

**MOTIVATION, PRACTICES AND INDICATORS
OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM FROM TOUR
OPERATORS' PERSPECTIVES IN KINABALU
PARK**

TAY KAI XIN



**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER IN TOURISM**

**FACULTY OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND
ACCOUNTANCY
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH
2015**

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

BORANG PENGESAHAN TESIS

JUDUL : _____

IJAZAH : _____

SAYA : _____ SESI PENGAJIAN : _____

(HURUF BESAR)

Mengaku membenarkan tesis *(LPSM/Sarjana/Doktor Falsafah) ini disimpan di Perpustakaan Universiti Malaysia Sabah dengan syarat-syarat kegunaan seperti berikut:-

1. Tesis adalah hak milik Universiti Malaysia Sabah.
2. Perpustakaan Universiti Malaysia Sabah dibenarkan membuat salinan untuk tujuan pengajian sahaja.
3. Perpustakaan dibenarkan membuat salinan tesis ini sebagai bahan pertukaran antara institusi pengajian tinggi.
4. Sila tandakan (/)

SULIT (Mengandungi maklumat yang berdarjah keselamatan atau kepentingan Malaysia seperti yang termaktub di AKTA RAHSIA RASMI 1972)

TERHAD (Mengandungi maklumat TERHAD yang telah ditentukan oleh organisasi/badan di mana penyelidikan dijalankan)

TIDAK TERHAD

Disahkan oleh:

(TANDATANGAN PENULIS)

(TANDATANGAN PUSTAKAWAN)

Alamat Tetap: _____

(NAMA PENYELIA)

TARIKH: _____

TARIKH: _____

Catatan:

*Potong yang tidak berkenaan.

*Jika tesis ini SULIT dan TERHAD, sila lampirkan surat daripada pihak berkuasa/organisasi berkenaan dengan menyatakan sekali sebab dan tempoh tesis ini perlu dikelaskan sebagai SULIT dan TERHAD.

*Tesis dimaksudkan sebagai tesis bagi Ijazah Doktor Falsafah dan Sarjana Secara Penyelidikan atau disertai bagi pengajian secara kerja kursus dan Laporan Projek Sarjana Muda (LPSM).

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material in this thesis is my own except for quotations, excerpt, equations, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.

15 April 2015

Tay Kai Xin
MB1221018T



UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

CERTIFICATION

NAME : TAY KAI XIN

MATRIC NO : MB1221018T

TITLE : MOTIVATION, PRACTICES AND INDICATORS OF
RESPONSIBLE TOURISM FROM TOUR OPERATORS'
PERSPECTIVES IN KINABALU PARK

DEGREE : MASTER OF BUSINESS (TOURISM MANAGEMENT)

VIVA DATE : 13 March 2015



1. SUPERVISOR:

Professor Dr. Jennifer Chan Kim Lian

DECLARED BY;

UMMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My Master journey is not alone because there are many family members and friends who supported me. Without their help and support, I would not be able to complete this research. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest and most sincere appreciation to the individuals who helped me in the completion of this research.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Dr. Jennifer Chan Kim Lian, who has been working with me on this thesis. Her comments have helped me to build the idea, correct my writing style and complete this thesis. I owe her a debt of gratitude that cannot be measured. The funding for this research was made possible through a research grant obtained from the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia under the Long Term Research Grant Scheme 2011 [LRGS grant no: JPT.S (BPKI)2000/09/01/015Jld.4(67)].

I would also like to thank Associate Professor Dr. Simon McArthur, who gave me some comments and his willingness to share his knowledge and time to discuss the issue of my research with me. My special thanks go to my friend Wong Wei Loong, who helped me a lot in completion of this thesis. Your help and ideas were highly appreciated. Thank to all of my buddies, who have supported me and chat with me when I was stressed.

Lastly, the most special thanks to all of my family members, I sincerely thank each and every one of you from the bottom of my heart for your continuous love and support. Especially to my mother, who always supported my spirit in completion of this research. Thanks for your patience when I called you to grumble.

Once again, thank you all very much.

