Factors Influencing Perceived Attractiveness of the Ecotourism City

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Abstract: The present study identify factors perceived by the respondents affected the attractiveness of the ecotourism city. Combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was utilized in this study. Qualitative approach was used to identify variables and quantitative approach was used to group the variables into factors. The 55 variables were drawn from in depth interview to 11 respondents followed by survey of 195 tourists. Exploratory factor analysis with principal factor extraction revealed 4 main factors of attractiveness with 22 remains significant variables. These factors were: distinctive local features, knowledge and service of the tourism operator, infrastructure and supporting facilities and cultural attributes. The highest variance that explains the tourism attractiveness is distinctive local features while the least variance is cultural attributes.

Key words: Tourism attractiveness, ecotourism city, distinctive local features, knowledge and service of the tourism operator, infrastructure and supporting facilities, cultural attributes

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important aspect of global economy. Its contribution to worldwide GDP is estimated at 5 and 6-7% of the overall number of direct and indirect jobs worldwide (WTO, 2010). Tourism sector provided benefits for both residents and visitors in term of higher employment and better quality of life (Mora *et al.*, 2012). It is impossible to achieve these benefits without proper and appropriately planning and managing the city's tourism attractiveness. Management or key decision maker of destination place need to fully understand the relationship between the tourist nature and environment to enable sustainable management as it is positively contribute to the landscape, nature, culture and tourism (Geneletti and Dawa, 2009).

City and now a days compete each other to attract visitor. The competition will become more intensive in the future (Lipman, 2007). Dealing with this competition is required collective effort, the tourism destination city need to offer more creative and unique tourism concepts, focus on its image and build strong and customer oriented city branding. By focusing the environment and the attractiveness of the target place, the city is forming its image as tourism destination (Naoi *et al.*, 2006). They also affect the motivation to visit (Goossens, 2000). For this reason, the policy makers and practitioner who involve in managing tourism destinations place need to identify factor contribute to city's tourism attractiveness and plan actions intended to improve attractiveness of a city or destination.

Tourism destination attractiveness and its measurement have received much attention from tourism researcher and stakeholders. Destination attractiveness and the overall tourist's perceptions of a location is dominant factor that motivates tourist to a destination (Cho, 2008). Attractiveness of a destination place effects by a very complex factors. These factors are: as price and distance factors (Nicolau and Mas, 2006); accessibility, touristic infrastructure, support services, ancient flavor of the city, distinctive local features, psychological and physical environment (Das *et al.*, 2007); natural environment, artificial and global market (Navickas and Malakauskaite, 2009); shopping elements (Sirakaya *et al.*, 2003); food element (Quan and Wang, 2004) and security element (Heung *et al.*, 2001).

It is found also that tourism attractiveness of a city correlate to its image, competitive positioning and competitive factors (Enright and Newton, 2004; Mazanec *et al.*, 2007). In other hand, image and attractiveness of the city or destination affects the tourist's perception of quality and satisfaction as well as their willingness to return and to recommend the destination (Bigne *et al.*, 2002). The attractiveness of a tourist destination could be improved by the implementation of a set of public-private plans linked to its tourism positioning, resident's awareness, the best use of the cultural and social wealth and the rich heritage as well as the improvement of the infrastructure and the public and private management of tourism (Mora *et al.*, 2012).

There are different views regarding the concept and definition of ecotourism. It is commonly agreed that ecotourism is about aligning natural resources, conservation, education, sustainability, community development and tourism (Su *et al.*, 2014; Donohoe and

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Needham, 2006). The concept of ecotourism and green tourism are growing trends, indicating the public concern and expectation to see destinations that aim to preserve both physical and socio-cultural environments (Uriely *et al.*, 2007). Ecotourism has become a strategic development sector and highly attractive for investment nowadays. If appropriately managed, this sector can contribute to the country's economic growth and social enhancement of local communities by provided foreign exchange, expanding employment and create business opportunity (Wall, 1996).

