

THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-DRIVE INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS IN
MALAYSIA

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DEDICATION

*To the Most Beneficent and the Most Merciful,
and
my dear mother and father*

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful

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ABSTRACT

Self-drive tourism is an independent form of travel which suits an individual or small group of travellers. In essence this form of tourism offers the most flexible visitation to mainstream tourist attractions as well as those off the beaten track. Nevertheless, self-drive tourism has received relatively little attention from researchers despite its significance in spreading economic benefits to rural areas and communities. In this light, understanding the demand characteristics of self-drive tourists is essential in ensuring their trip satisfaction. Hence, this study aims to investigate the phenomenon of self-drive tourism in Malaysia from the perspective of international tourists, specifically in terms of their satisfaction levels. To meet this objective two main methods are applied. Firstly, the Expectation and Satisfaction Analysis is used to measure the level of self-drive tourist satisfaction by using the Confirmation Paradigm Theory. It involves four main dimensions in the self-drive tourist experience namely; the physical dimension, experiential dimension, visual dimension and activity-based dimension. Secondly, the Tourist-Activated Network Analysis is used to understand the movement patterns and stopping behaviour of self-drive tourists during their trips in Malaysia. Based on the analysis, it was found out that self-drive tourism in Malaysia is spatially a regional phenomenon which is shaped by endogenous and exogenous factors. Despite the growing popularity of self-drive tourism in Malaysia, there are still gaps in their satisfaction levels. Among four dimensions stated previously, physical dimension has merely generated a negative gap of -1.2 which significantly affects the whole level of satisfaction. This has indicated that the service quality in Malaysia is still below the international standard. Finally, a model of self-drive tourism experience is developed to explain the underpinning phenomenon of self-drive tourism in this country which can help destination managers and marketers in enhancing the self-drive travel experience and provide appropriate services to attract more self-drive tourists to the country.

ABSTRAK

Pelancongan pandu sendiri adalah satu bentuk pelancongan bebas yang sesuai untuk individu atau sekumpulan kecil pelancong. Pada dasarnya bentuk pelancongan ini menawarkan lawatan yang paling fleksibel ke kawasan tarikan pelancong utama dan juga tarikan yang terpencil. Walau bagaimanapun, pelancongan pandu sendiri telah mendapat perhatian yang agak sedikit daripada penyelidik di sebalik kepentingannya dalam menyebarkan manfaat ekonomi untuk kawasan luar bandar dan masyarakat. Dalam hal ini, memahami ciri-ciri permintaan pelancong pandu sendiri adalah penting dalam memastikan kepuasan perjalanan mereka. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka fenomena pelancongan pandu sendiri di Malaysia daripada perspektif pelancong antarabangsa, terutamanya berkaitan tahap kepuasan mereka terhadap percutian pandu sendiri. Bagi tujuan tersebut, dua kaedah utama digunakan. Pertama, Analisis Jangkaan dan Kepuasan digunakan untuk mengukur tahap kepuasan pelancong dengan menggunakan Teori *Confirmation Paradigm*. Ia melibatkan empat dimensi pengalaman pelancong iaitu dimensi fizikal, pengalaman, visual dan aktiviti. Kedua, Analisis *Tourist-Activated Network* digunakan untuk memahami corak pergerakan dan tingkah laku berhenti pelancong semasa percutian mereka di Malaysia. Berdasarkan analisis, didapati bahawa pelancongan pandu sendiri di Malaysia secara umumnya adalah satu fenomena spatial serantau yang dibentuk oleh faktor-faktor dalaman dan luaran. Walaupun pelancongan pandu sendiri semakin popular di Malaysia, masih terdapat jurang dalam tahap kepuasan mereka. Dimensi fizikal telah menghasilkan jurang negatif sebanyak -1.2 yang memberi kesan kepada tahap keseluruhan kepuasan. Ini telah menunjukkan bahawa kualiti perkhidmatan di Malaysia masih di bawah piawaian antarabangsa. Akhir sekali, satu model pengalaman pelancongan pandu sendiri dibentuk untuk menjelaskan asas kepada fenomena pelancongan pandu sendiri di negara ini. Ia adalah sangat signifikan dalam membantu pengurus dan pemasar destinasi dalam mereka bentuk produk dan menyediakan perkhidmatan yang bersesuaian untuk menarik lebih ramai pelancong pandu sendiri ke negara ini.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ETP	-	Economic Transformation Programme
GNI	-	Gross National Income
UNWTO	-	United Nations World Tourism Organization
PTNP	-	Perak State Parks Corporation

