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Agrotourism in Malaysia: A Study of its Prospects Among Youth in Pekan Nanas, Pontian

The agrotourism industry in Malaysia has shown an increased interest among young tourists. The study aimed to explore the prospects of agrotourism among youth in Malaysia. The objective of this study is to identify the interests and needs of young people while visiting agrotourism destinations. The study focuses on a town called Pekan Nanas, Malaysia, famous for its pineapple production. Three methods employed in the study are surveys, interviews, and document analysis. The findings show that youths enjoy agrotourism with family and friends in large numbers. To attract youth, consistent promotion and marketing need to be carried out to get the information they need. In addition, interesting activities need to be enhanced, and basic amenities should be sufficient for tourist use. This paper is hoped to provide valuable information as a baseline study to help tourism-related authorities improve the current situation in Pekan Nanas.

Keywords: Youth prospect, agrotourism, sustainable tourism, Pekan Nanas, Malaysia

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Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) contained in the document entitled "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" encourages many countries, stakeholders, tourism-related agencies, and authorities in supporting the goals. Hassan and Azhar (2017) highlight that sustainable tourism has become a "prominent ingredient" in today's development. From a tourism perspective, the industry can contribute to all 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda depending on their nature of business. According to United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable tourism is firmly positioned in the 2030 Agenda, and tourism has been included as targets in Goals 8, 12, and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively.

In different parts of the world, agrotourism has different definitions. The concept of agrotourism is a direct expansion of ecotourism, which encourages visitors to experience the limelight of agricultural life first hand (Mansor, 2015). Yang et al. (2010) explain that rural areas are endowed with numerous historical, natural, and social qualities; thus, it is common that tourism spreads in conjunction and combined with farming activities. Agrotourism normally involves any agriculturally-based operation or activities such as bringing visitors to a farm, buying agro-based products, navigating a corn maze, picking fruit, feeding animals, or staying at a farm (Mansor, 2015 and Dennis and Richard, 2004).

Agrotourism was originally developed from ecological movement ideas and concern of societies where mass tourism was developed (Bramwell, 1994). Some developed countries such as the U.S.A. have an extensive history in agrotourism activities while developing countries such as Thailand have shown a promising development in the industry (Hamzah, 2012).

The tourism sector has been highlighted as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) in 2010 to transform Malaysia into a high-income nation by 2020. The program was highlighted in the 10th Malaysia Plan by the Prime Minister of Malaysia. In Malaysia, the tourism sector ranks as the third-largest revenue-generating industry after the oil and gas and manufacturing sectors (Lo et al., 2012). The country continues to see new records set, with tourism arrivals growing by 6.7% from 25.72 million to 27.4 million and receipts at RM72 billion compared to RM65.4 billion in 2013 (PEMANDU, 2015). In 2015, Malaysia ranked the fourth most popular destination in the Asia Pacific region by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in terms of international tourist arrivals. UNWTO estimates that around 20% of the 940 million international tourists travelling the world in 2010 were young people. This can be seen today, where most tourist spots are widely present by the younger generation. Richards and Wilson (2003) mentioned that many young tourists nowadays tend to travel more frequently and stay longer at destinations than their older counterparts. The former UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai highlighted that youth travel is one of the most promising paths towards a more responsible and sustainable tourism sector. Youth age in Malaysia's context is categorized from the age of 15 until 40 years old- based on the Malaysian 1997 National Youth Development Policy.

Agrotourism destination in Malaysia is associated with cultural and heritage tourism to promote the uniqueness of the rural community (Kunasekaran, et. al, 2011). The agrotourism concept is a direct expansion of ecotourism, where it encourages visitors to experience the limelight of agricultural life first hand (Mansor, 2015). Under the Malaysian National Agro-Food Policy, agriculture has been identified as a National Key Result Area. Under this initiative, the agriculture sector is targeted to increase the Gross National Income by RM28.9 billion (USD9.1 billion) to reach RM49.1 billion (USD15.4 billion) by 2020 (Dardak, 2015). Dardak (2015) added that the agricultural sector is also targeted to create more than 109,000

job opportunities by 2020, primarily in rural areas. In fact, in 2008, Malaysia tourism industries employ 1.7 million workers or approximately 16% of the total employment making the sector a major employer (EPU, 2010).

