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ASSESSING HIGHLAND TOURISM FACILITIES IN CAMERON HIGHLANDS FOR VISITOR EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Research employs an assessment framework to evaluate highland tourism facilities in Cameron Highlands, focusing on visitor experience. conducting an extensive survey on 445 visitors in the study area and performing detailed data analysis, the assessment highlights the strengths and weaknesses of local tourism facilities and services. The comprehensive study during non-peak tourist seasons underscores the importance of improving accommodation standards, recreational activities, and transportation systems to enhance overall visitor satisfaction. The same framework allows for the evaluation of overall affordability of a visit, emphasising the need for better pricing and promotion efforts. The findings of this study underscore the necessity for enhancing cost efficiency across various aspects of the tourism industry, offering a diverse array of attractions to cater to different interests and preferences. Furthermore, improving traffic and transportation services to better meet the needs of visitors is essential. The proposed strategies aim to create a balanced approach that maximises visitor satisfaction while ensuring the sustainability and resilience of the tourism industry in this unique and valuable destination.

Keywords: Highland tourism; Visitor experience; Tourism facilities; Tourism standards; Cost efficiency

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INTRODUCTION

Highland tourism represents a thriving segment of the global tourism industry, centered around mountainous and elevated regions celebrated for their scenic beauty, cooler climates, and rich cultural heritage. Understanding tourist behavior—which includes the decisions, preferences, and activities of visitors—is crucial to enhancing the tourism experience and promoting sustainable development. Cameron Highlands, situated in the Titiwangsa Mountains of Peninsular Malaysia, stands out as a leading highland destination. Renowned for its tea plantations, lush landscapes, and temperate climate, the region attracts a large number of visitors annually. However, it also faces critical challenges, particularly in the form of overtourism and high costs, both of which negatively impact visitor satisfaction and long-term sustainability.

This study addresses the pressing need to evaluate and improve tourism facilities in Cameron Highlands in order to enhance visitor experiences. Despite its popularity, the region continues to suffer from issues such as overcrowding and high expenses, which undermine its attractiveness. The core research problem focuses on identifying the key factors that influence visitor satisfaction and proposing strategic measures to address these concerns. The central hypothesis of this research is that targeted improvements in tourism facilities and services will significantly enhance visitor satisfaction and support the sustainable development of Cameron Highlands as a tourist destination. To test this hypothesis, the study adopts an exploratory research design that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data is collected through extensive surveys and analyzed to uncover major patterns and challenges. This comprehensive approach enables a detailed assessment of visitor experiences and the performance of existing tourism infrastructure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the multidimensional aspects of highland tourism, emphasizing the importance of evaluating tourism facilities in Cameron Highlands to enhance the overall visitor experience. It synthesizes existing research on highland tourism and identifies current gaps in the literature. The review addresses key themes, including various types of tourism, essential factors influencing the selection of highland destinations, and the challenges posed by congestion. It also examines the relationship between influencing factors and visitors' satisfaction levels in the context of Cameron Highlands. Lastly, the review outlines the structure of the subsequent chapters, establishing a coherent connection between the methodology, findings, and discussions to ensure a logical flow of information for the reader.

Overview of Highland Tourism

Highland tourism is a vital component of the global tourism industry, drawing visitors to elevated regions that offer scenic landscapes, cooler climates, and culturally rich experiences. Typically, this form of tourism involves travel to mountainous areas celebrated for their natural beauty, outdoor recreational opportunities, and historical or cultural significance. Its appeal lies in providing a refreshing escape from the heat and bustle of lowland environments, offering travelers a chance for relaxation, adventure, and discovery. Hosni, N. (2013). The literature on highland tourism identifies several key determinants of tourist behavior and destination preference. These include the quality of the natural environment, availability of cultural attractions, accessibility, accommodation standards, and the range of recreational activities. Other critical factors influencing satisfaction include perceived safety, infrastructure development, and the overall experience offered by the destination. **Rasdi, A. L. M.** (2023).