LIST OF SYMBOLS

n	-	The required sample size
N	-	The population size
pq	-	The population proportions
z	-	The value that specifies the level of confidence when analysing the data
E	-	The accuracy of the sample proportions

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The booming in private automobile ownership since the post-second World War has transformed the landscape of tourism in many developed nations. North America, Australia and New Zealand have the highest car ownership levels with an average of over 500 cars per 1,000 persons, and followed by European cities, with over 414 cars per 1,000 persons (Kenworthy, 1993). As ownership and usage levels of cars are high and rise over time, the interest in self-drive tourism is expected will increase too.

It is believed that car has become the most preferred mode of transport for land travel due to its ability in facilitating dispersal more than other mode of transport (AMR Interactive, 2000; Derrett, 2002; Hardy, 2005; Prideaux & Carson, 2003). Thus it enables travellers to access places that are inaccessible by bus or rail, which seems to benefit the tourism industry enormously. This is very important for the development of outback destinations and rural areas which rely very much on the car's ability to access remote areas. Consequently, it is apparent that the self-drive tourism plays a vital role in spreading economic benefits of tourism more than any other forms of travel. As car is also flexible and independent, travellers are not constrained from the fixed schedules and limited network options.

So far, the new travel behaviour of self-drive tourism has significantly grown worldwide and it can be seen through the changing trend or demand of the travellers. As noted by Schmallegger (2011), there has been a major change in the tourist travel

pattern that is from a conventional mass tourism into an individualistic form. In developed nations particularly, car has become the main form of holiday transport for domestic travellers. Previous studies by Carson & Waldhoer (2011), Hardy (2003), Lohmann *et al.* (2011), Timothy (2011) and Yu *et al.* (2011) show that over 70 to 80 per cent of total tourism trips made by domestic tourists globally are constituted by the self-drive tourists. These phenomena have significantly exposed the desire of tourists for a travel experience that is more independent and flexible. Moreover, the driving itself is often the central part of the travel experience in the term of 'touring for pleasure' (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011).

While in Malaysia, serious priority has been given to the development of tourism since 1970s. The emphasis on tourism development started after the Tourist Development Corporation Malaysia (TDCM) was established in 1972 (Hamzah, 2004). Although Malaysia is a new entrant in the tourism industry as compared to other established ASEAN neighbours such as Singapore and Thailand, it has shown a positive and remarkable growth over the last periods. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Malaysia ranked ninth of the most visited country in the world and 14th in receipts globally in 2011. Moreover, this sector is the third largest earner of foreign exchange in 2011 and the seventh largest contributor to the Gross National Income (GNI). Furthermore, over 25 million tourists have arrived in Malaysia per year that contributes over RM60 billion in receipts (PEMANDU, 2012). They are generally attracted to the eco-diversity and warm weather of Malaysia. Thus, these have made the industry a significant earner of foreign exchange that contributes to economic growth, provides employment and attracts investments.

Notwithstanding a firm worldwide position, Malaysia tourism sector is anticipated to keep developing in the future. Today, a typical generic experience is no longer preferred (MOTOUR, 2013; Suratman, 2008) as tourists are now looking for a customised leisure holidays especially a trip that is more experiential, explorative, flexible as well as independent like the self-drive tours (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). This is evident where there are over 89.2 per cent of domestic tourists arrive at their destination by car (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010) which

indicate that there is a very high demand of self-drive tours among the domestic tourists in Malaysia.