There are many agrotourism destinations in Malaysia. Among the famous ones are Cameron Highland, located in Pahang, and Langkawi Geo-Park in Kedah state. In the southern part of Peninsular Malaysia, in a state called Johor, a town called Pekan Nanas or Pineapple Town in English, is known for its agrotourism destination and a major center of pineapple cultivation in Malaysia. A center called Pineapple Farming Technology Development Centre (FTDC) in Pekan Nanas supports the pineapple industry's development in locations that have already been identified. The said support can be defined as a center for pineapple seed breeding and production (pineapple tendril). In addition to that, the FTDC is a reference center for the pineapple farming technology and verification to new technologies in pineapple cultivation through the joint-venture attempt with researchers in aspects of agronomy and increase of product from pineapple waste materials. Their mission is to emerge as a major reference center for the global Pineapple Industry Development Model, a perfect industry network for plantation technology, after-harvest, upstream and downstream processing industry, and the agriculture tourism industry. Besides being a development center and seed breeding, agrotourism activities were also seen in Pekan Nanas.

However, relatively little is known about agrotourism in developing countries, as the local demand for tourism is generally lower for less developed regions (Yang, 2010). Thus, this study provides evidence through the youth's perspective to explore young people's needs and prospects towards agrotourism destinations in Pekan Nanas, Pontian, Johor, Malaysia.

Methodology

Study location

The study focuses on Pekan Nanas town, Pontian District, Johor. Pekan Nanas is a small town with 859.7 hectares of land area and with a population of 10,000 people. The majority of its residents are Chinese. It contains the Pekan Nanas Immigration Depot and a pineapple canning facility. Pekan Nanas was Malaysia's largest production base for pineapple planting area, and output ranked first in the country.

The town is in a quiet rural area but close to the Administrative capital city of Johor (Johor Bharu) with 43KM away. Pekan Nanas is also located 55km from Singapore. Many younger generations have left Pekan Nanas for better work opportunities in big cities, especially Singapore. Attractions in Pekan Nanas include the Pineapple Research Centre, Pineapple Gallery and Museum, Pineapple Farming Technology Development Centre (FTDC), and Mount Pulai recreation area. It is also not far from the infamous Tanjung Piai, Coastal Mangrove -an ecotourism destination that has been recognized as the 3rd designed park of Johor National Park Corporation.

Study sample

The study focuses on the youth population in Pekan Nanas and the surrounding area of Pontian District, Johor. According to the Malaysian 1997 National Youth Development Policy, the age range for youth in Malaysia is between 15 and 40 years old. One hundred fifty-two of youth were chosen through random sampling from a list of registered youth in Pontian with Johor Youth Council as respondents of this study (Table 1). The study sample (n= 152) was determined as in accordance with Krejcie and Morgan (1970) to obtain an appropriate sample size.

Table 1: Registered youth in Pontian with Johor Youth Council according to Districts

District	No. of Registered Youth	Sample Size
Pontian	255	152

Research instrument

Data were collected based on qualitative and quantitative methods, including youth perceptions through surveys (structured questionnaires), interviews, and document analysis. A questionnaire will serve as the main instrument of this study. The questionnaire will be divided into three sections. The first section (Section A) aimed to collect the demographic profile of the respondents. The second section (section B) aimed to evaluate the respondent's general knowledge of agrotourism. Section three (Section C) focused more on their knowledge of Pekan Nanas. All section uses the 5-point Likert scale with the following values: 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Uncertain, 4-Agree, and 5-Strongly Agree. At the end of the survey, one open-ended question on respondents' perception of agrotourism can benefit economic development in the area.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Frequency analysis, descriptive analysis, crosstab analysis, and chi-square analysis were performed to analyze the obtained data.

