

# Core Tourism Products and Destination Image: Case Study of Sabah, Malaysia

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**Abstract**—This paper empirically investigates the relationship between Sabah state core tourism products and its destination image. Through a descriptive design using a quantitative method with a self-reported and self-administered questionnaire, this research surveyed the individual international tourists who had visited Sabah and experienced the state's core tourism products. The research findings clearly indicate that Sabah, one of the states in Malaysia has a lot of valuable resources in the eyes of the international tourists. Interestingly, it was found that Sabah's core tourism products namely unique marine resources, various nature attractions and cultural diversities have undoubtedly contributed to the state's tourism image. Good feedbacks and the promising insights from the international tourists' point of view offer varying consequences, repercussion, and implication to the state government and the relevant authorities. Collaboration and cooperation between all responsible authorities are therefore crucial in strengthening the "total tourism experience" among the international tourists in this state.

**Keywords**—Tourism core products, marine, cultural, nature, destination image, Sabah.

## I. INTRODUCTION

PSYCHOLOGICAL factors such as perceptions, beliefs, learning, attitudes and social factors such as leisure, family, disposal income and status have been proven to influence tourists in choosing a tourism destination. Despite all the above factors, the impression or image of a destination itself cannot be overlooked; thus, the ability of a country to develop and maintain its destination image not only becomes a fundamental factor of attracting tourists but also determines the success or sustainability of a destination [8]. A destination with a good and positive image has a better success rate of being chosen by tourists compared to a destination with negative images. There are many interpretations of destination image but in a general term, it can be referred to individual perception or impression to a particular place that emotionally describes and portrays the destination [4], [70], [37]. Other definitions of the destination image concept are discussed in the literature section.

The Tourism Marketing frameworks delineated that two factors influence how an image is developed for a respective tourist destination [27], [6], [7], [44]. The first factor relates to a person emotionality and rationality. This occurs when

tourists perceive a major importance to the image of tourism destination and ultimately influence their final choice or behavioral intention [9]. Scholars contended that a continuous tourism destination assessment by tourism authorities to identify destinations' strengths and weaknesses can be significant in predicting tourists' behavior intention that will subsequently determine the success of a destination [8]. As an example, the Eiffel Tower in France has long been recognized as the image of the country.

The outcome of their decision based on the perceptual, cognitive, and affective aspect forms the second factors. In the perceptual / cognitive image, tourist evaluates the destination resources and its attractions based on the perceived value and perceived importance of it to them [4], [3], [72]. The higher the value and the importance of the destination, the higher the chance for them to visit the respective destinations is [1], [26], [8], [29]. In this context, Kenya is a country that has the ability to attract a substantial number of the international tourists and continuously develop its image. It is their vast tourism resources especially the unique wildlife safari, pristine tropical beaches, culture attraction and pleasant climate that made the international tourists felt those resources are important and benefited them during their visit.

Meanwhile, affective aspect is the emotion and feeling experienced by tourists at the destinations [39], [65], [64]. The personal touch normally influences their emotions and feelings, or emotional components that a destination offers [8]. Spain is one of the countries that develops the destination image from the personal touch and emotional components. High values of caring, good hospitality, human kindness, safety, freedom and friendliness of its people become the strengths of Spain as tourism destination which continuously creating tourists supply to the country [61].

Scholars also posited that natural resources like wildlife, beaches, weather and culture or artificial resources such as entertainment, events and transportation strongly influenced the image of a tourist destination [62]. Other researchers postulate that mixture of tourism products, experiences and other intangible items are associated with the image of a tourist destination [60], [69], [77]. In fact, the characteristics of tourism products and services are also linked with the destination image [28], [11], [22].