Tourism Facilities and Their Impact

Tourism facilities play a central role in the success and sustainability of any tourist destination. These encompass a wide array of services and infrastructure, such as accommodations, transportation networks, dining establishments, recreational amenities, and visitor information centers. The presence and quality of such facilities directly affect tourists' experiences and levels of satisfaction. (Khairi, M., & Darmawan, D. (2021).

Research has shown that well-maintained and strategically developed tourism facilities significantly enhance a destination's attractiveness. This, in turn, encourages repeat visits and generates positive word-of-mouth promotion. On the other hand, insufficient or poorly maintained infrastructure can diminish the visitor experience, resulting in negative perceptions and a decline in tourist arrivals. In highland destinations specifically, facilities such as hiking trails, panoramic viewpoints, and cultural heritage centers are especially appreciated by visitors. (Jamal, S. A., Othman, N., & Muhammad, N. (2011).

Background of the Study Area: Cameron Highlands

Cameron Highlands, located in the state of Pahang, Malaysia, is one of the country's most renowned highland destinations, celebrated for its stunning landscapes and temperate climate. The region comprises three administrative sub-districts (mukims): Tanah Rata, Ringlet, and Hulu Terum. Each mukim contributes uniquely to the region's governance, land use, and socio-demographic profile. In term of administrative Divisions. The largest administrative unit, Hulu Terum, covers approximately 61,323.97 hectares, accounting for about 89.95% of Cameron Highlands' total land area. This mukim is predominantly rural, characterized by expansive tea plantations, dense forests, and robust agricultural activity. The terrain features terraced farms that yield various crops such as

vegetables, strawberries, and flowers—key drivers of the local economy. Ringlet, covering 4,835.02 hectares (7.09%), functions as a gateway to the highlands and is known for its scenic vistas and lively markets. It hosts several large-scale agricultural projects and serves as a logistical hub for distributing highland produce across Malaysia. Tanah Rata, the administrative and commercial center, spans 1,995.12 hectares (2.93%). Despite being the smallest mukim, it is a vibrant township offering a wide array of services and amenities for both locals and tourists. The town is distinguished by its colonial-style architecture, botanical gardens, and its function as a starting point for numerous hiking trails. Accommodation options in Tanah Rata range from budget lodges to high-end resorts, catering to a diverse visitor demographic.



Challenges in Highland Tourism of Cameron Highlands

Cameron Highlands, renowned as one of Malaysia's leading highland tourist destinations, offers an exceptional mix of natural beauty, cool climate, and cultural heritage. Despite its popularity, the region is increasingly confronted with a range of challenges that threaten its long-term sustainability and appeal to visitors. **Rasdi, A. L. M. (2023)**. Foremost among these challenges is the issue of overtourism, where visitor numbers exceed the destination's carrying capacity. This excessive influx of tourists results in overcrowding at popular sites, increased pressure on infrastructure, and environmental degradation. Consequently, the overall quality of the visitor experience is compromised, leading to lower satisfaction and concerns over the destination's sustainability. (Mohamad, D., & Marzuki, A. (2018))

Another major challenge is the high cost of tourism in the region. Expenses related to accommodation, transportation, and tourist activities are often considered excessive, deterring price-sensitive travelers and limiting the accessibility of Cameron Highlands to a broader market. This reduces the region's competitiveness compared to other domestic and international destinations offering similar experiences. Additionally, environmental degradation presents a critical concern. Illegal land clearing, often driven by agricultural expansion, and unsustainable farming practices have caused significant ecological damage. These activities not only threaten the natural landscape that forms the core of Cameron Highlands' tourism appeal but also contribute to soil erosion, water pollution, and habitat loss. Collectively, these challenges highlight the urgent need for integrated planning, regulatory enforcement, and sustainable tourism strategies to preserve the ecological integrity and economic viability of Cameron Highlands as a premier highland destination. Goh, H. C. (2015).

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data, was utilized to ensure comprehensive analysis. The integration of structured surveys, in-depth visitor insights, and spatial land use data enables a holistic understanding of the region's socio-economic conditions, environmental constraints, and tourism dynamics. This flexible approach is well-suited for examining emerging or poorly defined problems, enabling the development of hypotheses and guiding more in-depth future research. The target population comprises tourists and visitors to Cameron Highlands. A convenient random sampling method was employed to select 445 respondents, ensuring each participant had an equal opportunity to be included in the study. This sampling approach provided a representative cross-section of the tourist population.