Therefore, to further empower the industry, this new trend should be taken into consideration. This is very crucial if Malaysia wants to be the ultimate tourist destination in Asia. This then is the intention of this study; to study the phenomenon of the self-drive tourism in Malaysia based on the self-drive tourist experience that will help stakeholders to provide relevant services to the self-drive tourism experience. Finally, this should help to improve significant services and products such as the quality of roads, road signage, rest stops and other related facilities.

1.2 Problem statement

In most part of the world, self-drive tourism seems to offer the most comprehensive means of access especially to regional and rural areas. Several research of self-drive tourism has been done by scholars which discovered part of the tapestry of drive tourism forms. It can be seen that most of the research are focusing on the economic benefits of self-drive tourism (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Carson & Taylor, 2009; Letsoalo, 2010; Lourens, 2007; Marschall, 2012; Meng & Hudson, 2012; Ramsey & Everitt, 2007; Rogerson, 2007; Schmallegger, 2011), the impact of self-drive tourism on sustainability and environment (Ali & Carson, 2011; Filimonau, Dickinson, & Robbins, 2013; Kunaeva, 2012; Marschall, 2012; Meyer, 2004; Stanford, 2013), the supply side of self-drive tourism (Antonson & Jacobsen, 2013; Hall, 2006; Hallo & Manning, 2011; Nagy, 2012; Smith, 2011; Timothy, 2011a; Wilks & Pendergast, 2011), self-drive market segmentation (Carson, Prideaux, Coghlan, & Taylor, 2009; Carson & Waldhoer, 2011; Hardy, Hanson, & Gretzel, 2012; Hardy, 2005; Heerden, 2011; Lohmann *et al.*, 2011; McClymont, Thompson, & Prideaux, 2011; Walker, 2011) and self-drive tourist travel patterns and flows (Carson *et al.*, 2011; Hardy & Gretzel, 2011; Holyoak *et al.*, 2009; Lew & McKercher, 2006; Liu *et al.*, 2012; Lohmann & Zahra, 2011).

Conversely, there has been comparatively lack of research on the self-drive tourist experience even though there are a lot of studies focusing on tourist experience in general. Self-drive tourist experience is identified as one of the vital components in influencing behaviour towards certain destination. According to Jim Power Economics (2011), the quality of consumer experience is the key in stimulating longer dwell times, increased visits and higher expenditure. In fact, understanding the self-drive tourism market itself is very important as the self-drive tourist has been perceived as a ‘high yield market segment’; a traveller who spends more money than other tourists often does. This is obvious in a study done by Lohmann *et al.* (2011) in Brazil, where the total trip spending of the self-drive tourists visiting Florianopolis and Balneario Camboriu region in Brazil is higher than the tourist who travelled by coach. In fact, they have longer length of stay with an average of 9-16 nights compared to coach tourists who stayed on an average of 4-8 nights (Table 1.1). This is believed due to the unique characteristics of the car touring enthusiasts who are flexible and tend to make stopover at different point of interest along the route and spend money at the local business (AMR, 2000; Derrett, 2002). Therefore, higher frequency of stops will encourage longer length of stay and maximise their individual spend, thus increase the yield of a particular region.

Table 1.1: Comparison of self-drive tourists and coach tourists’ profile in Florianopolis and Balneario Camboriu region in Brazil

	Self-drive Tourists	Coach Tourists
Total trip spending	US\$1,001 – US\$2,000	US\$501 – US\$1,000
Average length of stay	9 – 6 nights	5 – 8 nights

Source: Lohmann et al. (2011)

Hence, the valuable potential that the self-drive market has as a high yield market segment will eventually bring about a positive impact to Malaysia tourism industry due to the characteristics of the self-drive market who stays longer and hence spend more in the region. Until recently, the tourism growth in Malaysia has been driven mostly by arrivals and not yields due to higher tourist arrivals than for receipts. This is then worsened by a negative growth in the international tourism receipts that Malaysia had experienced between the years 2010 and 2011 (UNWTO, 2011). In comparison with Singapore and Thailand, both countries have a significant

growth in receipts. Thailand for instance, has received a USD 6 billion that is a 26 per cent increase despite suffering from the most severe flood in decades as well as political unrest.