In line with the preceding notion, Sabah is aggressively promoting its tourism sector [68]. Due to its diversity of landscapes, Sabah is now recognized as one of the most important tourism spots in the South Asian region [40]. The state's interesting tourism products has increased its reputation as preferred destination among the local and international

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tourists [47]. This is supported by the positive growth of tourist receipts from both domestic and international with an increase from 2,300,428 in 2008 to 2,875,761 in 2012 and the figure is expected to flourish every year [53]. A mixture of various resources and attractions like a natural landscape, the uniqueness of its diverse cultures, beautiful beaches, untouched flora and fauna not only make Sabah a relaxing, peaceful and recreational place but also increase its popularity as a tourist destination [68], [71]. In this case, it is assumed that the international tourists who had visited this state had experienced Sabah's core tourism products; the marine, natural resources, and cultural events. With this, the questions on the extent the marine, natural resources and cultural events as the core tourism products contribute to Sabah's destination image were probed. In answering the questions, this paper empirically investigates the relationship between Sabah tourism core products and its destination image. This objective is further supported with three other main hypotheses:

- H1. There is a significant relationship between marine attribute as core tourism products and Sabah as destination image.
- H2. There is a significant relationship between natural resources attribute as core tourism products and Sabah as destination image
- H3. There is a significant relationship between cultural attribute as core tourism products and Sabah as destination image.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Tourism Core Products

In the tourism industry perspective, the core products usually come in a variety of forms. Reference [49] proposed that the core tourism products should be seen as a bundle of physical products such as plant, services, and activities at the tourist location that create the whole tourist experiences. One of the elements in core tourism products is physical plant like natural resources such as waterfall, wildlife, and facilities. Besides that, physical plants can be fixed into property likes hotel or cruise ships or can be referred as physical environment consists of water quality, marines, natural resources, cultural resources, the condition of the facilities, weather, equipment, and buildings [49].

Reference [70] stated that core tourism products deal with the composition of physical products that has been provided to tourists at the destination including facilities as well as services like transportation, accommodation, and entertainment that lead to tourists' satisfaction. Other scholars posited that core tourism products are the collection of tangible and intangible features where all of the features related to activities that attracted tourists to join or participate during their visit at the particular country or destination [35], [56], [23], [41]. Tangible features refer to physical plant like marines, natural resources, cultural resources while intangible features relate to hospitality, services, peoples as well as the communication among tourists and the local people. Reference [2] noted that tourism providers, in fact, are

offering tangible and intangible features for tourists since both features complement each other and influence the travel experiences.

In relation to the purpose of this study, attributes of the core tourism products like marine, nature, and culture, are reviewed the subsequent sections.

### B. Marine Tourism

Marine tourism is defined as leisure, relaxation and rough activities related to coastal environment likes surfing, swimming, snorkeling and others [58]. Reference [45] contended that marine tourist is a tourist that travel and leave their work place to participate in coastal activities and attraction or connection and phenomena that involve oceanic activities in coastal areas. Reference [14] on the other hand stated that marine tourism is emotional, psychological and physical activities that include enjoyable, remarkable, exciting or fascinating marine surroundings and atmospheres. These activities are divided into two namely mechanical and non-mechanical. The mechanical one involves fewer skill activities such as speed boating and motor boating, just to name a few. Meanwhile, the non-mechanical activities require participants' skills or psychomotor especially in activities like surfing, snorkeling, scuba diving and kayaking [14].

Reference [5] reported that fifty percent of international tourists and forty-two percent of domestic tourists that visited Australia participate in marine tourism or coastal activities every year. This shows that Australia marine tourism or coastal activities are the main attraction not only to the local but international tourists thus significantly contribute to the country's economy. Due to the promising topography that create the potential for marine tourism, the Taiwanese government has also started to focus on "Green Vacation Island" to attract a substantial number of tourists in an effort to promote Taiwan as 'Hawaii of Asia' instead of solidly depend on their traditional industries [82].

Studies on marine tourism have received significant attention among the academic scholars and practitioners. On the days spent with marine activities, [45] found that tourists primarily preferred to spend 0-3 days for snorkeling and the similar result obtained from [42] that tourists engrossed with this activity around 1 to 4 days. By investigating the experiential value, travel satisfaction and revisit intention on marine tourism, [43] revealed there is a causal relationship among the three attributes. Tourists were very satisfied with their experience on an island or beach in Wangan Islands Penghu, China due to its image and well protected natural atmosphere. [43] also pointed that there is a negative impact on ecology and environment of coastal sports tourism development among residents. They, therefore, suggested that any development made in coastal sports tourism should consider ecology and environmental impact to residents.

