

FROM RISKY ENDEAVORS TO PROFITABLE VENTURES: AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION OF ADVENTURE TOURISM

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Abstract: *Recently, adventure tourism has exhibited an explosive growth in its development and has been regarded as one of the most popular types of nature-based tourism. Stimulated mainly by high numbers of participants who aim for the novel, exciting, challenging as well as adrenaline-rushed experiences, commercially-specialised operators have emerged to satisfy this demand. A wide range of activities are offered and various promotional initiatives are advertised in order to obtain a wider market segment. The existing scenario has led to a new paradigm in assessing the traditional consumption of outdoor and adventure recreation. This paper intends to provide an overview of adventure tourism as an increasingly popular trend by exploring several conceptual dimensions relevant to the adventure tourism, particularly in terms of its affiliation with outdoor recreation, adventure recreation, and natural environment.*

Keywords: *Adventure Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, Adventure Recreation, Product Development*

Introduction

The increasing concerns towards better lifestyles and the necessity to experience the outdoors over previous years have brought upon an intimately closer relationship between the natural environment and the hedonic but beneficial participation of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism. Such relationship has been portrayed via several phases over the past few

decades. This includes the fact that it is being regarded as one of working together (Zierer, 1952), opposing each other (Akoglu, 1971), having some possibilities of conflict, coexistence and symbiosis (Budowski, 1976), and as an integrated system (Newsome, Moore and Dowling, 2013). From the outdoor recreationists and nature-based tourists' perspectives, there is a rapid growing demand for interaction with the natural environment in a variety of means and approaches (Coghlan and Buckley, 2013; Newsome et al, 2013; Pigram and Jenkins, 2006). As a matter of fact, as most of the world's population inhabiting modernly developed and urbanised areas, natural areas represent 'escape locations' that provide enormous opportunities for alternative relaxation, excitement, stimulation and even potential adventure (Ryan, 2003). This displacement of self from the ordinary populated surroundings to the extraordinary natural environment appears to be responsible for the obtainment of pleasurable experiences that are central to the outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism (Coghlan and Buckley, 2013; Newsome et al., 2013; Pigram and Jenkins, 2006).

Equally interesting notification that has emerged from the relationship mentioned above is the shifting pattern of outdoor recreation (including the more specific category of adventure recreation) consumption. The operationalisation of outdoor recreation and adventure recreation that was formerly regarded as need-satisfying initiatives during leisure or existing discretionary time has evolved into a more serious commercial application, with additional requirements such as travelling outside one's usual surrounding for a certain period of time, as well as purchasing adventure packages offered by specialised operators (Buckley, 2012; Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie and Pomfret, 2003). In this regard, the core attraction for participation (natural environment) still remains the same but the approaches adopted to manipulate such participations have shifted into a more diverse adventurous opportunities that involves certain amount of economic gains and monetary values. Specifically, the concept of tourism (as a need-satisfying approach and profitable venture) has contemporarily been expanded to embrace the conceptualisation of outdoor and adventure recreation; hence, giving birth to a unique form of nature-based tourism known as adventure tourism.

This paper seeks to provide an overview of adventure tourism as an increasingly popular trend for contemporary nature-lovers, outdoor recreationists and adventure enthusiasts. Descriptions and arguments presented within this paper will explore several conceptual dimensions relevant to adventure tourism particularly in terms of its affiliation with outdoor recreation, adventure recreation and natural environment. The paper will also draw upon published examples and existing research findings to illustrate certain highlighted key points and illuminate the contemporary adventure tourism scenes. Specifically, this paper develops a number of introductory ideas that help explain what might broadly be thought of as the commercialisation of outdoor and adventure recreational activities through the possibilities opened up by adventure tourism.

Defining Adventure Tourism

In general, the complex and multi-dimensional characteristics of tourism products and categories have led to a rather difficult task in finding a universal definition for a specific tourism type. The same scenario also applies to adventure tourism. Based on the existing literatures, this type of nature-based tourism has been loosely termed as the 'expansion of

active outdoor recreation’ (Christiansen, 1990), ‘tourism in the environment’ (Newsome et al, 2013), ‘physically challenging outdoor leisure in remote areas’ (Lala and Bhat, 2008) and ‘overlapping’ between several other types of tourism such as ACE (adventure, culture, ecotourism) (Fennel, 2003) and NEAT (nature, eco, adventure, tourism) (Buckley, 2000).