Furthermore, a large percentage of international arrivals in Malaysia are from the short haul countries. Singapore accounted for 59.4% of total arrivals to Malaysia in 2012. Although this share had decreased to 49.1% in 2013, Singapore remains as the most prominent source of the international arrivals in Malaysia. Whereas only 2.4 per cent are coming from the long haul countries namely; the United States and United Kingdom in 2012 and had declined to 2.1 per cent in 2013 (**Table 1.2**). The scenario is indicative of Malaysia's reliance on the short haul markets. As a result, tourism sector in Malaysia remains as a low yield industry compared to its bordering countries specifically Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand (**Table 1.3**). Hence, exploring the phenomenon of self-drive tourism in Malaysia is therefore a necessity as it will attract the high yield market more into the region.

Table 1.2: Malaysia tourist arrivals by ASEAN countries 2013

Country of Nationality	2012		2013		Growth %
	Number	%	Number	%	
ASEAN Countries					
Singapore	1,335,258	59.4	1,543,174	49.1	15.6
Thailand	92,706	4.1	93,317	3.0	0.7
Indonesia	236,867	10.5	273,660	8.7	15.5
Brunei	168,477	7.5	179,392	5.7	6.5
Philippines	51,808	2.3	59,046	1.9	14.0
Vietnam	15,571	0.7	21,731	0.7	39.6
Cambodia	4,813	0.2	6,182	0.2	28.4
Japan	44,548	2.0	53,256	1.7	19.5
China	123,527	5.5	125,444	4.0	1.6
Taiwan	17,318	0.8	19,945	0.6	15.2
India	54,022	2.4	63,735	2.0	18.0
Australia	50,784	2.3	642,802	20.4	26.6
United Kingdom	33,303	1.5	39,636	1.3	19.0
United States	20,782	0.9	24,697	0.8	18.8
GRAND TOTAL	2,249,784	100.0	3,146,017	100.0	

Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2013

Table 1.3: Malaysia's yield compared to other ASEAN countries

Country	Receipts/Arrivals (RM)	Rank
Philippines	4,942	1
Thailand	3,785	2
Singapore	3,106	3
Indonesia	2,930	4
Vietnam	2,588	5
Malaysia	2,260	6

Source: PEMANDU, 2012

However, to attract the self-drive tourists is not an easy task as it sounds. Self-drive tourists choose to drive as their choice of preference and experience than that of the cost and limited alternative (Prideaux & Carson, 2011a). Therefore, they are likely to be shrewder in terms of destination and products they would select. They will expect to have a very good access to range of sophisticated information technologies that far exceed the traditional static media; and vehicles that would provide them with aspects that are not provided by other mode of transport. Fundamentally, the tourists' needs are very dynamic and Malaysia's tourism industry needs to understand them to avoid tourist frustration entirely. Hence, these will then question the readiness and reliability of Malaysia's tourism industry in delivering those expectations.

1.3 Research question

The following research questions are designed based on the existing trends and issues to guide the research comprehensively:

- a. What are the demand characteristic and perception of the self-drive tourist?
- b. Is self-drive tourism in Malaysia a regional or national phenomenon?
- c. How are the self-drive tourists satisfied with their overall trip experiences?
- d. What are the gaps in the self-drive tourist satisfaction?

1.4 Research objectives

The goal of this study is to study the phenomenon of self-drive tourism in Malaysia from the perspective of the international self-drive tourists. This aim is supported by three main objectives which are:

- a. To analyse the experiences of the international self-drive tourists and their overall level of satisfaction.
- b. To identify significant gaps in the self-drive tourist experiences.
- c. To develop a self-drive tourist experience model as to understand the phenomenon and recommend interventions.