ABSTRACT

Responsible tourism emerges as an approach to tourism management, and its emphasises the responsibilities of tourism stakeholder in tourism industry, to take action to achieve sustainable tourism development. Tour operator is one of the important stakeholders to practise responsible tourism in tourism destination. It argues that a deep understanding of tour operators' perspectives on motives and responsible tourism practices is vital in order to sustain a world heritage site, Kinabalu Park. This research seeks to understand the motives and practices of responsible tourism that are grounded in tour operators' perspectives in Kinabalu Park. The research objectives are: (i) To define the responsible tourism and green tourism from tour operator respectively, (ii) To describe tour operators' motives to practise responsible tourism in Kinabalu Park by extending the push-pull motivation theory, (iii) To understand the practices of responsible tourism by tour operator in Kinabalu Park, (iv) To identify the challenges and barriers faced by tour operators in practising responsible tourism in Kinabalu Park, and (v) To explore the responsible tourism indicators of Kinabalu Park from tour operators' perspectives. An inductive qualitative research approach is adapted and data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews with 25 licensed tour operator who operate tour at Kinabalu Park in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The finding reveals that both of responsible and green tourism is related or complement each other. Responsible tourism is more on tourism operation, whereas green tourism is about nature. The motivators trigger tour operators to practise responsible tourism are mainly attributed to the push factors, which related to the intrinsic motives including organization benefits, to response customer demand, obligation and positive image; however, interestingly, there are two new discoveries from the primary data, namely own initiative and education and awareness from external sources. Pull factors are market trend and government role. The findings show that practices of responsible tourism are limited in Kinabalu Park by tour operators. This is because Kinabalu Park is under the management of local authority, namely Sabah Parks, tour operators are more likely to put the responsibility on Sabah Parks to practise responsible tourism in the site. The challenges that faced by tour operators include lack of commitment from multi-stakeholders, absence of awareness about responsible tourism, intensity of market competition, limited resources, and population pressure; and limited availability of green technology especially transportation. Most of the respondents agree that the role of government is playing significantly in creating awareness and education; and its role should take place in the tourism industry at first in promoting responsible tourism. The findings revealed 17 key indicators that can be used at Kinabalu Park and categorised into destination management, economic value, ecological and social and cultural. The current study benefits local authority to design the incentive strategies that able to motivate tour operator plays proactive role in responsible tourism practices at tourism destination. The local authority also suggested to make strategies that overcome the challenges and barriers of responsible tourism practices by taking tour operators' perspectives into consideration. However, the study is limited to focus on tour operator solely rather than whole tourism stakeholders. It suggests for further study on other tourism stakeholder perspectives on responsible tourism practices in Kinabalu Park, especially local authority and the local community.

Key words: responsible tourism, green tourism, tour operators, motives and practices in responsible tourism, challenges and barrier, responsible tourism indicators, Kinabalu Park.



UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

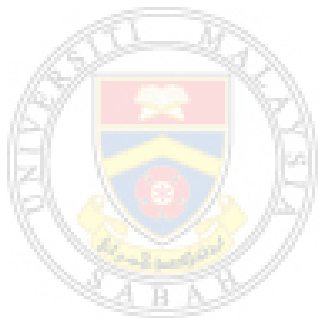
ABSTRAK

Motivasi, amalan, dan Penunjuk tentang pelancongan bertanggungjawab di Taman Kinabalu dari perspektif pengendali pelancongan