Nevertheless, it is also apparent that some attempts have been made by several researchers to develop definitions that can be used by academicians and practitioners in understanding the main concept of the word. Sung, Morrison and O’Leary (1997, p.66) for example, proposed that adventure travel is “*a trip or travel with the purpose of activity participation to explore new experience, often involving perceived risk or controlled danger associated with personal challenges, in a natural environment or exotic outdoor setting*”. Similarly, Hall (1992, p. 143) suggested that adventure tourism is “*a broad spectrum of outdoor touristic activities; often commercialised; involving an interaction with the natural environment; away from the participants home range; and containing elements of risk in which the outcome is influenced by the participants, settings and management of the touristic experience.*” Furthermore, Swarbrooke et al. (2003) and Buckley (2006a; 2012) had widen up the perspectives and viewed adventure tourism as an accumulation of several characteristics, such as remote and exotic natural environment, challenging and adventurous activities, mental and physical toughness, risky endeavours, specialised skills and equipment’s, guided tours and product commercialisation (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Characteristics of Adventure Tourism (Adapted from Swarbrooke Et Al. (2003) and Buckley (2012; 2006a)

In a broader viewpoint, Sung et al. (1997) and Weber (2001) claimed that definitions and implementation concepts of adventure tourism were originated from outdoor recreation and adventure recreation. Agreeing with opinions previously voiced by Ewert and Hollenhorst (1989) and Priest (1990), Sung et al (1997) and Weber (2001) added that adventure travel experiences are being portrayed by the interchange of competence and risk, as well as active interaction with the natural environment which resemble some of the main features of adventure recreation and certain outdoor recreational activities. As a matter of fact, most of the existing studies or available publications of adventure tourism can be regarded as a supplementary expansion of leisure science, outdoor education, adventure recreation and outdoor recreation fields (Buckley, 2012; Buckley, 2006b; Weber, 2001). While these fields may have similar philosophies in terms of participation outcomes, they do exhibit several distinctions with adventure tourism. An obvious distinguishing factor is the notion to which participants need to travel from their home base to participate in their preferred adventure tourism activities. Thus, adapting the core concept of tourism (dislocation of oneself from usual place or surrounding for a certain period of time to obtain hedonic or other beneficial experiences). Furthermore, the nature of engagement in adventure tourism activities are more focused on relatively formal, commercialized and guided types of activities with high level of intervention by specialised tour operators. On the other hand, outdoor recreation and adventure recreation activities are generally created and implemented by individual with little commercial influences and less urgencies for travelling to extra-ordinary places.

Adventure Tourism Products and Activities

Almost all adventure tourism products have evolved from the existing adventure and outdoor recreational activities, such as mountain climbing, jungle trekking, scuba diving, kayaking, caving and skydiving. In these instances, professional and specialised tour operators have actively sought tourist adventurous demand and creatively transformed the existing outdoor or adventure recreation activities into sell-able tourism packages to meet the specific needs and demands of the tourist markets (Buckley, 2007; Swarbrooke et al, 2003). In other cases, luxurious adventure products such as scenic aerial touring, jet boating and four-wheel-drive day tours have evolved to specifically meet the sensation-seeking, high novelty but transient demands of adventure consumers (Buckley, 2012; Williams and Soutar, 2009).

In general, the offering of adventure tourism products and activities seem to be exhaustive and can be regarded as sufficiently covering all geographical spectrums (Table 1). Similarly, several adventure activities that were previously exclusive to certain types of participants (requiring the mastery of special skills and expertise such as paragliding and scuba diving) have been made available and 'do-able' to a broad range of potential participants. In fact, nowadays, these activities have already been regarded as common activities in adventure tourism (Buckley, 2012).

The activities can also be considered as practically 'flexible' in terms of participation or consumption pattern. This is because the activities that are currently been offered can be participated via two approaches or through what has been termed by Hill (1995) and Scott &

Mowen (2007) as ‘hard adventure’ and ‘soft adventure’. This classification has indeed added another distinction between adventure tourism with outdoor recreation or adventure recreation (since this unique classification does not explicitly exist in academic discussion concerning types of outdoor recreation or adventure recreation). The management and organisation of the two types of experiences offered by adventure tourism are quite different. Hard adventure generally concerns with adventure tourists who are willing to travel to environmentally as well as socially remote destinations to acquire experiences that exist upon some extent of a confrontation with inherent risks and dangers. These risks are real rather than perceived, and need to be carefully managed through the advanced skills, intense commitment as well as experiences of participants and tour operators. In other words, hard adventure is normally characterised by high risk, active engagement, adrenaline-rushed and extremely challenging type of participation. Besides that, it also requires participants to be both physically and mentally fit since hedonism in a hard adventure is determined by the success of overcoming challenges, uncertainties and risks. Such activities include mountaineering, via-ferrata, downhill skiing, scuba diving, white-water kayaking, paragliding and skydiving.