### C. Nature Tourism

In its broadest sense, nature tourism involves experiencing natural places, typically through outdoor activities that are sustainable regarding their impact on the environment [76],

[81]. Reference [79] denoted nature tourism as a temporary movement of tourist that usually focuses in protected and pure surrounding environment. This definition is supported by [78] who defined nature tourism as the feeling and communication with pristine nature environments that involve inactive to active activities in the well protected natural setting. Reference [32] considered nature tourism as the alfresco or outdoor activities away from home that normally commercialized involving the connection of nature surrounding. The activities that involve in nature tourism are wildlife watching, physical challenge, risky or tough activities and engaging with naturalistic. The outcome of these activities influenced the tourist experience, the location, arrangement and number of participants. Nature tourism subscribed some beliefs and principal that involve with preservation of the environment, learning and the benefit towards socioeconomic of the local peoples [82]. Many scholars, however contented that nature tourism is the greatest wild destination, visited by nature tourists that create a complex interface between individuals, non-human as well as another mechanism of the biophysical world [10], [19], [50], [54].

TABLE I  
TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE OF CULTURAL TOURISM

Tangible culture	Intangible culture
Movable cultural heritage (paintings, sculptures, coins and manuscripts)	Intangible cultural heritage (oral traditions, performing arts and rituals)
Immovable cultural heritage (monuments, and archaeological sites)	
Underwater cultural heritage (shipwrecks, underwater ruins and cities)	

As the concept of nature tourism is broad, scholars further divided it into three main categories, namely nature-based tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism [80], [31]. Nature-based tourism is related to activities like fishing, hiking and hunting while adventure tourism is related to physical activities with nature environment [78]. Eco-tourism, on the other hand is the connection between sustainability, natural environment and closely related to education [46]. In a different perspective, [78] and [79] postulated that nature tourism is ecotourism or nature-based tourism with the intention to visit a particular destination due to ecological, social as well as sustainable environment. In line with this, nature tourism without a doubt has received significant interests among the tourism scholars, particularly looking at the motivational factors ranging from geographical location, environment, relaxation, thrills, excitement, social interaction, self-esteem, development, and fulfillment [36], [34], [51], [52], [63], [55], [57].

#### D. Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism can be defined as a travel to experience the visual and performance of arts, heritage buildings, ancient landscapes, special ethnic lifestyles, values and traditions of the culture, events and many others [75] or efforts to attract tourists with different orientation to visit homogenizes landscape at a destination, [12] or when tourists directly

involve and experience current and previous cultural performances, handicraft and cultural activities that available at particular destination [15] or the movement of tourist to experiencing cultural attractions at a destination at the same time to escape it from their routine lifestyle [33]. Reference [24] however considered cultural tourism as a heritage tourism that contains economic activities, protected surrounding and sociocultural as the main assets that can be offered hence offering opportunities to the tourists to learn such visual of cultural artifacts, architecture, galleries and theaters [66], [67]. Reference [38] stated that cultural tourism emphasizes on the interrelationships among tourists, tourism, cultural assets in the country as well as the experiences. They added that the main goal of cultural tourism is to ensure the tangible and intangible cultural elements are available and appropriate to tourists that can only be achieved by converting the cultural elements into tourism products. Reference [76] further explained about the tangible and intangible asset of cultural tourism (see Table I).

Reference [66] illustrated that the pure, uniqueness and multiplicity of cultural tourism can defend the local identity of the country, produce innovation idea and endorse sustainable tourism destination attractiveness. Some countries, as stated by [31] have started to offer cultural tourism as their branding sector aggressively. Branding process is determined by public authorities with the aim to develop tourism resources of the country, therefore [48] deduced that the cultural tourism becomes the fundamental strategies in developing tourism destination world widely. Reference [38] indicated that cultural tourism gives an idea and inspiration to create innovative, creative and marketable products and services. Modification on cultural nevertheless is unavoidable since the cultural tourism is designed based on tourist demand [74]. This notion is supported by [54] who stated that the development of cultural tourism that forms urban tourism can modify the cultural originality and commercialism. In contrast, [25] strongly argued that since cultural concern to maintain the identities of the place, the tourism development can give negative impact to the place identities and may also affect the uniqueness of cultural because of the needs in homogenization instead of sustaining it.

