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Ecotourism Awareness in Peninsular Malaysia: A National Domestic Tele-Survey

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1. INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Defining "Ecotourism" has proven to be a difficult task given all the different players attempting to define it. People tend to define things in terms that are beneficial to themselves, hence the variety of definitions. There are however several workable definitions currently in wide use.

The International Ecotourism Society defines Ecotourism as: "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people". The Australian Commission on National Ecotourism Strategy calls it: "nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable". Since the publication of her excellent book "Ecotourism and Sustainable Development" Martha Honey's definition is quickly becoming the standard. Most serious studies of ecotourism including several University programs now use this as the working definition. Her definition of ecotourism encompasses seven points:

1) Involves travel to natural destinations
2) Minimizes Impact.
3) Builds environmental awareness
4) Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
5) Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
6) Respects local culture:
7) Supports human rights and democratic movements

Ecotourism maybe the fastest growing tourism sub market in the world in general, and in Malaysia in particular. A macro awareness on the understanding of ecotourism is essential if this specialised industry is to succeed in Malaysia. In July 2001 the Expert System Research Group of Universiti Putra Malaysia with the help of the students of Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism, commissioned a research to measure the understanding, interest and participation in ecotourism among Malaysians.