ADVENTURE TOURISM ACTIVITIES		
land-based	water-based	aviation-related
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-country skiing • Downhill skiing • Ski-touring • Snowboarding • Trekking/tramping • Jungle hiking/bush walking • Off-road safaris • 4wd tours • Flying-fox • Zipline • Via-ferrata • Bungy jumping • Mountain biking/cycling • Horse riding • Hill climbing • Mountain climbing • Abseiling • Rock climbing • Ice climbing • Caving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White-water rafting • Sailing • Snorkelling • Scuba diving • Jet-boating • Sea/river kayaking • White-water kayaking • Canoeing • River boarding • Water skiing • Wind surfing • Board surfing • Expedition cruise • Fishing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot-ballooning • Hang gliding • Heli-bungy jumping • Parachuting • Paragliding • Paramotor • Sky diving • Scenic aerial touring (small aircraft/helicopter)

Table 1: Adventure Tourism Activities (Adapted from Swarbrooke Et Al (2003), Buckley (2006a) and Bentley And Page (2008))

Soft adventure, on the other hand, usually involves novices or beginners in certain activities and settings. Participants of soft adventure are generally seeking for a carefully planned level of novel activities that provide excitement and emotional release rather than extremely challenging or high-risked circumstances. Soft adventure experiences are relatively passive as compared to hard adventure and rarely involve physical discomfort, even though there are implemented in the rugged natural environment. Such activities include bush walking, horse riding, fishing, snorkeling, hot-ballooning and scenic aerial tours. The enjoyment for soft adventurers comes from overcoming the perceived risks and dangers that are produced through the leadership and experiences of the tour operator and also through a spiritual association with the natural environment. In addition, according to Christiansen (1990), 'all-in-one packaging' is an important component of soft adventure tourism, with the package normally consists of transportation, accommodation, equipment, activities, permits, entrance fees, catering and entertainment.

Promotion and Marketing of Adventure Tourism

Several researchers such as Christiansen (1990), Sung et al (1997), Williams and Soutar (2009) and Lotter, Geldenhuys and Potgieter (2012) indicated that adventure tourism market in general is formed by relatively young, educated, active, and high-spenders type of tourists. Similarly, Buckley (2006a) also voiced out the allegation that adventure tourists are tourists who are willing to spend considerably high amount of money in exchange for personal pursuit of thrills and adventures, either in choosing the types of challenging activities they want to participate or determining the types of adventure destinations they wish to visit. Besides that, the unique personality traits and psychological eagerness towards adventure experiences identified through several research findings such as from Gilchrist, Povey, Dickinson and Povey (1995), Fluker and Turner (2000), Muller and Cleaver (2000), Gyimothy & Mykletun (2004), Tran and Ralston (2006), Faullant, Matzler and Mooradian (2011) and Schneider and Vogt (2012) further act as significant catalyst to the aggressive participation in adventure tourism. Consequently, these behavioural and attitudinal characteristics of adventure tourists have been viewed by adventure tourism operators as optimistic marketing justifications in order to offer advanced adventurous enjoyment beyond what were once solely supplied by outdoor recreation or adventure recreation.

Besides that, many remote and previously unexplored destinations such as the mountain range of the Himalayas, the outer-most sections of the Great Barrier Reefs, grade five white water of the Zambezi River, beaches with big waves of the remote Savaii Island and the snowy landscapes of the Arctic have been transformed into adventure tourism venues (Buckley, 2006a; Gyimothy and Mykletun, 2004; Swarbrooke et al., 2003). Even trekking to the base camps or 'conquering' the iconic mountains of the world such as Everest, Elbrus, Kilimanjaro, Vinson Massif, Kosciuszko, Carstensz Pyramid, McKinley and Aconcagua are no longer merely depend on technical knowledge and capabilities, but how much money a climber could pay and support such expeditions (Heinrichs, 2010; Richardson, 2008). The bases of these mountains as well as any other adventure tourism venues of the world have

already been developed with proper and conducive infrastructures to facilitate the ‘selling processes’ of adventure tourism (Richardson, 2008; Buckley, 2007; 2006a).