Pelancongan bertanggungjawab muncul sebagai satu pendekatan dalam pengurusan pelancongan, dan mementingkan peranan tanggungjawab dalam sektor pelancongan dan destinasi secara umumnya, untuk mengambil tindakan dalam mencapai pembangunan pelancongan lestari. Pengendali pelancongan merupakan salah satu pihak berkepentingan yang penting untuk mengamalkan pelancongan bertanggungjawab. Ia dipertikaikan bahawa pemahaman yang dalam di perspektif pengendali pelancongan atas motif dan amalan pelancongan bertanggungjawab amat penting untuk kelestarian Taman Kinabalu. Kajian ini adalah untuk memahami motif dan amalan pelancongan bertanggungjawab berdasarkan perspektif pengendali pelancongan di Taman Kinabalu. Objektifnya termasuk: (i) Untuk mentakrifkan pelancongan bertanggungjawab dan pelancongan hijau daripada pengendali pelancongan masing-masing, (ii) Motif untuk mengamalkan pelancongan bertanggungjawab dengan menlanjutkannya ke teori motivasi tolak-tarik di Taman Kinabalu, (iii) Amalan pelancongan bertanggungjawab daripada pengendali pelancongan di Taman Kinabalu, (iv) Cabaran dan halangan yang dihadapi oleh pengendali pelancongan dalam mengamalkan pelancongan bertanggungjawab di Taman Kinabalu, dan juga (v) Meneroka penunjuk pelancongan bertanggungjawab di Taman Kinabalu dari perspektif pengendali pelancongan. Pengumpulan data telah dilakukan dengan menggunakan temu bual secara mendalam dengan 25 pengendali pelancongan yang berlesen dan beroperasi di Taman Kinabalu di Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa pelancongan bertanggungjawab dan pelancongan hijau adalah berkaitan atau pelengkap sesama sendiri. Walau bagaimanapun, pelancongan bertanggungjawab lebih kepada operasi pelancongan, manakala pelancongan hijau adalah berkaitan semula jadi. Motivasi yang merangsangkan pengendali pelancongan terutamanya asal dari faktor penolak, iaitu manfaat organisasi, tindak balas terhadap permintaan pelanggan, kewajiban dan imej positif. Tetapi, dua penemuan baharu didapati, iaitu inisiatif sendiri, dan pendidikan dan juga kesedaran dari sumber luaran. Faktor penarik adalah trend pasaran dan peranan kerajaan. Penemuan menunjukkan amalan pelancongan bertanggungjawab adalah terhad dilaksanakan oleh pengendali pelancongan di Taman Kinabalu. Ini kerana taman ini adalah di bawah pengurusan pihak kuasa tempatan, iaitu Sabah Parks, ini menyebabkan mereka lebih cenderung meletakkan tanggungjawab ke atas Sabah Parks. Cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pengendali pelancongan termasuk kekurangan komitmen dari pelbagai pihak berkepentingan, tiada kesedaran tentang pelancongan bertanggungjawab, intensiti persaingan pasaran, sumber yang terhad, dan tekanan populasi; penemuan baharu adalah terhad kepada ketersediaan teknologi hijau. Kebanyakan responden setuju bahawa kerajaan memainkan peranan yang penting dalam mewujudkan kesedaran dan pendidikan untuk mempromosi pelancongan bertanggungjawab. Penemuan juga mengetahui bahawa 17 penunjuk utama boleh digunakan di Taman Kinabalu dan dibahagikan kepada pengurusan destinasi, nilai ekonomi, ekologi, dan sosial dan budaya. Kajian ini memanfaatkan pihak berkuasa tempatan untuk mereka strategi insentif yang mampu memotivasi pengendali pelancongan memainkan peranan proaktif dalam pelancongan bertanggungjawab di destinasi pelancongan, dan untuk

membuat strategi untuk mengatasi cabaran dan halangan dengan mengambil perspektif pengendali pelancongan sebagai pertimbangan. Kajian ini terhad dalam fokus ke atas pengendali pelancongan sahaja daripada seluruh pihak perkepentingan pelancongan disebabkan masa dan wang yang terhad. Ia mencadang untuk kajian lanjutan atas perspektif pihak berkepentingan pelancongan yang lain dalam amalan pelancongan bertanggungjawab in Taman Kinabalu, terutamanya pihak kuasa tempatan dan masyarakat tempatan.

Kata Kunci: *pelancongan bertanggungjawab, pelancongan hijau, pengendali pelancongan, motif dan amalan untuk pelancongan bertanggungjawab, cabaran dan halangan, penunjuk pelancongan bertanggungjawab, Taman Kinabalu.*



UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

TABLE OF CONTENT

	Page
TITLE	i
DECLARATION	ii
CERTIFICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	v
<i>ABSTRAK</i>	vii
TABLE OF CONTENT	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
LIST OF APPENDICES	xv
LIST OF PUBLICATION	xvi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 An Overview of Study	1
1.3 Research Problem	4
1.4 Research Questions and Research Objectives	7
1.5 Scope of Study	8
1.6 Organization of Study	8
1.7 Conclusion	9
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 Study Site: Kinabalu Park	10
2.3 A Review of Green Tourism, Sustainable Tourism and	16