Results and discussion

Demographic profile of respondents

Respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire and interviewed. The demographic profile in Table 2 shows fair gender distributions, with 55% female and 45% were male. The majority of the respondents were 21-25 years old (51%) and are still single (79%). In terms of respondent's employment status, 66% are still studying, followed by 28% of respondents are

working. The analysis also showed that 84% of respondents had at least tertiary education, followed by 14% of those with at least secondary education.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	68	45
Female	84	55
Age (Years)		
15-20	36	24
21 - 25	78	51
26 - 30	23	15
31 - 35	10	7
36 - 40	5	3
Marital Status		
Single	120	79
Married	31	20
Divorced	1	1
Employment Status		
Students	101	66
Working	43	28
Not Working	8	5
Education Level		
Primary	2	1
Secondary	22	14
Tertiary	127	84

General Knowledge on Agrotourism

In this section, respondents were asked to evaluate their understanding of six concepts using a Likert scale of 1 to 5;- i) Agrotourism is a type of tourism offered worldwide, ii) Agrotourism destination is located mostly in rural areas, iii) Agrotourism offers variety of activities and additional business based on socio-cultural activities in agriculture, fisheries and livestock, iv) Visits to the orchards and farms, research, training, recreation, community activities and homestays area among agrotourism activities, v) Agrotourism industry could generate income for the locals and vi) Agrotourism sector in Malaysia has the potential to grow better.

Findings revealed that most of the respondents agree (89.47%) that agrotourism is a type of tourism offered worldwide. In terms of agrotourism locations, 57.24% of respondents agree that agrotourism locations are mostly located in rural areas. However, 23.03% of respondents were observed to neither agree nor disagree on this concept. 90.79% of the respondents agree that agrotourism offers various activities and additional business based on socio-cultural activities in agriculture, fisheries, and livestock. In the context of agrotourism activities, 84.87% agree that visits to the orchards and farms, research, training, recreation, community activities, and homestays area are among agrotourism activities offered. According to 88.82% of respondents, the agrotourism industry could generate income for the locals, while 9.87% neither agree nor disagree on this concept. In addition, most respondents were observed to agree that the agrotourism sector in Malaysia can develop better.

Respondent's perspective when visiting agrotourism destination in Malaysia

In this section, respondents were asked to evaluate their perspective when visiting agrotourism destination in Malaysia. This section consists of seven sub-section on; - i) Respondents visiting purpose; ii) length of stay; iii) agrotourism destinations in Malaysia; iv) criteria for a good agrotourism; v) preferred accommodation type; vi) preferable types of

activities to do while visiting agrotourism destination and vii) medium of information on agrotourism destination.

Findings show that the respondent's main purpose for visiting the agrotourism destination in Malaysia is a family vacation (70.4%). This is followed by a vacation with friends (57.2%), and 46.1% of respondents visit agrotourism destination to enjoy the quiet atmosphere from the hustle and bustle of the city.

According to the survey, most respondents (76.3%) tend to stay for about one to three days when visiting such a destination. 17.1% would stay longer than three days, and about 6.6% would just visit such destination as a day trip as they have a limited time of traveling.

In the context of agrotourism in Malaysia, it was found that Mardi Agro Technology Park in Cameron Highland is the most popular known agrotourism destination among the respondents with 90.1%, followed by MARDI Agro Technology Park in Langkawi and Pekan Nanas, Johor with 85.5% and 70.4% respectively. The study also indicated that about 30% of respondents are not aware of Pekan Nanas existence as an agrotourism destination in Malaysia.