The above-mentioned factors have undoubtedly lured significant amount of investments, particularly in terms of product development, infrastructure construction and associated service provision by adventure tour operators. The unique demand of adventure tourists and the associated potential income generation opportunities have been fully exploited by the tour operators to sell specialised services as well as creating diversity and flexibility of the adventure activities to obtain wider market segments (Buckley, 2012; Swarbrooke et al, 2003). In addition, with the availability of some supporting materials and channels such as websites, books, magazines, clothing suppliers and outdoor stores (Page, Steele and Connell, 2006; Buckley, 2003), the prospect for adventure tourism as a long-term profitable venture and lucrative tourism industry indeed seems to be very promising.

As a result of the above-mentioned scenarios, two types of marketing initiatives can be observed. First, some adventure tourism operators specifically aim for adventure tourists and offer a broad range of commercial adventure packages. A classic example of this approach can be seen in Queenstown, New Zealand. With a very robust branding of ‘Adventure Capital of the World’, Queenstown has aggressively promoted itself to cater a wide range of adventure tourists via various adventure products such as the “Awesome Foursome”. A Malaysian example that could be classified as utilising similar promotional approach is Gopeng, Perak. Although there is yet to be any specific adventure branding proclaimed by the local authority, Gopeng is undeniably a ‘one stop centre’ for adventure tourism in Peninsular Malaysia, which caters for various adventure activities such as white-water rafting and kayaking, waterfall abseiling, caving, high rope activities, rock climbing, mountain biking and jungle trekking. The other marketing approach of adventure tourism exists in the forms of combination of various tourism products. Rather than prioritising the efforts to attract adventure tourists, tourism developers and operators are utilising a more diversified strategies by simultaneously offering other tourism products with the intention to obtain wider range of tourist markets. Examples in this context would be of Cairns, Australia and Sabah, Malaysia. Both destinations have been successfully appealing to high number of tourists due to the effective ‘blending’ of tourism products such as cultural tourism, wildlife tourism, ecotourism and adventure tourism, mimicking the concept of NEAT and ACE tourism introduced by Buckley (2000) and Fennell (1999).

Growth of Adventure Tourism

In recent years, adventure tourism has stood out to be one of the most prevalent themes for nature-based tourism and increasingly dominates the industry. Despite its relatively new occurrences, documented proofs of adventure tourism’s meteoric growth such as statistical reports produced by George Washington University, Adventure Travel Trade Association and Xola Consulting (2011), UNWTO (2014) as well as academically-supported assertions from several prominent researchers of the field such as Buckley (2007), Schott (2007) and Williams and Soutar (2009) seem to be spreading the notion that this type of nature-based tourism might overshadow the popularity of its ‘siblings’ such as ecotourism and wildlife tourism or even its ‘ancestors’; the outdoor and adventure recreation. In fact, it is claimed

that adventure tourism has already emerged as the fastest growing sector of international niche tourism market (Ewert and Jamieson, 2003) with an estimated annual growth of 17% (George Washington University et al., 2011).

In addition, as a response to the rapid and dynamic growth of adventure tourism, a significant number of specialised tour operators as well as adventure tourism companies has emerged (Buckley 2006a; Bergin & Jago, 1999). These operators offer numerous ranges of adventurous activities and even expand their services to some of the world's most remote places such as Antarctica, Mongolia, Cambodia, Samoa, Namibia or Papua New Guinea (Buckley, 2006a). Simultaneously, the operators also provide diversity and flexibility in their services whereby the adventure packages are carefully planned and made available to a wider market segment encompassing all level of ages and capabilities, or even to the hard adventure and soft adventure tourists (Buckley, 2007; Kane and Zink, 2004).

The growing pattern of adventure tourism services is also apparent in Malaysia. Although currently receiving limited publicity as compared to ecotourism and still holding the status of a 'new' type of tourism in Malaysia, adventurous travel is progressively gaining its momentum as one of the most participated tourism activities and has provided the added value to the status of tourism as one the country's most promising and important economic sectors (Mohamad Khairi and Azlizam, 2016; PE Research, 2013). In this context, the attractiveness of Malaysia's natural resources has been gradually exploited by local tourism developers to cater the needs, wants and desires of nature-based tourists including adventure tourists. Table 2 depicts several examples of well-known destinations for adventure tourism activities in Malaysia.