1.5 Scope of study

The scope of this study is summarised in **Table 1.4** below:

Table 1.4: Scope of the study

Scope	Aspects to be studied
<p>Understanding and defining the concept of self-drive tourism and the self-drive tourist experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Definition of self-drive tourism; variants of self-drive tourism; importance of self-drive tourism; characteristics of self-drive tourism that presents difficulties; how to respond to self-drive tourists; phenomena of self-drive tourism as a whole; and self-drive tourists experience and their dimensions.
<p>Analysing the self-drive tourists experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysing the self-drive tourist satisfaction using two main methods which are the Self-drive Tourist Expectation and Satisfaction Analysis and Self-drive Tourist-Activated Network. ▪ Self-drive Tourist Expectation and Satisfaction Analysis: four dimensions of self-drive tourists satisfaction are analysed namely; the physical dimension; experiential dimension; visual dimension and activity-based dimension. ▪ Self-drive Tourist-Activated Network: tourist flow of movement which consists of a sequence

	<p>of tourists' stopovers and length of stay at each stop.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respondents: 140 international self-drive tourists. ▪ Study area: (1) route from Kuala Lumpur to Royal Belum State Park, and (2) route from Penang to Royal Belum State Park.
Identifying significant gaps in the self-drive tourists satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Detailed elements that causes limitations to the self-drive tourist satisfaction.
Developing a model of self-drive tourism experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creating a model of self-drive tourism experience to explain the underpinning phenomenon of self-drive tourism in Malaysia which can help destination managers and marketers in enhancing the self-drive travel experience and provide appropriate services to attract more self-drive tourists to the country

Source: Author, 2014

1.6 Outline of research methodology

1.6.1 Research framework

The research framework comprises three main phases (**Figure 1.1**).

First phase: Conceptualisation

The first phase is called "Conceptualisation", involves a comprehensive review of the self-drive tourism literature. Based on the main selected authors and articles, self-drive tourism is defined clearly in this phase. Various explanations on the self-drive tourism are also highlighted and synthesised. The outcome of the literature review on self-drive tourism shows the complex nature of this alternative tourism. Basically, it is sorted out into seven specific themes which include the aspects on economic, sustainability and environment, physical design, self-drive

tourist experience, travel pattern and tourist flow, tourist supply, and market segmentation. Based on the given gaps, the self-drive tourist experience is selected as the main subject of this study and variables are identified. Exploring the complexity of the phenomena of self-drive tourism as well as the current issues and problems either locally or globally, this phase culminated in a detailed conceptual framework.

Second phase: Operationalization

The second phase is called 'Operationalization'. In this phase, the research methodology is designed and then operationalized and implemented. It consists of two main stages. The first stage is the data collection which specifically involves the identification of sampling (sampling technique, sample size, sampling frame), designation of research instrument (semi-structured questionnaire) and finally the process of data collection (site inventory, pilot survey and field survey). So the data collected are then analysed in the second stage that is the data analysis stage. The result of the analysis will be synthesised to get the overall findings of the research.

Third phase: Implications

The third and final phase is called 'Implication'. It involves the synthesis and discussions of the major findings. Based on the critical review of the findings that have been obtained in the previous phase, a theory on self-drive tourism experience model is developed and implications on the self-drive theory and practice are then formulated.