In section (iv), respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of each criterion listed to become a good agrotourism destination. Ten important factors were asked under this subsection. These are a) the diversity of tourism place; b) culture and lifestyle of the local community; c) good infrastructure; d) telecommunication network and coverage; e) systematic road linkage; f) access to food; g) accommodation; h) reasonable cost; i) varieties of activities offered and j) protection and safety. Based on the study, more than 85% agreed that all these ten criteria are essential and important for one agrotourism destination. Youth nowadays are very selective in choosing a good agrotourism destination. It was found that the top two most important factors, according to these youth respondents, were the variety of activities offered on-site, their protection and safety, and good infrastructure, which all these criteria recorded

95.4%. It is important that relevant stakeholders who manage agrotourism fulfill these criteria as it will affect tourist influx.

In terms of accommodation, 71.1% of respondents prefer to stay in homestays, followed by budget hotels (9.9%) and hotels (8.6%). In the last sub-section, 69.1% of respondents are interested in going for orchard visits, followed by fruit picking (63.2%). Participate with local cooking activities and tree planting were found to be the least favorable among respondents with 36.8% and 36.2%, respectively. 'Others' activities contribute to 8.6% are walking, taking photos, and doing research.

The last subsection requires respondents to indicate which medium is important to retrieved information and promote agrotourism activities. Respondents are allowed to choose more than one of the following medium: - i) social media; ii) television; iii) internet search engine; iv) tourism website; v) road advertisement and signage; vi) word-of-mouth; vii) brochures and flyers; viii) magazine; ix) Tourist Information Centre and x) radio. More than 80% of respondents agree that social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) plays an important role as sources of information for generation nowadays. This was followed by television (70.4%) and an internet search engine (65.1%). The least likable medium was visiting the tourist information center and radio with 41.2% and 34.2%. This is maybe due to different era changes among respondents as they are a more 'tech-savvy' generation who wants fast and accurate information in just one click.

Knowledge of Pekan Nanas as an Agro-tourism Destination

In this section, respondents were asked about their basic knowledge and information on Pekan Nanas. There are five questions under this section which are- i) the existence of Pekan Nanas as an agrotourism destination; ii) how often they visit Pekan Nanas; iii) reason for

visiting Pekan Nanas, iv) their perception of Pekan Nanas current facilities, and v) revisiting Pekan Nanas. Item (iv) requires respondents to evaluate using Likert scale of 1 to 5.

In the context on the existence of Pekan Nanas as an agro-tourism destination, 50.7% of respondents know the existence and have visited Pekan Nanas before, 19.7% know the existence but never visited whereby about 29.6% (eight respondents) neither known the existence nor visited the agro-tourism destination before. The study found that most of the respondents reside in other areas before residing in Pontian due to studying purposes.

The three primary purposes for visiting to Pekan Nanas was because of its known as an agro-tourism destination (54.47%), followed by visiting relatives and friends with 26.39% and 20.83% because Pekan Nanas is their hometown. This section allows respondents to answer more than one choice, and the result was recorded in Table 3 below. Respondents were also asked to evaluate their perception of Pekan Nanas current facilities (Figure 1).

Table 3: Visiting Purpose to Pekan Nanas

Visiting Purpose	Number of respondents
Agro-tourism destination	77
Visiting Relatives and Friends	38
Hometown	30
Local residence	25
Academic purpose/ Research	23
Employment	18
Business trip	18

*Note: only 144 respondents out of 152 answered this section as 8 respondents never visited Pekan Nanas.