The data collection was conducted in two stages, which were primary data collection was gathered through the administration of structured questionnaires distributed to tourists in various locations across Cameron Highlands. The questionnaire covered several dimensions, including respondent demographics, travel details, motivating factors for choosing Cameron Highlands, types of activities undertaken, perceived congestion at tourist sites, satisfaction with public facilities, overall trip satisfaction, and willingness to pay. Secondary data analysis was obtained from a range of sources including academic books, peer-reviewed journals, news articles, and online databases. Additional data was sourced from official documents such as the Cameron Highlands District Local Plan 2030, the Department of Statistics Malaysia, and PlanMalaysia. These secondary sources provided essential information on land use patterns, area size, existing facilities, and infrastructure in the study area. This study recognizes several limitations, such as the geographically confined scope

limited to Cameron Highlands and the brief period allotted for data collection. Moreover, as the study relies on self-reported data, there is a risk of response bias. Hence, generalizing the findings to other highland destinations should be approached with caution.

ANALYSES

Profile of Respondents by State of Origin

State of origin	Frequency	Percent
Selangor	86	19.30%
Kuala Lumpur	69	15.50%
Perak	47	10.60%
Foreigner	40	9.00%
Negeri sembilan	35	7.90%
Kelantan	34	7.60%
Pahang	29	6.50%
Johor	25	5.60%
Kedah	19	4.30%
Terengganu	19	4.30%
Melaka	14	3.10%
Pulau Pinang	14	3.10%
Putrajaya	7	1.60%
Perlis	3	0.70%
Sabah	3	0.70%
Sarawak	1	0.20%
Total	445	100%

The survey data reveals a diverse range of origins among the respondents, reflecting the widespread appeal of Cameron Highlands as a tourist destination. The highest number of visitors came from Selangor, accounting for 19.3% (86 respondents), followed by Kuala Lumpur at 15.5% (69 respondents). This indicates a strong interest from the central regions of Malaysia. Notably, foreigners also represented a significant portion, with 9% (40 respondents), highlighting Cameron Highlands' international attraction. Other states with notable representation include Perak (10.6%), Kelantan (7.6%), and Negeri

Sembilan (7.9%). On the lower end, states such as Perlis, Sabah, and Sarawak had minimal representation, each contributing less than 1% of the total respondents. The diverse geographical origins underscore the broad appeal of Cameron Highlands and the potential for targeted marketing strategies to boost visitation from underrepresented regions. 80.2% (357 respondents) reporting that their trips were spontaneous and unplanned visits which suggests a strong impulsive travel trend among tourists, potentially influenced by the accessibility and attractive climate of Cameron Highlands. 97.1% (432 respondents) visiting in groups which include family outings, tours, or trips with friends, highlighting the social nature of travel to Cameron Highlands.

Type of Attractions Respondents Visited

Table 2: Type of Attraction respondents visited in Cameron Highlands

	Count	Percent
Adventure and Sports Tourism	20	4.5%
Agro and Wildlife Tourism	280	62.9%
Eco Tourism	44	9.9%
Gastro Tourism	5	1.1%
Religious and Cultural Tourism	5	1.1%
Urban and Shopping Tourism	91	20.4%
Total	445	100%

The type of attractions visited by respondents indicates a strong preference for agro and wildlife tourism, which attracted 62.9% (280 respondents). This overwhelming majority reflects the region's reputation for its agricultural heritage and natural beauty, such as tea plantations and strawberry farms. Eco-tourism also garnered significant interest, with 9.9% (44 respondents), underscoring the appeal of Cameron Highlands' natural landscapes and biodiversity.

Urban and shopping tourism attracted 20.4% (91 respondents), indicating that a substantial number of visitors also appreciate the commercial and urban offerings of the highlands. Conversely, adventure and sports tourism, gastro tourism, and religious and cultural tourism were less popular, each drawing less than 5% of respondents. This data suggests that while the primary draw to Cameron Highlands is its natural and agricultural allure, there is potential to diversify and enhance other tourism sectors.

