The PCA shows four components explained beach tourism from the perspective of international tourists within the context of experience economy of Pantai Cenang.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Profiles of Beach Tourists and Activities

The socio-demographic profiles of the sampled tourists are briefly described. At Cenang Beach, the male/female ratio was 63% / 37%. More than 60% were single and the remaining, married and divorces are 36 % and 1.5% respectively. The age groups above 21-25 and above 25 to 35 years were dominant, making 25.5% and 40.5% of the total respondents surveyed. The country of residence showed that dominating countries was the Europe, Asia and Oceania.

The respondents were asked whether they have visited Pantai Cenang before (Table 2). A total 65% mentioned that they were the first timer or have not visited this place in the past. Only 35% mentioned 'more than twice' and 'many times' in terms of their arrival. The respondents had their family members and relatives, office mates and friends as favourable companions. Those who came alone were small in numbers. They merely agreed time spend at 1 - 3 hours for several outdoor activities, including a simple sightseeing, relaxing, vacation and water-based activities and adventure sport.

Looking into the beach activities, as displayed in Table 2, Pantai Cenang was the main attraction of their visit. The beach reputation as the best site for sun set watching was cited why they explored Cenang Beach as part of their holidaying. Among those not staying at Pantai Cenang, renting a motorcycle or bicycle is cited as a self-drive excursion within the rural ambiance of Langkawi Island.

With respect to variation of beach activities, the tourists indicate that they ventured into all types of activities. Relaxing, bathing and coastal/ beach-based activities are among their preferences. They mentioned that a relax ambiance, friendly beach boys and cheap rentals for the beach sport activities/facilities influenced them of not neglecting these experiences. Added to these man-made factors, the physical characters of the beach – wide, flat and sandy beach shore as well as tropical climatic conditions - ample of sunshine, no rain and no rough wind were cited as favourable environmental features of Pantai Cenang.

The study solicited on the respondents' visits to other places of interest. The results indicate that besides beach activities, major sites were also visited. These include island excursion, cultural visit and cable car riding which they considered a unique attraction of

Langkawi Island. While some mentioned as an 'extraordinary ride', the attraction provides tourists to experience Langkawi nature from the 'bird's eye view'.

Table 2 Beach Trips, reasons of Visit and Activities

Questions	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
How many hours you spend at Pantai Cenang	1 – 3 hrs	116	58.0
	More than 3 – 5 hrs	55	27.5
	More than 5 hrs	29	14.5
How many times have you visited PC	First time	130	65.0
	More than second times	24	12.0
	Many times	46	23.0
Activities At Pantai Cenang	Underwater World	90	45.0
	Muzium Laman Padi	54	27.0
	Bathing at Pantai Cenang	128	65.9
	Jet Ski	95	48.5
	Banana Boat	84	42.0
	Suntans	77	38.5
	Gastronomy	78	39.0
	Go Kart	45	23.2
	Shopping	130	65.0
	Health and spa	61	31.8
	Reflexology	54	27.8
	Relaxing	128	65.9
Cenang Beach as major visit	Cenang Beach	150	75.0
Other attraction	Cable Car	94	47.0
	Geopark	106	53.0
	Hardrock Cafe	77	38.6
	Kuah Town	80	40.0
	Mahsuri's Tomb	95	47.5
	Tanjung Rhu	54	27.0
	Tourist attractions	150	75.0
	Island tour	140	70.0

This study also seeks tourists' concern on quality services as beach tourism experiences, especially from the tourism providers and results showed in Table 3. From the core services, recreational, safety and hygiene, and language and communication, the results suggest that the Pantai Cenang services have had received 'high ratings' from tourists. The highest mean values of core services (4.02) revealed that quality services were derived from the accommodations, restaurants, recreation and leisure as well as shopping.

While the transportation and banking were rated at a lower order, these two core attributes for the beach tourism signaled more upgraded facilities. The second service components that the international tourists responded were the recreational services. This service was evaluated 'high' with beach and rest-shade were above-average mean values 3.80 and 4.00, while the toilet and parking facilities were only rated moderate.

Table 3 Tourist Stisfaction on The Pantai Cenang Facilities and Services

Services	Sub-sectors	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean average	Rank
Core Service	Accommodation	4.32	0.789	4.02	High
	Restaurants	4.19	0.943		
	Transport	3.74	0.778		
	Banking	3.65	0.819		
	Recreation and Leisure	4.16	0.753		
	Shopping and Souvenir Shops	4.10	0.833		
Recreational Service	Beach	4.17	0.759	3.80	High
	Rest Shades	4.02	0.802		
	Sport Activities	3.93	0.894		
	Toilet	3.51	0.827		
	Parking	3.39	0.952		
Safety and Hygiene Service	Safeguard	3.66	0.732	3.57	Moderate
	Mobile Policing	3.55	0.804		
	Walkways	3.45	0.781		
	Public space	3.55	0.785		
	Fire Prevention	3.43	0.803		
	Clinic	3.68	0.827		
	CCTV	3.36	0.829		
	Waste dispersal and Beach Cleaning	3.75	0.702		
	Clean Water supply	3.75	0.768		
Language & Communication	Internet	3.50	0.821	3.71	High
	Signage in Multi Languages	3.62	0.729		
	Brochures	3.90	0.766		
	Tourist Agencies	3.81	0.718		
	Frontlines with multi language communication skills	3.71	0.763		

Looking into safety and hygiene, the components were rated at the moderate range of 3.57. This score should be considered more seriously as these aspects are vital components of beach destination. Considering that safeguard, mobile policing, CCTV and fire prevention aids were fairly noticeable to visitors, failure of providing safe environment will erode tourists from this site. The language and communication services, however, were perceived higher than the safety and communication. In this aspect, three of the services were rated at high performances, especially with regards to brochures, tourist agencies, and frontliners.

