

## **Motivation factors of ecotourists in ecolodge accommodation : The push and pull factors**

### **Abstract**

Tourist motivations are important factors in understanding tourist behaviour in relation to destination choice; and motivation relates to the needs, goals and preference of the tourists. Extensive research work on tourist motivation factors has been documented in the tourism literature. However, there seems to be a lack of empirical study on the accommodation sector, in particular ecolodge accommodation. Attention to tourists' motivational factors in the ecolodge accommodation is essential for determining the tourists' choices or needs and tourist behaviour in terms of choosing ecolodge accommodation. Previous studies determine that tourist motivations are influenced by both push and pull forces; and these forces describe how an individual is pushed by motivating variables into making travel decisions and how they are pulled or attracted by destination attributes. This paper reports an exploratory qualitative study on ecotourists' motivation factors in the ecolodge accommodation by adopting pull and push motivation theory. In-depth interviews were conducted with 29 ecotourists who stayed in the two ecolodges in Sukau. The findings reveal that ecotourists are primarily attracted by the destination attributes (natural attractions, wildlife, local lifestyle and eco-activities) where ecolodges are located, which we term pull factors. At the same time, they are also pushed by their social-psychological desire to escape from their routine of normal life (push factors) by visiting ecolodges. This suggests that there are two different motivational forces among the ecotourists; and that ecotourists' motivational factors can be explained by employing "seeking" and "escaping" as motivational dimensions of leisure behaviour (Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 18(2) 226-237). The findings seem to inform that ecotourists' choices to stay in the ecolodges in Sukau are strongly influenced by the destination attributes or attractions around the ecolodges and not ecolodge accommodation attributes. The identification of motivational factors in this study provides a clearer account of what actually attracts the ecotourists to stay at ecolodges. It suggests that the marketing strategies for ecolodges should focus more on the destination attractions around the ecolodge accommodation. The ecolodge operators

should position their ecolodges based on the unique destination attributes - wildlife and pristine environment - rather than the ecolodge attributes. Similarly, it is important for the ecolodge operators to conserve and protect their surrounding natural resources since these are the main motivational factors for tourists to patronize their ecolodges.