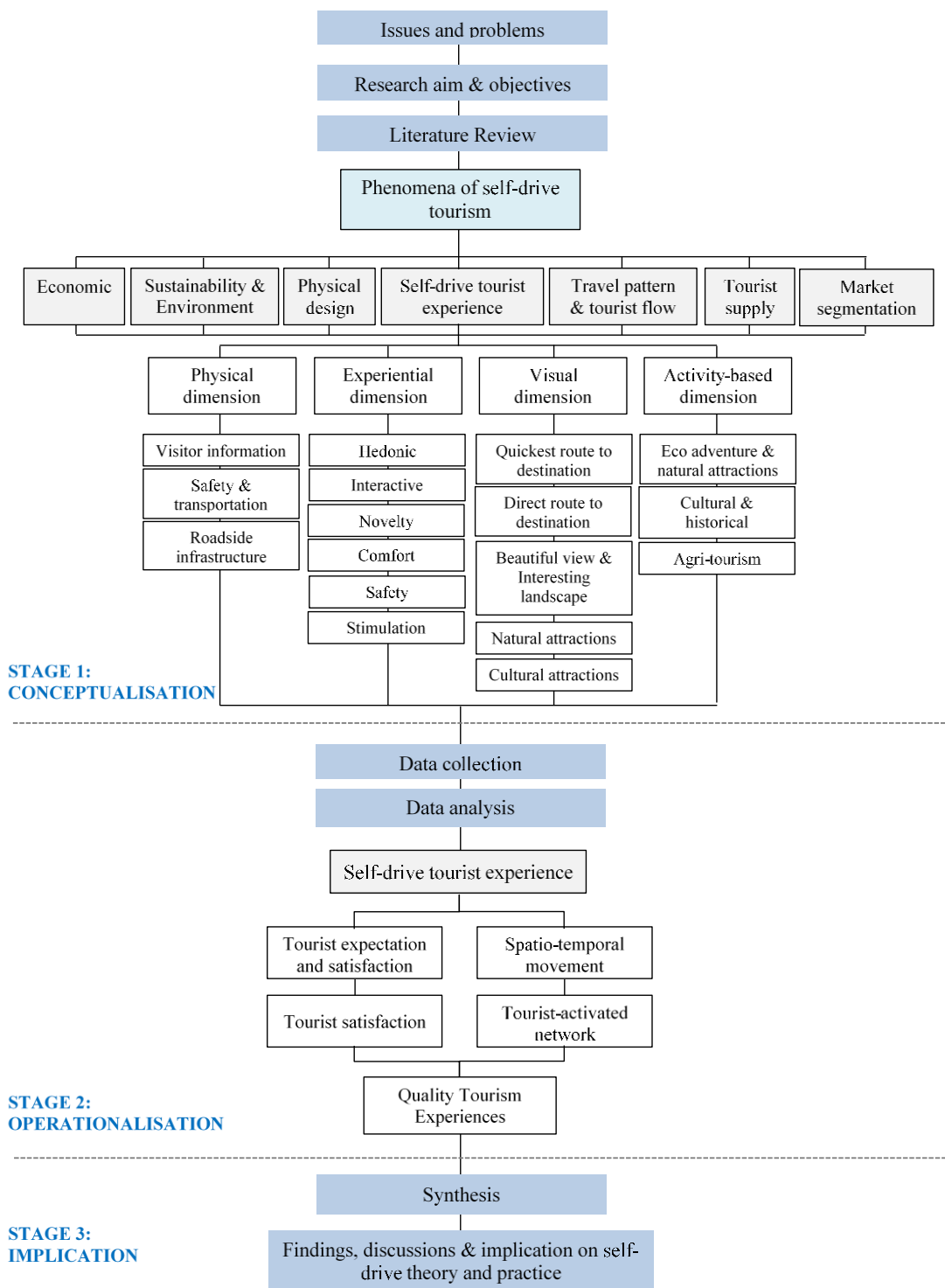


Figure 1.1: Research Framework

1.6.2 Data collection

This study examined the international self-drive tourist experiences in Peninsular Malaysia; the west part of Malaysia that lies on the Malay Peninsula. Since there is no official touring route developed in the region, routes that are prevalent among the self-drive travellers in Malaysia were chosen based on dependable evidence from the Tripadvisor and Travel Blog. **Figure 1.4** shows some of the famous stop overs in Malaysia.

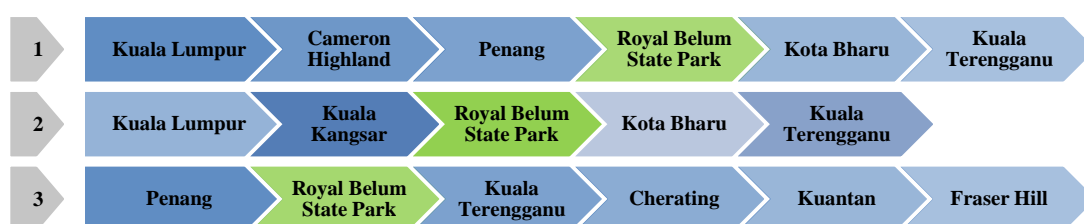


Figure 1.2: Tourists' favourite stops in Malaysia

(Source: *TripAdvisor and Travel Blog, 2014*)