#### E. Destination Image

Despite the wide application in the empirical context, destination image is yet to have a solid conceptual structure thus its definition becomes rather loose [21]. Destination image from the tourists' perspective is about the place [18], [30] and the impression created by them [73] which involves the characteristics of the image of a destination that influence the tourists' decision to travel to the particular country [3]. Reference [21] however argued that destination image should not be confined to one narrow aspect but should be evaluated by a much broader scope; in line with the word image itself.

The concept of destination image can be better understood by looking at a proposition of [26] who developed a comprehensive theoretical framework, defining image in terms of its four features: 1) complexity (it is not unequivocal),

underlining an analytical dimension 2) multiplicity (in elements and processes), providing an action dimension 3) relativistic (subjective and generally comparative) translating destination image as a strategic tool and 4) dynamic (varying with time and space), allowing for tactical decisions based on destination image.

Destination image has been recognized as the most prevalent topics in the tourism literatures and some researchers [20], [22], [27] found that the studies were only theoretical and there was little conceptualization and operationalization of the destination image construct. This is due to the characteristics of tourism products/services itself, for instance, its complexity [71], multidimensionality [28], subjectivity [11] and intangibility [22] which collectively, make it difficult to measure the destination image construct. Interestingly, [27] suggested that destination image is made up of two distinct but hierarchically interrelated components: 1) cognitive or perceptual and 2) affective. The cognitive component is viewed as the sum of beliefs and attitudes of an object leading to some internally accepted picture of its attributes (external forces, pull attributes). In addition, cognitive or perceptual component is also known as the designative component of views, knowledge and information regarding the perceived attributes of a particular destination [13]. The affective component on the other hand, is related to motives in the sense that how a person feels about the object under consideration (internal forces, push attributes).

Deriving from the review of the existing literature, [8] classified all attributes influencing image assessments into nine dimensions: 1) nature resources, 2) tourist leisure and recreation, 3) natural and marine environment, 4) general infrastructure, 5) culture, history and art, 6) social environment, 7) tourist infrastructure, 8) political and economic factors and 9) atmosphere of the place. Affective image is also known as elements that deal with affecting and emotional feedback of tourists about particular destination or products. This is supported by [3] who referred affective or evaluative component as an individual feeling and emotion towards a place. Besides that, cognitive or perceptual and affective or evaluative, organic, induced and complex are considered as the other components of destination image [30]. Word-of-mouth (WOM) from friends and relatives based on their own knowledge or experience about the places, whether the information was requested or volunteered and a visit to the destination which both are not controlled by destination marketers. Induced image acts as conscious efforts to promote tourism destination using attractive brochures to be distributed to various travel agencies and information center, as well as television and radio advertisement [44], [58]. Reference [30] explicated that complex image is related to the outcome of the real visitation meanwhile, [16] and [17] suggested that the complex image involves direct experience and involvement of the tourists at the destination.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### *A. Sampling and Instrumentation*

A descriptive research design using a quantitative approach through a cross sectional study was applied with a self-reported and self-administered questionnaire. As this study specifically looking at Sabah, Malaysia, the population and the unit of analysis was among the individual of international tourists who had visited Sabah and experienced the state tourism core products.

The survey instrument comprises three major sections whereby Section A solicited the demographic information of the respondents. With the range of adapted questions, Section B was created to measure the perception of international tourists towards Sabah tourism core products as the main construct through three dimensions namely marine, nature and culture resources. Lastly, Section C specifically focuses on the international tourists' view toward Sabah as destination image. Most items in all dimensions were replicated from the previous related studies with a few minor modifications of wording to address specific needs of the current research or fit the tourism context. Respondents were required to translate their view on a five points Likert scale ranging from 1 with "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Although most of the questions were adapted, a pilot study was initially conducted to verify and confirm the reliability and validity of the items used. All comments and recommendations were considered and some further changes were made before arriving into a final version of the survey instrument.

#### *B. Data Collection*

Before the actual survey, the Sabah Kota Kinabalu International Airport management was initially contacted to obtain permission to undertake the survey. After one week and a few follow-up phone call, the airport management allowed the researcher to conduct the survey inside the satellite building and the departure hall within a two week period. The questionnaire was then administered by the researchers and respondents were approached and briefed on the purpose of the survey. With full cooperation and commitment given by most of the international tourists, a total of 256 questionnaires were successfully obtained.

