

Ecotourists' perception of ecotourism experience in Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah, Malaysia

Abstract

This paper presents the empirical findings of an exploratory qualitative study which looks at ecotourists' perceptions of ecotourism experiences in Sabah, Malaysia in order to identify the expressive dimensions that describe the quality of their experience. In-depth interviews were conducted with European ecotourists who stayed at two ecolodges in Sukau. Positive and negative experiences were identified from an analysis of the expressive dimensions of their service experience. The findings show that the ecotourists' experience is multidimensional. Respondents place particular emphasis on the ecotourism activities in which they physically engage at the sites and the natural environment in which they are located; their interaction with the site service staff; socialisation with other ecotourists, and the information acquired during the visit. The six expressive dimensions describing the positive experience are consistent with previous research. The study explores understanding of ecotourists' experience in the ecotourism environment - an under-researched area. The paper points out that the evaluation of quality of experience appears to involve both attributes - functional elements that are provided by the service suppliers and affective/ emotional elements that are brought about by the ecotourists themselves. © 2007 J.K.L. Chan & T. Baum.