ACTIVITY	DESTINATION	STATE
Mountain Hiking	Gunung Kinabalu	Sabah
	Gunung Tahan	Pahang
	Gunung Datuk	Negeri Sembilan
Jungle Trekking	Endau Rompin	Johor
	Danum Valley	Sabah
	Taman Negara	Pahang
Caving	Merapoh Karst Complex	Pahang
	Sarawak Chamber	Sarawak
	Gua Tempurung	Perak
White-water rafting	Sungai Kampar	Perak
	Sungai Padas	Sabah
	Sungai Sedim	Kedah
Paragliding	Bukit Jugra	Selangor
	Kuala Kubu Bharu	Selangor
	Gunung Jerai	Kedah
Rock Climbing	Batu Caves	Selangor
	Bukit Keteri	Perlis
	Gunung Lang	Perak
Scuba Diving	Pulau Mabul	Sabah

	Pulau Redang	Terengganu
	Pulau Payar	Kedah
Canyoning	Hutan Lipur Kanching	Selangor
	Hutan Lipur Berkelah	Pahang
	Lata Bukit Hijau	Kedah

Table 2: Examples of Adventure Tourism Destinations According to Several Specified Activities in Malaysia (Adapted from Alwi and Aziz, 2016; Tourism Malaysia, 2008).

Furthermore, as highlighted by Alwi and Aziz (2016), the high demand for adventurous endeavor among Malaysian can also be regarded as the main justification for the emergence of adventure tourism businesses in the country, which eventually gives birth to a number of specialized adventure tour operators such as GAC Adventure Consultant, Nomad Adventure, Skytrex, ORL Green Nature, Doth Fourseven Resources, SGI Outdoor Merapoh Travel, S & R Adventure Consultant, Silver Outdoor Sports, Kem Bara Murni, Hiloadna, 69 Degree North, Liam Watersports, Padi Travel and Tours, Riverbug, AWAN Adventure, MKA Outdoor Booster, Wild Junction, Career One Divers and Petit Climbing Center. Interestingly, there is also an observable increase in the numbers of nationally certified outdoor recreation instructors (*Persijilan Kejurulatihan Rekreasi Luar Kebangsaan* by the Ministry of Youth and Sports) who currently own and operate adventure tourism companies (Alwi and Aziz, 2016). These companies such as Mountain River, XTree Resources, KBX Reramaria, Delta Adventure Consultancy, Luluh Outdoor Recreation and Survival, Pearl Island Adventure, Aquaputra Academy, Rapidfire, Redtma Recreation Sport Centre, UNI Qteam, Kayak Baling, and Wira Adventure Consultant have successfully commercialised the existing outdoor and adventure recreation activities and simultaneously transformed them into purchase-able adventurous short-term holiday experiences.

Conclusion

Adventure tourism has emerged as one of the fastest growing nature-based tourism industries worldwide. This scenario, among others is mainly due to the paradigm shift in contemporary adventure-lovers' demand, expectation and psychological belief, whereby enjoyment through experiencing the natural environment or 'statically' involve in nature-based experiences within their own usual surroundings is no longer sufficient. Instead, the emerging needs and tendencies to participate in the risky situations, obtaining sensory stimulations and indulging in certain level of challenges provided by the natural environment in new and extraordinary locations have opened up significant opportunities for the development of adventure tourism.

The wide variety of interestingly-packaged adventurous activities accompanied with professional guidance by specialised tour operators have provided another substantial leap of adventure tourism over the typical implementation of outdoor and adventure recreation. With the assurance of hedonic experiences by overcoming perceived or real risk scenarios, hard and soft adventurers are capable of obtaining the desired enjoyment and safety in a more structured process of experience gathering rather than implementing the activities individually or by themselves. Moreover, the commercialisation of outdoor and adventure recreation has also led to income generation as well as provided opportunities for the existing

outdoor recreation instructors to initiate tourism-related entrepreneurial initiatives based on their possessed skills and expertise.

Participation in adventure tourism is generally expected to grow at a faster rate than any other nature-based tourism or even outdoor and adventure recreation (Buckley, 2012). In fact, in most developed countries, outdoor and adventure recreations are no longer treated as acquired lifetime skills but more as purchase-able holiday products (Kane and Zink, 2004). This is not to ignore the importance of outdoor and adventure recreation but the existing scenario will undoubtedly shape the contemporary perspectives as well as providing a glimpse on how outdoor and adventure recreations will most likely be implemented in the future.

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