The underlying relationships between items in each stipulated dimension were statistically tested with the exploratory factor analysis as some of the items used were newly developed. Using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalisation on the 39 items with factor loading of 0.50, four factors were extracted with two items deleted. The four factors were Marine (BMR, 9 items), Nature (BNR 7 items), Cultural (BC, 8 items) and Destination Image (DD, 12 items). The reliability test was then undertaken for Sections B and C separately. The results showed that the instrument and items used were reliable with a coefficient alpha value at 0.73 for marine, 0.79 for nature at 0.94 for cultural and 0.70 for destination image.

## IV. RESPONDENT PROFILES

Through frequency tests, number of male respondents exceeded the females with 51.6 percent (n=132) against 48.4 percent (n=124). Respondents were between 18 and 39 years of age, which made up 46.1 percent (n=118) followed by 40 to 59 years old which represented 37.9 percent (n=97) and 60 years and above that own around 16 percent (n=41). 53.5 percent (n=137) were married compared to 33.6 percent (n=86) who were single and 12.9 percent (n=33) were the others. The highest percentage of tourists were from the European continent accounted for 39.8 percent (n=102) as opposed to 30.2 percent (n=78) from Asian region and 22.7 percent (n=58) from the Australasian region (Australia and New Zealand) and the smallest proportion was from the North America continent (American) that possess 3.9 percent (n=10) and followed by Eurasia region (Turkish) with 3.1 percent (n=8). On the length of stay and purpose of visit, almost all the international tourists visited Sabah for the purpose of a holiday which accounted 90.6 percent (n=232) compared to 9.4 percent (n= 24) for business matters. 71.9 percent (n=184) had visited Sabah for the first time, followed by 18.4 percent (n=472) who was visiting for the second time, 7.0 percent (n=18) who had visited this state for third times and 2.7 percent (n=7) were more than three times. 80.9 percent (n=207) of the total respondents had involved in ecotourism/nature tourism for their activities as compared to 69.9 percent (n=179), had involved coastal/ island tourism, 67.2 percent (n=172) involved in cultural tourism, 40.2 percent (n=103) had adventure tourism, 9.4 percent (n=24) had sport tourism, 3.5 percent (n=9) had shopped and the smallest proportion.

## V. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive analysis was undertaken on the independent variables (marine, nature and culture) and dependent variable (the destination image).

## A. Marine Resources

Looking at Table II, the magnitude of the mean scores ranging from 3.50 to 4.00 indicates that the majority of the international tourists agreed with most of the items in this section analysis. As such, the majority the international tourists agreed that Sabah is having natural and unique marine resources (M=4.00, BMR1), provide great underwater treasures (M=3.97, BMR2) and offers great choices of marine activities (M= 3.96, BMR3). The international tourists agreed that clear sea condition permits them to involve in major marine activities likes snorkeling, scuba diving, fishing and other (M=3.74, BMR4). With that feeling, it is not surprising that they also agree it is worthy of taking marine activities in this state (M=3. 83, BMR5). In addition, the international tourists agreed that they enjoyed exploring the varieties of marine resources (M=3.76, BMR6), the protected marine life and islands (M=3.72, BMR7) therefore felt the worth of exploring the richness of coral species in this state's underwater (3.76, BMR8) as underwater environment is well maintained (M=3.50, BMR9). All these points clearly indicate

that Sabah, from international tourists' point of view has a vast selection of good marine resources which allowed them to perform many activities during their visits.

## B. Nature Resources

The second analysis of the sub-dimensions of Sabah tourism core products is related to the nature resources. From Table III, it is interesting to see that most of the international tourists agreed with most items in this section the range of mean score were from 4.04 to 4.38. The international tourists agreed that Sabah has a vast unique nature resource (M=4. 16, BNR1), great nature treasures like mountain, terrain, forests, flora and fauna, wildlife, beach and many others (M=4. 38, BNR2) and therefore agreed that good nature resources like mountain and forest provided them the opportunities to take part in adventurous activities (M=4. 30, BNR3).