	Responsible Tourism	
2.4	The Roles of The Tour Operator in Responsible Tourism	24
2.4.1	Tour Operators' Motives towards responsible forms of tourism	37
	a. The Motivation Theories Used in Tourism Industry	43
2.4.2	The Responsible Tourism Practices Implemented by Tour Operators	49
	a. Awareness Raising	49
	b. Cleaner Production	51
	c. Local Capacity Development	52
	d. Green Supply Chain Management	54
	e. Internal Management	54
	f. Sustainability Reporting	56
2.4.3	The Challenges Faced by Tour Operators whilst Practising Responsible Tourism	60
2.5	The Indicators of Responsible Tourism	64
2.6	Conclusion	70
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY		
3.1	Introduction	71
3.2	The Theoretical Framework for Responsible Tourism by Tour Operator Motivation	71
3.3	Research Design	73
	3.3.1 Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Paradigm	73
	3.3.2 Inductive Approach	75
	3.3.3 Phenomenological Research	75
	3.3.4 Qualitative Method	75
	3.3.5 The Types of Data collection	76
	a. Method and Sampling Size	82
	b. Trustworthiness of the research	83

c. Data collection method	85
3.3.6 Data Analysis Method	87
3.4 Conclusion	89

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction	90
4.2 Recapitulation of Study	90
4.3 Profiling Tour Operators	90
4.4 The Definition of Responsible Tourism and Green Tourism	92
4.4.1 The Understanding of the Responsible Tourism Destination	92
4.4.2 The Definition of Green Tourism	97
4.4.3 Responsible Tourism Versus Green Tourism	100
4.5 Tour Operators' Motives in Responsible Tourism Practices Adoption	103
4.6 The Practices of Responsible Tourism Implemented by Tour Operators	113
4.7 The Challenges and Barriers of Responsible Tourism Practices	118
4.8 The Responsible Tourism Indicators at Kinabalu Park	126
4.9 Conclusion	135

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction	136
5.2 Research Findings	136
5.3 Research Contributions	141
5.4 Limitation and Suggestion for Further Research	142
5.5 Conclusion	143

REFERENCE	144
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Interview protocol	159
Appendix B: Sample of interview transcripts	161
Appendix C: Data analysis – Theme emerged from interview responses	166
Appendix D: Formal letter for data collection from School of Business and Economic	180
Appendix E: List of publication	181



UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 2.1: Visitor figures to Kinabalu Park from 2000 to 2012	14
Table 2.2: The definition of sustainable tourism from various sources	19
Table 2.3: Prior study on the definition of responsible tourism	22
Table 2.4: The principles of responsible tourism to tour operators	25
Table 2.5: Previous empirical studies on tourism businesses toward responsible tourism	31
Table 2.6: Previous studies examining motivational factors in practising sustainability	41
Table 2.7: Motivation theories	46
Table 2.8: Previous studies on responsible tourism practices implemented	57
Table 2.9: The challenges and barriers faced by tourism businesses	63
Table 2.10: Reviews of core indicators of responsible tourism	68
Table 3.1: Constructivism-interpretivism and associated philosophical beliefs	74
Table 3.2: Guba's four criteria for trustworthiness	85
Table 4.1: Tour operators' profile	91
Table 4.2: Responses to definitions of responsible tourism	93
Table 4.3: The concept of green tourism	98
Table 4.4: Motives to practise responsible tourism	104
Table 4.5: Practices of responsible tourism by tour operators	113
Table 4.6: The challenges and barriers faced by tour operators	119
Table 4.7: Responsible tourism indicators in Kinabalu Park	127

LIST OF FIGURE

	Page
Figure 2.1: Location of Kinabalu Park	11
Figure 2.2: Five basic needs of Maslow's Theory	46
Figure 2.3: Eight stages of Maslow's Triangle Model	46
Figure 2.4: Role of hygiene and motivational factors by Herzberg's Theory	47
Figure 2.5: The model of Travel Ladder Theory	47
Figure 2.6: A Hedonic Tourism Motivational Model	48
Figure 2.7: LCD model of responsible tourism	53
Figure 3.1: The theoretical frameworks triggering responsible tourism practices amongst tour operators	72
Figure 3.2: The steps of interviewing	81
Figure 3.3: Methodology framework for data collection	86



UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

LIST OF APPENDIXES

	Page
Appendix A: Interview protocol	159
Appendix B: Sample of interview transcripts	161
Appendix C: Data analysis – Theme emerged from interview responses	166
Appendix D: Formal letter for data collection from School of Business and Economic	180
Appendix E: Abstract of publication	181



UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

LIST OF PUBLICATION

Journal

Tay, K. X. and Chan, J. K. L. 2013. A Study of Tour Operators' Motivation and Views on Responsible Rural Tourism Development in Sabah, Malaysia. *TEAM Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, **10**(1):17-31. (Indexed journal, available in

http://teamjournalht.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/vol1012013-team-journal-of-hospitality_tourism_2.pdf)

Tay, K. X. and Chan, J. K. L. 2014. Tour operators' perspectives on responsible tourism and green tourism. *International Journal of Economics and Management*. (Selected and will be publish in 2015).