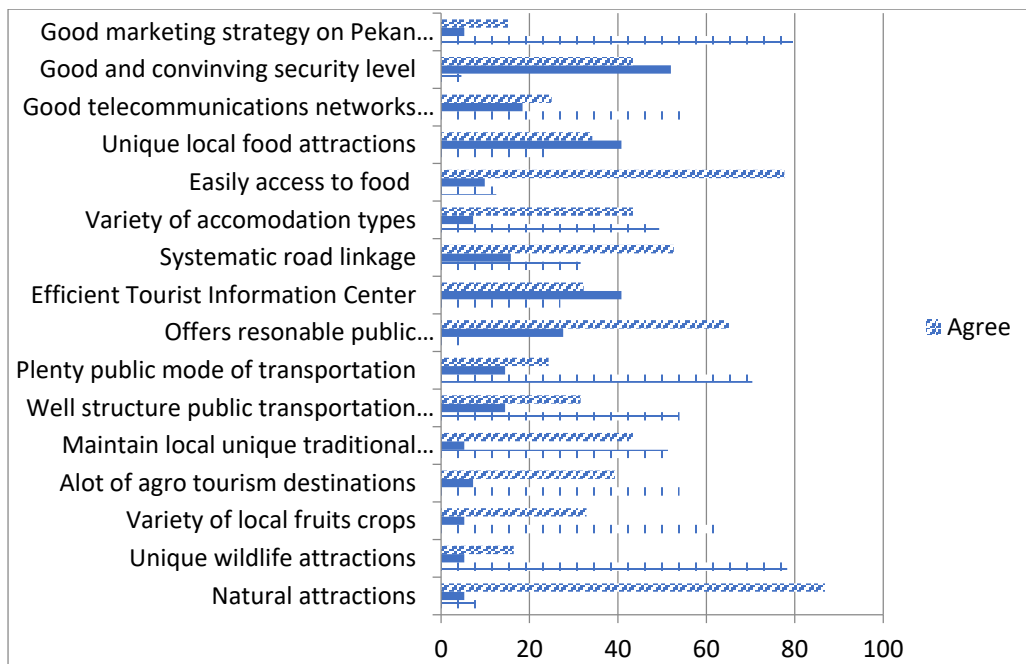


Figure 1: Facilities Offered in Pekan Nanas

While almost 90% of respondents agreed that there is a natural attraction in Pekan Nanas and can attract tourists, Pekan Nanas weighted more negative perception than a positive one by the youth respondents. Poor strategic planning and management are seen as the main weaknesses of Pekan Nanas, resulting in low tourist influx demand. Marketing activity promoted Pekan Nanas as an agro-tourism destination, no unique wildlife attraction, and not many public transport choices were among the top three concerns identified by the respondents with more than 70% vote. This shows a crucial concern and must not be taken lightly by the government and relevant authorities.

Peter (2004) also mentioned that youth are thirsty for experiencing cultural differences, opening to new ideas, and pioneering for new destinations. Thus, relevant agencies' marketing and promotional strategies should be well planned out to attract tourists. Geographically, Pekan Nanas topography is located on both hilly and flat land surface, ideal for developing tourist attraction spots. Moisa (2010) added that youth travel has the feature of a "consumer product," especially in the case of sports or adventure activities, meaning youth are important consumers

of destinations and "trendy" activities and thrills in general. This includes ATVs, jungle tracking, flying fox, zip-lining etc.

It is undoubtedly that Pekan Nanas has many beautiful places and wildlife attractions. However, lack of research and disclosure of information on species available from the government or relevant agencies is one limitation to this matter. In addition, almost no improvement effort was seen to preserve and improve the facilities and amenities in the area. As a tourist destination, efficient public transportation mode and system should be made available and easily accessible by tourists. This is crucial as agro-tourism places in Pekan Nanas are quite far from one another, and a good transportation system would be very convenient, especially for young travelers who travel frequently using public transportation.

To retrieve information and promote Pekan Nanas, good telecommunications networks and internet access should be available as internet and gadgets are seen as the main source of information among youth to engage with the outside world. Tourist visiting Pekan Nanas can share their visiting experience via WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media platform which can promote Pekan Nanas to the world. Words-of-mouth do wonders.

Furthermore, the government and relevant authorities should encourage and start making plans to collaborate with the locals to create various agro-based products, food production, and orchards. In order to reduce farm subsidy dependence and meet changes in consumer demand, farmers are motivated to take up new value-added and especially agro-tourism activities as additional income sources (Loureiro, 2005). Other agro-based activities suggested include farm-based agro such as cow, horse, buffalo, and goat husbandry. Relevant authorities or local communities can design their farm system; as such, it is suitable for both passive and active tourist activities such as exploring the farm itself by walking or enjoying animal rides and hands-on experiences such as exposing tourists on how to feed and milk cows, horses, and buffaloes. In addition, the development of new land creates employments in rural

areas and, at the same time, increases the production of agro-food products for local consumptions (Dardak, 2015).

