

Appreciating a World Heritage Site using Multisensory Elements: A Case Study in Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract. Nature based tourism products offer valuable experience to visitors which can only be appreciated or stimulated using sensory elements. Visual, sound, taste, smell, touch and mobility are sensory elements that are able to enhance visitors' experience in any particular destination. However, some destinations might not provide all the elements. Therefore this study's objective is to assess the role of multisensory experience in appreciating the natural heritage of Kinabalu Park. Participant observation is used to carry out the assessment. Findings show visitors are able to appreciate Kinabalu Park using five main sensory elements namely visual, sound, smell, feelings and mobility. The only one that is not available is taste. This is parallel to the products offered in Kinabalu Park which do not allow visitors to pluck any branches or taste any of its forest products. Multisensory elements enhance visitors experience through the senses which will be memorable in years to come. Learning will take place not immediately but through recalling of memories.

1 Introduction

Appreciation of tourism products may take in different forms by various types of visitors. Some may appreciate them through any combination of sensual methods namely visualization, feeling, tasting, smelling or hearing. All depends on how visitors are exposed to the said tourism products. Many visitors are concerned only about their final destination without realizing that they are missing the experiences they gathered along the way to their destination. They appreciate most of the time through a small window rather than experiencing the surrounding environment [1-2]. Mass tourism has created this situation [3]. Visual elements dominated tourists' experience [4-5].

Multisensory elements are vital in enhancing visitors' experience in many ways [6]. Any of these elements will help shape local identity of a specific destination [7]. Meaningful experiences can create a closer link between a visitor and his/her environment and thus will lead to a stronger engagement between the two parties (Pine and Gilmore, 1999 cited in [8]). Referred to as the experience economy by Pine and Gilmore, these experiences can be in the form of active or passive experience [8]. Experiences are not only at the heart of tourism marketing but they will also lead to the essence of branding as argued by [8].