Chan, J. K. L and Tay, K. X.. 2013. Tour Operator Perspectives on Responsible Tourism Practices: A Case of Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality*. (Accepted and will be publish in 2015).

Chan, J. K. L and Tay, K. X.. 2013. Exploring definitions and practices of responsible tourism in Kinabalu National Park , Sabah, Malaysia. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*. (Accepted and will be publish in 2015).

Proceeding

Tay, K. X. and Chan, J. K. L. 2014. Tour Operators Perspectives on Responsible Tourism Indicators of Kinabalu National Park, Sabah. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 144: 25-34. (Indexed journal, available in

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814041986>)

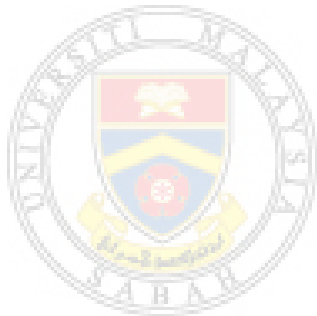
Conference paper

Tay, K. X., Chan, J. K. L., Nair, V., and Ramachandran, S. 2013. Conceptualizing A Research Framework for Tour Operators' Motivation and Practices in Responsible Rural Tourism Development. Paper presented in 12th Asic Pacific Forum for Graduate Students' Research in Tourism and 5th Graduate Research Colloquium, 26th – 29th June 2013. Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Malaysia.

Tay, K. X. and Chan, J. K. L. 2014. Tour Operator Perspectives on Responsible Tourism Indicators of Kinabalu Park, Sabah. Paper presented in Asia Euro Conference 2014, 19-21 May 2014. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Tay, K. X. and Chan, J. K. L. 2014. The Practices of Responsible Tourism in Kinabalu Park, Sabah. Paper presented in 12th APacCHRIE Conference 2014, 21-24 May 2014. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Tay, K. X. and Chan, J. K. L. 2014. Tour operators' perspectives on responsible tourism and green tourism. Paper presented in National Research & Innovation Conference for Graduate Students in Social Sciences 2014 (GS-NRIC2014), 5-7 December 2014. Corus Paradise Resort Port Diskson, Negari Sembilan, Malaysia.



UMS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research background on the tour operators' perspectives toward responsible tourism practices in Kinabalu Park. It presents the research problem with the gaps, research aims and objectives, the scope of the field, and the organisation of the thesis.

1.2 Research Background

The travel and tourism industry contributes significantly to the Malaysian economy in terms of generating output, income, employment, and value added (Mazumder, Ahmed, and Al-Amin, 2009). According to World Travel and Tourism Council (2014), the total contribution of travel and tourism to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was MYR158.2bn, which makes it the second main contributor (16.1 per cent of GDP) in 2013; this is forecasted to rise by 5.1 per cent in 2014 and by 4.5 per cent per annum to MYR262.5bn. The tourism industry is not only beneficial to GDP but also to employment. In 2013, the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 14.1 per cent of total employment with a total of 1,857,500 jobs (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2014). Additionally, the tourism industry is currently the second largest foreign exchange earner after manufacturing in Malaysia (Mazumder et al., 2009).

There are already strong signs that the tourism industry is booming and contributes to socioeconomic development and quality of life. Tourism is playing a pivotal role in increasing the living standard of low-income groups. However, undeniably, the economic benefits of tourism come at a high price paid by natural resources and societies, endangering the core assets of tourism itself such as

nature and human cultures (Budeanu, 2005). Vlaicu (2010) also noted negative impacts on the natural environment caused by uncontrolled tourism activities such as changes in the composition of the floristic and faunistic species through killing, destruction of the species' habitat and rare vegetable species, as well as animal migration. Apart from that, deforestation for building tourist facilities, air, water, soil and noise pollution, and soil erosion and subsidence cause the growth of the pluvial leak and superficial erosion (Vlaicu, 2010). Honey (2008) and Chun (2006) also argued that certain countries, especially those in the third world, suffer a lack of benefits due to the oligopoly of the global tourism market. These negative natural and social impacts evoke an urgent integration of preventive approaches in all tourism strategies, development plans and actions, at all levels of governance and organisation (Budeanu, 2005).