Respondents Purpose of Visit

Table 3: Purpose of visit

	Count	Percent
Holiday	384	86.3%
Work/Academic Purpose	54	12.1%
others	7	1.6%
Total	445	100.0%

The primary purpose of visiting for most respondents was holiday-related, accounting for 86.3% (384 respondents). This dominant percentage highlights the highlands' role as a leisure destination. Work or academic purposes accounted for 12.1% (54 respondents), indicating a smaller but notable segment of visitors combining business with pleasure. The remaining 1.6% (7 respondents) visited for other unspecified reasons, further emphasizing the predominance of leisure travel to Cameron Highlands.

Respondents Perception of Congestion

Table 4: Respondents opinion on factors of congestion in Cameron Highlands

	Count	Percent
High number of tourist	103	23.1%
High number of activities	14	3.1%
Loud noise	208	46.7%
Heavy motorised vehicle traffic	4	0.9%
Not congested	116	26.1%
Total	445	100.0%

Congestion was a significant concern among respondents, with 46.7% (208 respondents) citing loud noise as a major factor contributing to their perception of overcrowding. A high number of tourists was the second most cited factor, noted by 23.1% (103 respondents). Interestingly, a considerable portion of respondents, 26.1% (116 respondents), felt that the area was not congested. Other factors, such as high numbers of activities and heavy motorised vehicle traffic, were less commonly mentioned, at 3.1% (14 respondents) and 0.9% (4 respondents), respectively. This feedback indicates that noise pollution and crowd density are primary concerns affecting the visitor experience in Cameron Highlands.

Analysis of Visitors' Satisfaction of the trip based on purpose of visiting

All cross-tabulated analyses were subjected to a Kruskal-Wallis test, revealing highly significant relationships between the variables and visitors' satisfaction levels, as indicated by the asymptotic significance values (Asymp. Sig.). This statistical approach confirms that the factors presented correlate significantly with differing degrees of satisfaction among visitors. The findings underscore the robustness of the relationship, highlighting how all these factors impact satisfaction levels across distinct categories.

Table 5: Visitors' level of satisfaction with purpose of visiting

	Overall Satisfaction			Total
	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	
Holiday	7	55	322	384
Education/Work	7	13	34	54
Others	0	1	6	7
Total	14	69	362	445

The analysis of visitor satisfaction based on the purpose of visiting Cameron Highlands reveals significant insights. Out of 445 respondents, the majority (384 or 86.3%) visited for a holiday. Among holiday visitors, 83.9% (322 respondents) were satisfied, 14.3% (55 respondents) were neutral, and only 1.8% (7 respondents) were unsatisfied. This high satisfaction rate underscores the highlands' appeal as a leisure destination. For those visiting for education or work purposes (54 respondents or 12.1%), satisfaction was lower, with 63% (34 respondents) satisfied, 24.1% (13 respondents) neutral, and 13% (7 respondents) unsatisfied. This indicates that while the majority are still satisfied, the satisfaction rate is notably lower compared to holiday visitors. The smallest group, visiting for other reasons (7 respondents or 1.6%), had a satisfaction rate of 85.7% (6 respondents), with 14.3% (1 respondent) neutral and none unsatisfied. This high satisfaction, despite the small sample size, suggests that other purposes might also align well with the attractions and services provided in Cameron Highlands.

Table 6: Visitors' level of satisfaction with public facilities and utilities

	Mean in Ranking Order
Public Toilet	2.53
Access to Clean Water	2.38
Sewage System	2.21
Waste Management	2.15
Recycle System	2.03
Road	1.96

These scores suggest that public toilets received the highest satisfaction rating, whereas road conditions were the least satisfactory. The relatively low scores across all categories highlight the need for significant improvements in public amenities to enhance the visitor experience.

Table 7: Visitors' level of satisfaction with food and beverages provided

	Mean in Ranking Order
Food Quality	2.52
Beverage Quality	2.51
Food Price	2.31
Beverage Price	2.30

These scores indicate that visitors were generally satisfied with the quality of food and beverages offered, though there is some room for improvement in pricing to better meet visitors' expectations.

