Expert Rating System: Application For Sustainable Ecotourism Management

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Abstract:
All ecotourism sites must be planned, guided and exploited in a monitored and controlled manner for effective and efficient management. A systematic expert rating system is developed to maintain a certain level of standards based on different levels of categorisation to ensure the sustainability of these ecotourism sites, which can be used for intelligent decision-making. The expert system developed uses a web-based information-sharing platform in line with the existing legislation on safety, health and environment. Where no guidelines are available, recommendations based on the domain experts, literature and field survey statistics are incorporated. The diagnostic list of ecotourism sites in Malaysia, developed by the World Wildlife Fund as The Malaysian National Ecotourism Plan, is also used in enhancing the expert rating system. The system is designed and developed on a back-end on-line database, which will keep record of all successful transactions. The web site, which is the graphical user interface (GUI) for the user, is hosted in the Technology Park for more efficient maintenance and management with its domain name being www.ecotoures-upm.net. The web designing is done using HTML codes and Java Scripts. The on-line database would be designed using Visual Basic with MS-Access 2000 back-end database engine, which encompasses Standard Query Language (SQL) and Active Server Pages (ASP) as part of the rule based expert system shell.

Key words:
Ecotourism, sustainable management, expert system, rating

Introduction
Malaysia is a tropical wonderland that is substantially rich in a variety of ecological pursuits. It is abundantly green and is home to over 11000 known species of flora and fauna (Khairuddin, 1992 and Ahmad Shuib et.al, 1992). Malaysia, is an ecological area of much tourist potential. This potential can be harnessed through destination developed for tourists. They can be converted as an essential element for any successful destination for tourists.

The ecotourism concept emphasises the maximisation of the ecological interest areas, which include marine parks and islands, national parks, recreational forest reserves, and other forests, mangrove sites, limestone hills and cave sites, river, waterfalls and lakes, beach sites and montane areas (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1993). This aspect, while having vast potential for further development and exploitation, has not received adequate attention in