TABLE II  
MEAN SCORES AND STD. DEVIATION FOR THE MARINE RESOURCES

Code	Items	Mean	S.D.
BMR1	Sabah is having natural and unique marine resources	4.00	.954
BMR2	Sabah provide great underwater treasures	3.97	.898
BMR3	Sabah offers great choices of marine activities	3.96	.905
BMR4	Clear sea condition permits major marine activities (snorkeling, scuba diving, fishing and others)	3.74	.943
BMR5	Worth of taking marine activities in this state	3.83	.798
BMR6	I enjoyed exploring the varieties of marine resources in this state	3.76	.945
BMR7	I enjoyed exploring the variety of protected marine life and islands	3.72	.939
BMR8	Worth of exploring richness of coral species in this state underwater	3.76	.942
BMR9	The underwater environment in this state is well maintain	3.50	1.056

(Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Slightly Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree); Note: (n=256)

TABLE III  
MEAN SCORES AND STD. DEVIATION FOR THE NATURE RESOURCES

Code	Items	Mean	S.D.
BNR1	Sabah is having a vast and unique nature resources	4.16	.954
BNR2	Sabah provide great nature treasures like mountain, terrain, forests, flora and fauna, wildlife, beach and many others	4.38	.898
BNR3	Good nature resources like mountain and forest provide opportunities for adventures activities	4.30	.905
BNR4	I enjoyed of exploring the various nature activities in this state	4.27	.943
BNR5	Worth of exploring nature resources in this state	4.10	.798
BNR6	All nature activities undertaking worth for money spending	4.04	.945

(Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Slightly Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree); Note: (n=256)

With all the above feelings, it is not hard to understand their enjoyments of the exploring experience on various nature activities (M=4.27, BNR4), their agreement on the worth of nature resources exploration (M=4.10, BNR5) and the worth or value they got for the money they had spent (M=4.04, BNR6). From this perception, there is no doubt that Sabah has a great nature resources that could be promoted to attract substantial number of the international tourists in the future.

### C. Cultural Resources

Although the magnitude of the mean score ( $M=3.60$  to  $3.80$ ) in this section analysis is slightly lower than the two preceding analyses, the international tourists still agreed on all items which measure their perception on Sabah's culture resources. The results can clearly be seen in Table IV.

TABLE IV

MEAN SCORES AND STD. DEVIATION FOR THE CULTURAL RESOURCES

Code	Items	Mean	S.D.
BC1	Sabah is having a vast and unique cultural attraction	3.80	.954
BC2	Sabah provide great culture treasures like historical sites, handicraft, long houses, cultural village, culture center, and many others	3.67	.898
BC3	Ethnic cultural diversity create intention to explore more about this states	3.60	.905
BC4	Sabah offers great choices of related cultural activities	3.66	.943
BC5	The cultural attraction and activities in this state are still preserved	3.71	.798
BC6	I enjoyed of exploring the diverse cultural activities in this state	3.61	.945
BC7	Worth of undertaking and exploring the richness of cultural attraction in this states	3.63	.903
BC8	All cultural activities undertaking worth for money spending	3.74	.923

(Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Slightly Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree); Note: (n=256)

TABLE V

MEAN SCORES AND STD. DEVIATION FOR THE DESTINATION IMAGE

Code	Items	Mean	S.D.
DDI1	Marine resources clearly contribute Sabah tourism image	4.29	.952
DDI2	Natural and unique marine resources increase Sabah as tourists' destination among the international tourists	4.25	.965
DDI3	I believed marine resources popularize tourism in Sabah	4.23	.954
DDI4	Various nature resources available, contribute to Sabah tourism image in the eyes of the international tourist	4.33	.954
DDI5	Vast nature resources manifestly make Sabah internationally recognized	4.21	.905
DDI6	Nature resources clearly increase Sabah as tourism destination	4.13	.943
DDI7	Vast and unique culture attraction undoubtedly contributes to Sabah tourism image	3.91	.798
DDI8	Culture attraction increase Sabah as tourists' destination among the international tourists	3.68	.945
DDI9	I believed culture diversity attract more tourist of visiting Sabah	3.64	.862
DDI10	Local food clearly contributes to Sabah tourism image	3.42	.821
DDI11	I believed local food also popularize Sabah in the eyes of the international tourist	3.33	.923
DDI12	I believed local food also increase Sabah as tourism destination	3.31	.952

(Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Slightly Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree); Note: (n=256)

Again, the international tourists agreed that Sabah has a unique culture attraction ( $M=3.80$ , BC1), provide great cultural treasures like historical sites, handicraft, long houses, cultural village, culture center, and many others ( $M=3.67$ , BC2). With that positive perception, they agreed that this state offers a great choice of related cultural activities ( $M=3.66$ , BC4) and agreed that the cultural attraction and activities are still preserved ( $M=3.71$ , BC5) thus believed that the ethnic

cultural diversity creates intention for them to explore more about it ( $M=3.60$ , BC3).