For a long sustainable growth, responsible tourism has emerged as a preventive approach to mass tourism, which had previously dominated the tourism industry. Responsible tourism shares much in common with 'sustainable tourism', 'green tourism', 'ecotourism' and other related forms of nature and socially-conscious tourism practices (Caruana, Glozer, Crane, and McCabe, 2014). It is extremely difficult to draw a distinction between these forms of tourism practices because their definitions and concepts are overlapped, interlinked and interconnected (Mitani, 1993). According to Risteski, Kocevski, and Arnaudov (2012), sustainable development is a necessary practice in order not to create excessive exploitation of natural resources, because the environmental damages can be irreparable. Budeanu (2005) noted that concerns for responsible tourism practices should have an equal focus on correcting past mistakes and on preventing future ones from occurring, therefore, a clear preventive approach must be embedded into current tourism policies and strategies as a whole, if tourism is to help society make progress towards sustainability.

Responsible tourism is typically understood as a broad set of tourist interactions that engage with and benefit local communities and minimise negative social and environmental impacts (Caruana et al, 2014). The label of 'responsible tourism' is by far the most favoured industry term that is used by tour operators

(Center of Responsible Travel (CREST), 2009; SNV, 2009). The tour operator is one of the key players advancing the proposition in affecting changes in the behaviours and attitudes of other stakeholders (e.g. tourists, tourism suppliers) towards more responsible forms of tourism (Budeanu, 2005). In the initial period, tourism companies considered environmentalists and environmental regulations as enemies, and then obeyed them reluctantly (Cairncross, 1995). However, with recent trends, the popularity of corporate social responsibility principles have positively changed corporate attitudes to environmental issues (Budeanu, 2005; Khairat and Maher, 2012). Responsible tourism has become an important means for tourism companies, especially tour operators, to ensure the long-term viability of their business, to differentiate themselves from the market, and to support local communities (SNV, 2009).

Kinabalu Park is one of the most visited destinations in Malaysia (Nais, 1996); it is well-known in domestic circles as well as internationally due to the diversity of its flora and fauna. Kinabalu Park is a protected area under category II as identified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (2000); it has also been declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a World Natural Heritage Site (UNESCO, 2013). The existence of Kinabalu Park is directly or indirectly reliant on the conservation of its natural and cultural resources, otherwise, the main reason driving visitation could be compromised, and the industry could lose market share in the higher yielding responsible tourism while gaining share in low yielding mass tourism. Therefore, all stakeholders are required to play proactive roles towards responsible tourism practices for the long-term sustainability of Kinabalu Park. Kinabalu Park is also one of the most famous products sold by tour operators; their role in practising responsible tourism is significant in the designing and planning of Kinabalu Park tour packages. Moreover, Kinabalu Park was chosen as a subject for the LRGS 0004 Grant provided by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Drawing upon these insights, it is imperative to study the tour operators' perspectives on responsible tourism practices in Kinabalu Park. Perspectives on the motives, practices, challenges faced by tour operators are seen to be important in

understanding responsible tourism in Kinabalu Park. Apart from that, a set of responsible tourism indicators needs to be explored in determining which indicators significantly affect the park's sustainability from the tour operators' perspective.

1.3 Research Problem

Green tourism and responsible tourism have emerged in response to the concerns over the mass tourism development's impacts on the industry (Wheeller, 1990). To date, however, whilst there has been a great deal of research in the field of responsible tourism, most of it is focused on the business perspective on corporate social responsibility, such as hotels (Merwe and Wocke, 2007) and the tourism business (Frey and George, 2010; Cole, Fenclova, and Dinan, 2013), tourists' perspective and trends (Goodwin and Francis, 2003; Caruana et al, 2014; Ramachandran, 2009), local or host perspectives (Sin, 2010; Ramachandran, 2009), or decision makers' perceptions on indicators (Ramachandran, 2009). By contrast, there have been relatively few studies of tour operators' perspectives on responsible tourism (Miller, 2001). Yet, Miller (2001) stated that tour operators have normally served as a source of irascibility amongst the critics who argue that the negative impacts of tourism are more or less in part caused by the actions of operators who therefore have a responsibility to act.