Based on the study, the main visiting purpose was family vacations. To accommodate such big groups, it is important that Pekan Nanas offers various accommodation types in the area. In order to understand and explore the relationship between main visiting purpose and preferable accommodation type, an analysis using two methods; - i) crosstab and ii) correlation of chi-square was performed.

Table 4 shows the relationship between the main visiting purpose and preferable accommodation type. Based on the analyses, 99% of respondents who visited Pekan Nanas for family vacations prefer to stay in a homestay, and only 1% choose hotels. This shows that respondents preferred staying in a homestay when they visit Pekan Nanas in a big group.

Table 4: Crosstab Table between Main Visiting Purpose and Preferable Accommodation Types

Item	Types of Accommodation							Total
		Homestays	Budget hotels	Hotels	Dormitory/hostel	Friend's house	Not staying	
Family vacation	Yes	106	0	1	0	0	0	106
	No	2	15	12	8	5	3	2

The correlation of “Chi Square” between “Main Visiting Purpose” and “Preferable Accommodation Types” is shown in Table 5. The result shows a significant value of 0.000, and there is a very strong relationship between the two variables. Thus, it indicates how important homestay is in such area.

Table 5: Chi-square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	138.152 ^a	5	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	157.705	5	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	97.709	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	152		

*Note: a. 7 cells (58.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.89.

Wide opportunities are seen for homestay providers as it is more convenient and value for money. According to Clammer (1996) and Kennedy (1993), homestay operations in Malaysia have become popular in rural areas because of its development orthodoxy, which gives higher priority to kampungs (villages). Thus, relevant authorities and communities should consider providing more homestays and improving current homestay services in the area. Malaysian homestays give guests the opportunities to interact with local communities and learn directly or indirectly from each other by exchanging culture, heritage, and lifestyle (Peterson, 2004).

In the context of visiting or revisit Pekan Nanas, about 51.3% of respondents say they will never visit or revisit Pekan Nanas again. It was observed that most of the respondents felt that the unsatisfactory status of facilities offered in Pekan Nanas is the main factor that affects their interest in visits. Lack of amenities and activities decreases interest between respondents. As youth are more self-reliant, basic amenities are needed to be improved.

Conclusion

The current work provides insight into agro tourism's youth prospects by identifying these young people's interests and needs while visiting agro-tourism destination in Pekan Nanas, Pontian, Johor. In terms of study output, youth is found to be fond traveling to agro-tourism in big groups. Correlation analysis between main visiting purpose and preferable accommodation type by respondents shows a strong relationship. Thus, accommodation providers are seen to have wide opportunities to provide suitable accommodations to cater to these travelers' needs.

The survey also revealed that more than half of the respondents expressed their disappointment regarding the current facilities and situation in Pekan Nanas. Youth seems to enjoy different types of activities that can be found in one place in an agro-tourism area. Therefore, to preserve and enhance the credibility of Pekan Nanas as an agro-tourism destination requires contribution from both local and relevant authorities. The involvement of multiple stakeholders from the bottom-up approach rather than the traditional top-down approach is crucial to effectively develop good strategic planning and management. Good marketing and advertisement on Pekan Nanas should be constantly made available continuously to promote what Pekan Nanas offers.

Nevertheless, to understand the perceptions and prospects needs of all levels of communities and develop a refined framework or policy, more research of awareness and perception is needed, especially from the perspective of adults and elderly tourists. Moreover, academic and research institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are seen to have a wide opportunity to educate and raise awareness of the importance of an agro-tourism destination and its socio-economic impact on all communities local and tourists in particular.

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