Their feeling is further expressed that they enjoyed exploring the diverse cultural activities ( $3.61$ , BC6) and agreed that the richness of the cultural attraction in this state is worth exploring and undertaking ( $M=3.63$ , BC7). They also believed that all the cultural activities are worth for money ( $M=3.74$ , BC8). All in all, these results show that cultural in addition to marine and nature as one of the important attractions of Sabah.

### D. Destination Image

A similar analysis was undertaken in response to the third objective and research question of the study, which measure the international tourist's view of the Sabah destination image. Looking at the mean score, the international tourists agreed that marine resources clearly contributes to Sabah tourism image ( $M=4.29$ , DDI1), increase Sabah's tourist destination status ( $M=4.25$ , DDI2) and believed that marine resources have popularized tourism in Sabah ( $M=4.23$ , DDI3).

On the natural factor, they agreed that various natural resources available contribute to the state tourism image ( $M=4.33$ , DDI4) thus making Sabah being internationally recognized ( $M=4.21$ , DDI5). The available nature resources in Sabah enhanced its reputation as a popular tourism destination ( $M=4.13$ , DDI6). Similar ratings were given to cultural resources as the international tourists agreed that vast and unique cultural attractions have undoubtedly contributed to Sabah's tourism image ( $M=3.91$ , DDI7), increasing Sabah's popularity as a tourist destination ( $M=3.68$ , DDI8) and they believed that cultural diversity attracts more tourist of visiting the state ( $M=3.64$ , DDI9).

## VI. HYPOTHESES TESTING

### A. Relationship between Marine Attributes as Tourism Core Products and Destination Image

To test the strength of the relationship between the marine resources and destination image as the first hypothesis (H1) of the study, a single-step multiple regression was conducted. The marine attribute items (the predictor) and destination image items (the criterion) were collapsed and entered into the equation all at once. Table VI displays the summary of the results.

TABLE VI

RESULTS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSIONS OF THE MARINE RESOURCES DIMENSIONS WITH DESTINATION IMAGE DIMENSIONS

Predictors	Model 1 Std. B
Step 1: Model Variables	
Marine dimensions	.47***
$R^2$	.22
Adj. $R^2$	.21
$R^2$ Change	.22
F-Change	72.060***

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Looking at the table, the marine manages to explain 22 percent ( $R^2 = .22$ , F-change = 72.060,  $p < .001$ ) of the variance

in the destination image dimension. The marine dimension was found significantly and positively influenced the destination image. The value of  $B = .47$ ,  $p < .001$  demonstrated that elements of marine have given a significant impact to the Sabah's destination image among the international tourists. In sum, this first sub-hypothesis is supported.

*B. Relationship between Natural Resources Attributes as Tourism Core Products and Destination Image*

Again, single-step multiple regression was conducted to test the predictors comprise of nature against the destination image variable. The predictors' variable and criterion variable were entered into a linear regression equation. The output of the test is summarized in Table VII. Based on the table, the nature as part of the core tourism product explains 21 percent ( $R^2 = .21$ ,  $F\text{-change} = 68.543$ ,  $p < .001$ ) of the variance in the destination image dimension. The nature dimension was found significantly and positively influenced the destination image. The value of  $B = .46$ ,  $p < .001$  demonstrated that the elements of nature have given a significant impact on the destination image among the international tourists. In sum, this second sub-hypothesis is supported.

TABLE VII  
RESULTS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSIONS OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES  
DIMENSIONS WITH DESTINATION IMAGE DIMENSIONS

Predictors	Model 1 Std. B
Step 1: Model Variables	
Nature dimensions	.46***
$R^2$	.21
Adj. $R^2$	.20
$R^2$ Change	.21
F-Change	68.543***

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

*C. Relationship between Cultural Attributes as Tourism Core Products and Destination Image*

For the last sub-hypothesis, single-step multiple regressions were also conducted to test the predictor comprising of cultural dimension against the destination image variable which is entered into a linear regression equation. The output of the test is shown in Table VIII.