Therefore, two main routes were chosen due to high hits received by both routes which are; (1) Kuala Lumpur to Royal Belum State Park and (2) Penang to Royal Belum State Park. The former route has a distance of approximately 369 km, which leave tourists with a transition of experiences from an urban experience to rural and eco-tourism settings along the stretch. The route encompasses a number of iconic attractions in Malaysia such as the highland retreats in Cameron Highland and Fraser Hill, amazing limestone karst in Gua Tempurung, the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar and Archaeological Land in Lenggong. While the latter route has a shorter distance of approximately 157 km, that stretches along rural areas. As the study involves only the foreign tourists, Kuala Lumpur and Penang were chosen as the starting point of the trip since both are the bases for the international arrivals.

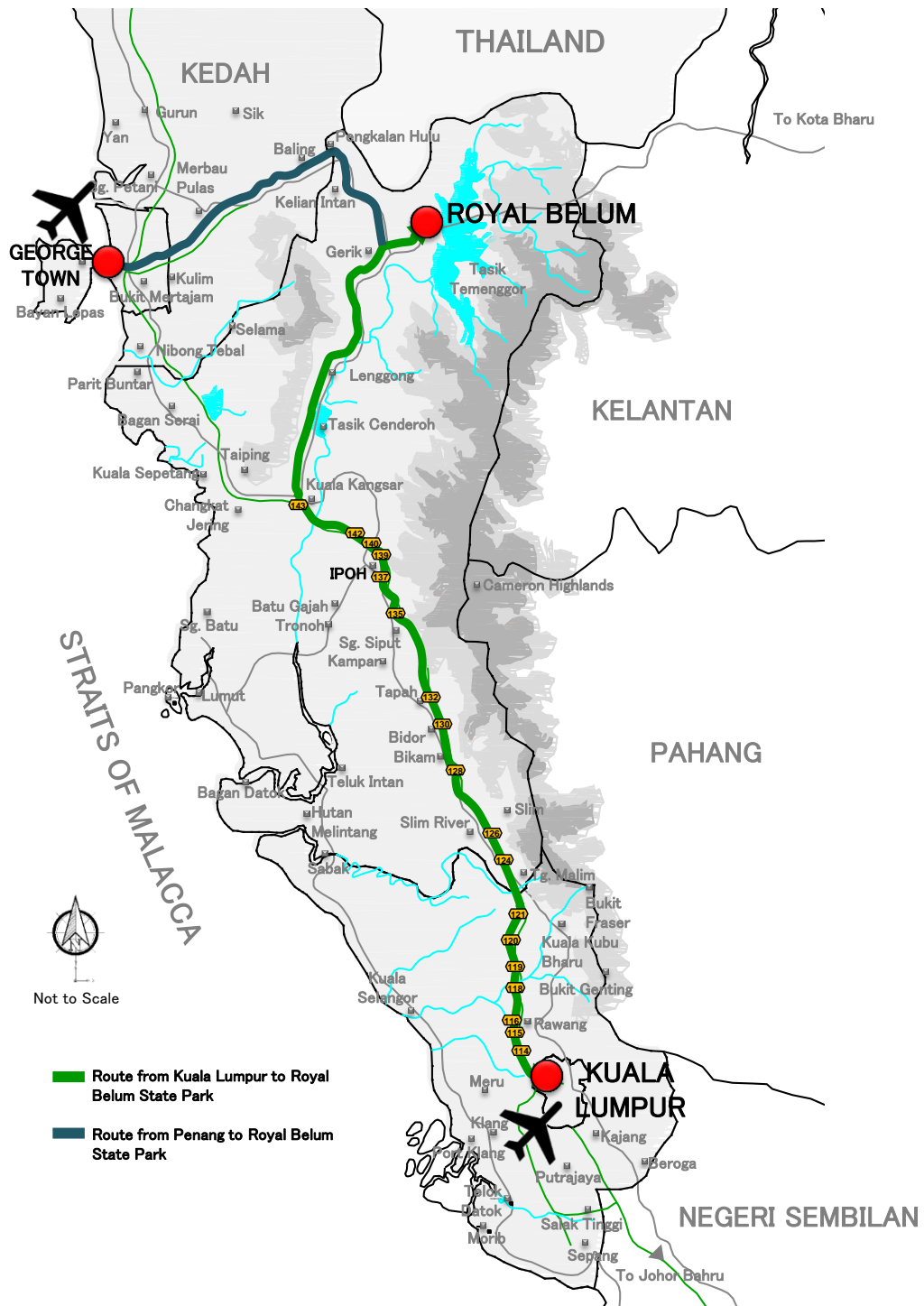


Figure 1.3: Study area

To capture the whole experience of the self-drive tourists, the respondents were surveyed at the end point of the journey that is at the Royal Belum State Park. Two main hotels in the Royal Belum State Park were selected as the sample stations; the Belum Rainforest Resort and Banding Lakeside Inn, for they are the only hotels available in the area. The survey incorporated questions about their flow of

movements including their chronological stopovers and duration of stay; evaluations on four dimensions of self-drive tourist experiences; perception about the trip; the trip information; tourists profile such as their age, gender, income, employment, and place of residence; and the vehicle information. The potential self-drive tourists were approached at the hotel lobby and were required to self-complete the questionnaires. The tourists were then interviewed on specific questions, especially regarding their stopover destination and the route selection. The sample is, therefore, convenience: convenience in the context of choosing ideal samples that are easily accessible and willing to participate in the survey on a specific period (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012; Michael, 2008). In fact, since the exact rate of response is about 20%, which is considered low due to the small number of available sample population, the convenience sampling technique is thus suitable as it allows researcher to collect data from those who are obtainable. While a total of 700 questionnaires was distributed from July 2014 to August 2014 at the two participating hotels, only 141 respondents completed the questionnaires. Another 4 questionnaires from the prior pilot survey were included which make it a total of 145 questionnaires. Data cleaning was made to remove non- or partial responses based on the required number of samples, and thus yielded a viable database of 140 respondents.