4.2. Beach Tourism Experiences from the International Tourists' Perspectives

This study also explored what was the tourists' experience when they visited Pantai Cenang. In this study, a principal factor analysis was conducted on a 21 statements and results shown in Table 4 depict the 17 constructs of beach tourism. From the analysis, the results indicate that the beach tourists had their preferences as follows: The first factor was classified as 'Escapism', which comprised beautiful beach as great escape, fresh sea breeze, stroll freely and can do all activities.

The second factor was 'Entertainment', comprising construct of active beach activities – sea bathing, suntanned, outdoor games and little money spend. The third factor was 'Aesthetic', and this comprised public facilities which aesthetically the concern with diverse users, security and relaxing, local-global aesthetic and tolerance with the crowd. The fourth factor was the 'Education', comprising 'Playing games with the locals is an interesting

learning experience', 'nature appreciation as a meaningful learning' and 'swimming in an open sea provides educational experience'.

The results indicate that Escapism and Entertainment were the two important experiences that beach tourists seek for. Comparing this result with the beach tourism that holds the 3S attraction - the sun, sea and sand, it sheds the fact that in the context of experience economy, the traditional beach attraction is still relevant.

Overall, the four dimensions of experience economy, the escapism, entertainment, aesthetic and educations respectively were noticeable to beach tourists of Pantai Cenang. Within the realms of experience economy, the beach has been consumed as an active, exciting and experiential site more than passive activities.

4.3. Implication for Beach Management

From the results, the beach experience for the international tourist warrant inclusive beach management. They viewed their experiences at the beach are attempted not only in the provision of amenities and facilities from the private entities. The safety and hygiene as well as safety guard should be provided by the local authority who managed the beach. What have well respected in term of beach management, the tourists are aware on the authorities concern on communication among the beach facilities providers.

Although, Langkawi and Pantai Cenang were closed and experience lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic, and there are no international tourists coming in, the beach management authority should consider preparing the beach management protocols especially with regard to safety, cleanliness and security.

Table 4 Rotated Component Matrix

	Component			
	Escapism	Entertainment	Aesthetic	Education
This beautiful beach landscape is a great escape for me/us	.722			
Fresh sea breeze gives me/us choice away from busy city	.653			
I/we can stroll the beach freely which I can't get it anymore elsewhere	.648			
This is a place where I/we can do all activities	.535			
Playing beach activities is an edutainment		.766		
Sea Bathing brings enjoyment to me and all		.713		
I/ we can enjoy beach activities with little money spend		.711		
Outdoor Games at the beach is entertaining		.577		
Sunbathing is totally relaxing for me/us		.545		
The public facilities here are aesthetically concern with cultural background of users like me/us			.681	
I/ We can savour nature in a simple way of beach appreciation			.637	
I feel secure and relaxing			.617	
Gazing all way on the beach teach me of local-global aesthetic			.452	
The beach gives us high aesthetic as it has high tolerance with crowd			.448	
Playing games with the locals is an interesting learning experience				.736

Nature appreciation of Pantai Cenang is a meaningful education to me/Us				.648
Swimming in the open sea here is an educative one for me/us				.593
Eigenvalue	5.830	1.498	1.135	1.047
Variance (%)	34.293	8.812	6.677	6.158
Cumulative variance (%)	34.293	43.105	49.782	55.940
Reliability Alpha (%)	72.30	77.80	70.0	69.7
Number of items (total=17	4	5	5	3

5. CONCLUSION

This study shed some insights of the international tourists who appreciated beach tourism in the contextual of experience economy and beach management.. The beach tourists reveal the existing pattern of international arrivals to Malaysia and Langkawi. Single, educated, professionals, first timer and seeking beach experience are the emerging profiles of Pantai Cenang tourists. Although previous literatures reported that crowding influenced tourists' avoidance due to dissatisfaction on service quality, this finding suggests it is a localized experience. The beach is accepted as shared space for active activities.

Within the context of experience economy, the beach tourism provides the followings: escapism, entertaining, aesthetic and educational experiences respectively. The escapism forms the extraordinary experience which was not gained elsewhere and the entertaining beach activities reveal that the beach has provided and engaged active beach users. In the context of beach tourism, Entertainment was not only expressed as soft staged entertainment as what Gilmore and Pine [32] and other researchers discover.

From the international beach tourists, the beach tourism indeed, was an active involvement and place with full of 'excitement' and 'escapism' experiences. In terms of aesthetic and education aspects, the tourists seek quality experience, and learning is only a partial experience when beach vacation matters. In fact, to be totally prepared for the tourism recovery post pandemic of Covid-19, it is recommended that the beach tourism management of Pantai Cenang has to be revitalized accordingly to the new viewpoints of the experience economy and international tourists' perspectives.

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