TABLE VIII  
RESULTS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSIONS OF THE CULTURAL RESOURCES  
DIMENSIONS WITH DESTINATION IMAGE DIMENSIONS

Predictors	Model 1 Std. B
Step 1: Model Variables	
Cultural dimensions	.50***
$R^2$	.25
Adj. $R^2$	.25
$R^2$ Change	.25
F-Change	90.006***

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Based on Table VIII, the cultural resources dimension explains 25 percent ( $R^2 = .25$ ,  $F\text{-change} = 90.006$ ,  $p < .001$ ) of the variance in the destination image dimension. The cultural dimension significantly and positively influenced the destination image. The value of  $B = .50$ ,  $p < .001$  indicates that the elements of culture have given a significant impact on the

destination image among the international tourists. In sum, this third sub-hypothesis is supported.

## VII. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The research findings clearly indicate that Sabah has a lot of valuable resources in the eye of the international tourists through its tourism core products namely marine, nature and culture. The majority of the international tourists in this study positively perceived Sabah as a good tourist destination with many interesting tourism core products and this perception in fact was translated through to their involvement in the various activities. To be specific, the international tourists believed that Sabah is blessed with unique and natural marine resources, provide great nature treasures and adventures that gave them the opportunities of enjoying various kind of activities worthy of undertaking and exploring. The same perception is also identified with regard to the richness and diverse cultural activities that the state offers. It is also interesting to note that the unique marine resources, various nature attractions and culture diversities also contribute to Sabah's tourism image. This is strengthened and supported through the main and sub-hypotheses of this study.

The positive feedbacks and the promising insights from the viewpoint of the international tourists offer some consequences, repercussion and implication to the state government and relevant authorities likes the State Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment, the Sabah Tourism Board, Sabah Parks, Sabah Culture Board and Sabah Department of Wildlife and any other related authorities. In a simple word, this positive indication sheds some light on the strategies to be undertaken by those relevant authorities.

With glorious and magnificent tourism resources in terms of marine, nature and cultural, the responsible bodies should maintain and improve the facilities, activities and security at various tourism attractions without neglecting the surrounding environment. For instance, the marine activities which are always being criticized due to the lack of security should be uplifted on higher alert by the authority. This similarly goes to marine products. The collecting of turtles' eggs, turtle killing and sea cucumber catching activities by some irresponsible villagers must be curbed and controlled by the local authorities. Having the marine conservation or restricted area of these marine animals only for tourism is one of the best initiatives conducted by the Sabah Marine Authority.

A similar case can be seen in natural resources when over-exploitation of the Sabah forest for timber supply in the large scale has affected the incredible diversity of flora and fauna life. Higher rates of timber harvesting and levels of damage may undermine the prospect for effective facilities of water catchment protection, the biodiversity conservation and sustainable timber production. Hence, there is a need for continuity and consistent attention in planning, controlling and allocation of land and timber harvesting with the integrating the needs of all sectors. By doing that, the rich nature of the state can be preserved. Moreover, to increase the image of a destination, scholars unanimously agreed that marketing effort plays significant roles in attracting the local and international

tourists. The findings of this study revealed that the international tourist enjoyed the attraction, nature environment and other related activities. With that, the state tourism authority through the marketing department needs to continuously improve the current efforts to promote this glorious state as a land of fascinating island life, adventure attraction, and diverse culture to the international tourists. Various marketing tools likes world wide web, overseas promotional campaign, brochures, pamphlets, internet ads, television, commercial and social networking are all effective in spreading the words to reach their potential target market. The combination of the conventional and modern approaches of the marketing tools would at least if not all make Sabah attractions and activities not only attractive among the locals especially from the Malaysia peninsular, but also among the international tourists which will consequently enhance the state's destination image.

Finally, the collaboration and cooperation between all authorities are therefore crucial and should be further strengthened if the "total tourism experience" among the international tourists in this state is to be achieved. Failure to develop such a commonality of approach may lead to the meaningless effort even if there are thousands of glorious and wonderful tourism products in that particular country can be offered.

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