1.6.3 Data analysis

The most appropriate way to explore the self-drive tourist experience within a destination is to analyse their expectation and satisfaction levels and to map their spatio-temporal movement. In this study, the self-drive tourist satisfaction is measured using the expectation and satisfaction analysis. The tourist satisfaction was evaluated based on the gaps generated between their expectation and satisfaction of four main dimensions of self-drive tourists' experience; the physical dimension, experiential dimension, visual dimension and activity-based dimension. According to Awang & Ismail (2010) and Ryan (1995), the gaps will enable the researcher to assess the discrepancy between what the tourists anticipate and where these needs fit into their realm of satisfaction.

Complementing the expectation and satisfaction analysis was the tourist-activated network analysis. As self-drive tourists drive to multiple destinations, a lot of movements need to be considered. Therefore, this method of analysis will help to map their spatio-temporal movement as an additional way of capturing their experience. The tracking of tourist flow includes the route choice, their stopovers and length of stay at each attraction.

1.7 Significance of research

As there is lack of research on the self-drive tourism in Malaysia, this study will become the basis of exploring the significant potential of self-drive tourism in Malaysia. By exploring the self-drive tourist experience, it will offer relevant information to the stakeholders, such as the state government, local government and regional tourism businesses to provide services and facilities related to the self-drive tourism experience. This will then lead to the developments of important services and products based on the demands of the tourists as well as the local communities. It includes the road signage, rest stops, road quality, maps and other related services.

1.8 Summary

This chapter addresses the general problem and objectives of this study. In general, it can be said that the self-drive market is extremely important to tourism in Malaysia. They have their own unique characteristics that significantly influenced how the product of tourism is managed and distributed. Therefore, understanding the self-drive tourism is very essential especially to regional and rural destinations. This chapter has also report on the overall framework of the research which includes both the conceptual and operational framework. The basic information and the key indicators provided will help the researcher and readers to understand the study in general before going into further details in each chapter. Next, the following chapter will explain the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study.

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