Table 8: Visitors' level of satisfaction with accommodation services

	Mean in Ranking Order
Friendly Service	2.53
Cleanliness	2.48
Sufficiency of accomodation offered	2.34
Packae Price	2.21

Visitors rated friendly service the highest, followed by cleanliness and the sufficiency of accommodation. The package price received the lowest rating, suggesting that while services are appreciated, value for money could be better addressed.

Table 9: Visitors' level of satisfaction with the overall expenditure for their visit

Range	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Total
RM200	7	22	46	75
RM201-RM500	3	18	89	110
RM501-RM1,000	3	15	116	134
RM1,001-RM5,000	1	7	52	60
>RM5,000	0	7	59	66
Total	14	69	362	445

Analysing satisfaction based on overall expenditure reveals distinct trends across different spending brackets. Among respondents who spent RM200 or less, 61.3% expressed satisfaction, while 29.3% were neutral and 9.3% were unsatisfied. As expenditure increased to RM201-500, satisfaction notably rose to 80.9%, with 16.4% neutral and only 2.7% unsatisfied. In the RM501-1,000 range, satisfaction levels further increased to 86.6%, accompanied by 11.2% neutral and 2.2% unsatisfied. For those spending RM1,001-5,000, satisfaction remained consistently high at 86.7%, with 11.7% neutral and a mere 1.7% expressing dissatisfaction. The highest expenditure category, exceeding RM5,000, exhibited the highest satisfaction rate of 89.4%, with 10.6% neutral responses and no reported dissatisfaction. These findings indicate a clear correlation between expenditure and satisfaction levels, suggesting that visitors who invest more tend to derive greater satisfaction from their experience. The data suggests that premium services and experiences associated with higher expenditures likely contribute significantly to overall visitor satisfaction. This trend underscores the potential impact of upscale offerings in enhancing visitor experiences and perceptions.

The analysis of visitor satisfaction in Cameron Highlands highlights the strengths and areas for improvement in the tourism experience. High satisfaction rates among holiday travelers and group visitors emphasise the highlands' appeal as a leisure and social destination. However, lower satisfaction among solo travelers and those visiting for work suggests areas for enhancement. Public amenities, food and beverage offerings, and service quality receive moderate to high ratings, indicating a generally positive but improvable visitor experience. Finally, higher expenditure is associated with greater satisfaction, suggesting that

investment in premium services could further enhance the attractiveness of Cameron Highlands as a tourist destination.

DISCUSSIONS

From the survey findings on Cameron Highlands tourism, several key discussion points and conclusions emerge. Firstly, the diverse geographical origins of respondents underscore the broad appeal of Cameron Highlands as a tourist destination, with Selangor and Kuala Lumpur leading in visitor numbers, followed by significant international interest. This geographic diversity presents opportunities for targeted marketing strategies to increase visitation from underrepresented regions.

Secondly, the strong preference for agro and wildlife tourism among visitors reflects Cameron Highlands' reputation for its agricultural heritage and natural beauty. This combines the high satisfaction rates reported by holiday-goers, indicating that the region effectively caters to its primary visitor interests. However, the lower interest in adventure, sports, and cultural tourism suggests potential for diversification to appeal to a wider audience.

Thirdly, the high incidence of unplanned visits highlights a trend towards spontaneous travel decisions influenced by the region's accessibility and climate. This impulsive behaviour presents both opportunities and challenges for tourism management in balancing visitor volumes and maintaining a positive visitor experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of visitor satisfaction based on purpose of visit, expenditure levels, and accompanying group dynamics reveals clear patterns. Higher satisfaction rates among holidaymakers and group travelers indicate strong performance in leisure and social tourism sectors. However, opportunities exist to improve satisfaction among solo travelers and those visiting for work or education purposes. Addressing infrastructure concerns, enhancing service quality, and diversifying tourism offerings could further elevate Cameron Highlands' appeal and competitiveness in the tourism market. These insights provide a foundation for strategic planning aimed at sustaining and enhancing Cameron Highlands' position as a premier destination in Malaysia.

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