Ecotourism is a commonly researched topic today, but few studies had been done to measuring and analyzing attractiveness of an ecotourism city or destination based on its underlying factors thus leaving a gap of knowledge what important factors contribute to the attractiveness of the ecotourism city. It is the intention of this study to look at attractiveness of ecotourism city from tourist perspective and to know the factors contribute to attractiveness of the ecotourism city. Specifically to answer the following questions: what factors contribute to attractiveness of the ecotourism city. Which of those factors account for the most variance. Does attractiveness of the ecotourism city differ as perceived by the foreign tourists and domestic tourists.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

An exploratory factor analysis was done in order to identify factors contribute to city's tourism attractiveness. Self-developed questionnaire was used as the measuring instrument to determine factors perceived by the respondents affected the attractiveness. This instrument was developed in two-stage process. First, items in the questionnaire were derived from in-depth interviewed with 11 current visitor of manado-ecotourism city. Each interview lasting between 30-60 min then recorded and transcribed. The number of persons that were interviewed was based on the saturation of the information. There was no more new information on the tenth and twelfth person. The 55 variables derived from in-depth interview then converted into items in a questionnaire. The final questionnaire included specific questions about the aspects respondent's preferences in selecting ecotourism city to be visited. The questioner was tried out to 60 respondents in order to test the construct validity and reliability. The reliability was examined with Cronbach's alpha reliability estimate. The construct validity of this questionnaire was also examined. It is found that coefficient of reliability was 90%. The 18 items were removed indicated by coefficient that was <0.30 (Spector, 1992). The final version of the questionnaire consists of remaining 37 valid items. The questionnaires were prepared in bahasa Indonesia and English, then distributed directly to 195 respondents consist of 66 Foreign and 129 domestic tourists. These respondents were the visitor of manado, a unique ecotourism city in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The respondents were selected conveniently based on some criteria. The criteria used in selecting sample are: the respondent had been visiting manado for tourism purpose and age above 18 years old. Exploratory factor analysis with principal extraction was used in answering the first research question what factors contribute to attractiveness of the ecotourism city. And the second research question which of those factors account for the most variance while in answering the third research question do attractiveness of the ecotourism city relate to respondent's domicile. Independent-samples t-test was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Exploratory factor analysis with principal factor extraction and varimax rotation method was utilized to extract the factors by calculating the eigenvalues of the matrix >1.0. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's (KMO) overall Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) suggested that the sample items was factorable (KMO = 0.863) moreover, another measure of the strength of the correlations among variables, Bartlett's test of sphericity statistically significant (p< 0.05). All the items yielded MSA >0.50 that qualify for further analysis.

The 10 factors were extracted then tested for reliability which was assessed by Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Four of these ten factors were internally consistent and well defined by the variables that are shown by reliability score of Cronbach's alpha that is range from the highest (0.86) to the lowest value (0.71) as shown in Table 1. The 4 factors that contribute to the attractiveness of ecotourism city are distinctive local features, knowledge and service of the tourism operators, infrastructure and supporting facility and cultural attributes. Results of the principal components factor analysis are shown in Table 2. The factors are accounted for 36.97% of the overall variance.

Table 1: Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency

Variable factors	Cronbach's alpha
Factor 1: Distinctive local features	0.86
Factor 2: Knowledge and service of the tourism operators	0.75
Factor 3: Infrastructure and supporting facility	0.75
Factor 4: Cultural attributes	0.71

Table 2: Percentage of variance after varimax rotation

	Factors			
Variables	1	2	3	4
Eigene value	10.01	2.25	1.79	1.65
Variability (%)	11.99	10.71	8.09	6.19
Cumulative (%)	11.99	22.70	30.79	36.97

Table 3: Factor analysis after varimax rotation

Variables	Factors			
	1	2	3	4
Well-known diving spot	0.725	-0.041	0.083	0.110
Availability of public transportation	0.651	-0.032	0.291	0.087
Unique culinary	0.639	0.155	0.187	-0.002
Beaces	0.629	0.351	0.054	0.008
Landscape and nature	0.603	0.347	0.030	0.112
Receptivity of the residents	0.577	0.356	-0.056	0.057
Richness of culture	0.556	0.183	0.004	0.413
Flora and fauna	0.555	0.246	-0.040	0.323
Availability of hotel	0.536	0.118	0.420	0.165
Knowledge and service of tourism center	0.208	0.690	0.089	0.161
Knowledge and service of tourism agents	0.190	0.649	0.058	0.126
Physical infrastructure	0.063	0.606	0.451	0.118
Availability of tourism center	0.091	0.593	0.110	0.202
Cost of accomodation	0.124	0.529	0.205	-0.049
Accesability to destination	0.299	0.451	0.374	0.089
Entertainment place	0.026	0.187	0.803	0.094
Shopping location	0.183	0.066	0.761	0.130
Communication and information network	-0.061	0.402	0.639	0.060
Good looking local peoples	0.324	-0.032	0.569	0.153
Traditional dance attractions	0.117	0.107	0.167	0.813
Cultural events	0.224	0.151	0.196	0.641
Protection of cultural values	0.099	0.492	0.067	0.517

Factor 1: Distinctive local features; Factor 2: Knowledge and service of the tourism operators; Factor 3: Infrastructure and supporting facility; Factor 4: Cultural attributes

The highest variance is Factor 1: distinctive local features (11.99%) while factor that account the least variance is Factor 4: cultural attraction (6.19%).