"Green tourism" was the first term pertaining to the sustainability concept used in the tourism industry, in the mid-1970s (Swarbrooke, 1999), whereby responsible tourism is declared as a form of tourism that can shape sustainable spaces into a better place in 2002 (Cape Town Declaration, 2002). Green tourism is advantageous to the tour suppliers and tourists without spoiling the environment for future use (Font and Tribe, 2001). Responsible tourism is emphasising the responsibility of role players in the tourism sector to take action in achieving sustainable tourism development (City of Cape Town, 2009). Since the green concept appeared before responsible tourism, the understanding of green tourism and responsible tourism from the tour operators' perspective needs to be explored before going deeper into this study.

Kinabalu Park is one of the main icons of Sabah and its also the oldest world heritage site in Malaysia. It is vital to ensure that park operations are run in a sustainable manner. However, the role of a tour operator cannot be neglected because Kinabalu Park is one of the main destinations packaged by tour operators and sold to tourists. The attractions of a tourism destination are the main elements in a tour package sold by operators (Curtin and Busby, 1999). If tour operators do not carry out their responsibility in preserving the attractions; they could experience a loss in business due to low destination quality (Budeanu, 2005). However, if the tour operators practise responsible tourism, they will look after the natural resource that they need for a long term, sustainable future. It can be said that tour operators have responsibility to ensure the quality of the product for their business purposes. Responsible tourism practices are recognised as an effective way to drive tour operators to achieve long term sustainability in Kinabalu Park (SNV, 2009; Budeanu 2005). However, there is little research conducted to investigate the tour operators' perspective on responsible tourism in Kinabalu Park, as most of the research performed had placed focus on the local community (Nais, 1996) and local authority (Goh and Yusoff, 2010).

Much research has been done on tourism businesses' attitudes towards sustainability, including tourism business attitudes and perceptions towards responsible tourism management practices in South Africa (Frey and George, 2010), the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices with reasons and barriers faced by SMEs (accommodation, restaurant, travel agents, guides, activity providers) in Europe (Font, Garay, and Jones, 2014) and Latin America (Tamajón and Aulet, 2013), and Scandinavian Airline's decision-motivations for environmental commitment (Lynes and Dredge, 2006). By contrast, there is a relatively little research which focused on tour operator's motives, practices implemented and challenges faced in moving towards sustainability or more responsible behaviour, such as the factors influencing the degree of responsibility shown by tour operators in UK (Miller, 2001), adoption of environmental supply chain management by eight large tour operators (Budeanu, 2009), and the actual experience of tour operators in adopting sustainability practices (implementation areas, motivators, and benefits and barriers) (Khairat and Maher, 2012). The tour

operators' perspectives are dependent on personal value judgement, and what appears to be significant in other locations may not coincide with the findings of this study.

Jaini, Anuar and Daim (2012) argues that there are no special guidelines in practising responsible tourism, thus, many tour operators simply proclaim themselves as responsible operators and operate in the tourism industry without restrictions. Such tour operators would negatively affect Kinabalu Park's environment due to the lack of proper responsible tourism practices. In addition, eventhough the Malaysian government has formulated several policies and acts that are beneficial to environmental issues such as the National Park Act 1980, The National Forestry Act 1984, Environmental Quality Order 1987 and others (Siti-Nabiha, Wahid, Amran, Haat and Abustan, 2008), there is still a lack of regulation or law to police the tour operators accordingly. This phenomenon may affect tour operator business attitude towards responsible tourism in the Kinabalu Park. Furthermore, the literature records many responsible tourism indicators to evaluate different tourism destinations, such as the European tourism indicator system (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013), universal tourism indicators (World Tourism Organisation, 2004), and successful ecotourism indicators (Pengiran Bagul and Datu Eranza, 2010), but there are limited records as to which indicators significant affecting Kinabalu Park's sustainability.

In addition, the main tourism attraction of Kinabalu Park is its abundance of natural resources, and if park management and tour operators do not look after it, the main reason driving visitation could be compromised. Consequently, the tour operator sector would lose higher yielding responsible tourists. Due to the gaps mentioned above, this study is designed to explore in depth tour operators' perspectives on responsible tourism practices in the Kinabalu Park. The definition of responsible tourism and green tourism, the motivation factors driving tour operators towards responsible tourism, the practices of responsible tourism implemented, the challenges and barriers faced and responsible tourism indicators are examined in this study.