Loading of variables on factors are shown in Table 3. Variables are ordered and grouped by size of loading to facilitate interpretation. Twelve variables were removed due to lower factor loading than 0.45 which left 22 items. As shown in Table 3 well-known diving spot ($r = 0.725$) is the highest loading for Factor 1. Well-known diving spot indicated one of the distinctive local features.

The next highest loading for Factor 1 seems more appropriate to indicate the name of Factor 3 that is availability of public transportation that relate to artificial factor and infrastructure ($r = 0.651$). Knowledge and service of both tourism center ($r = 0.690$) and tourism agent ($r = 0.649$) are the highest loading for Factor 2. Tourism center and agent considered as tourism operator. Availability of entertainment place ($r = 0.803$) and shopping location ($r = 0.761$) are the highest loading for Factor 3.

Entertainment place and shopping indicated infrastructure and supporting facility. Traditional dance attractions ($r = 0.813$) and cultural events are the highest loading for Factor 4. These two variables indicated cultural attractions. Distinctive local features can be describe in terms of natural environment elements such as diving spot, beach, landscape and nature and flora and fauna; food elements and residence receptivity. Knowledge and service of the tourism operators can be describe in terms of tourist center and agent. The infrastructure and supporting facility can be describe in terms of basic infrastructure; availability of tourism center; transportation; cost element accessibility to destination; entertainment place; shopping place and communication and information network. The cultural attributes can be describe in terms of; traditional dance attractions cultural event protection of cultural values.

To answer the third research question; do attractiveness of the ecotourism city relate to respondent's country of domicile. An independent samples t-test was calculated comparing the mean scores of factors contributing to tourist's interest in visiting ecotourism city between domestic and foreign visitors. No significant deference was found between the contributing factors and country of domicile (t (193) = 0.230, p = 0.81.

There are 4 main factors that contribute to the attractiveness of ecotourism city; distinctive local features, knowledge and service of the tourism operators, infrastructure and supporting facility and cultural attributes. It seems there is no different in the important of factors tourist look at ecotourism and mass tourism destination (Das *et al.*, 2007). Distinctive local features are factor contribute the most to the attractiveness compare with the other factors. This finding is consistent with the study by Das *et al.* (2007) which found that unique attributes determine the perception of tourists towards the attractiveness of a tourist destination.

Another 2 important factors contribute to the attractiveness of the ecotourism city are knowledge and service of the tourism operator and infrastructure and

supporting facility. This findings consistent with the previous studies which found that artificial factors like ease of accessibility touristic infrastructure and support services are some of the factors that contribute to tourism destination attractiveness (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Navickas and Malakauskaite, 2009). Cultural attribute is another factor influencing attractiveness of ecotourism destination. These results are consistent and in agreement with other similar studies which found that cultural attributes determine the perception of tourists towards the attractiveness of a tourist destination (Muller, 1996; Ahmed, 1996; Oppermann, 1996; Schroeder, 1996; Baloglu, 1997; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999).

CONCLUSION

The results of the study may be used by the government and key decision maker of the city not only to gain better understanding of factor contribute to the city's tourism attractiveness from the customer's perspective but also to better design effective strategies and policies and to ensure the sustainability of the ecotourism city.

LIMITATIONS

Some limitations are evident in this study. It has collected responses only from tourist who visited Manado, perhaps it would have presented a more comprehensive picture of ecotourism if responses from the other destination tourists been also included. Secondly, this study limited only to ecotourism concept, similar study that includes other kinds of tourism concept may be conducted. Finally, despite the responses both from the domestic and foreign tourists been collected, it has not been possible for the researchers to collect proportionate number of responses from the respondents of this two domicile. Nevertheless, the present study provides useful information for understanding the tourism characteristics of the destination, especially in the context of tourism city. It will benefit both public and private tourism manager for the purpose of formulating effective tourism policies.

IMPLICATIONS

The major implications to attract more visitor of an ecotourism destination are: maintain and preserve unique characteristic of the city, continually improve the knowledge and service quality of tourism operators, enhance the tourism infrastructures and supporting facilities and provide attractive cultural attribute. Although, the four factors that contribute to the attractiveness of the ecotourism city seem not relate to visitor's country of domicile. It is not necessarily majority of the aspect. As the study of Das *et al.* (2007) except in case of touristic infrastructure, there is no significant differences in the tourist's perception on other touristic attributes relate to geographical region of origin.

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