

RISK & RESCUING ISSUE: OUTDOOR ADVENTURE ACCIDENTS IN PROTECTED AREAS OF GUNUNG LEDANG, JOHOR NATIONAL PARK, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a study on outdoor recreational risk factors at Johor National Park of Gunung Ledang. It located at Southern of Malaysia and consists by tropical rainforest. The biodiversity richness and the wilderness of the natural resources has become attraction for local and international tourists to visit this national park to enjoying their outdoor recreational activities. But they are exposed with the risks and hazard in the wilderness tropical rainforest and the rescuing process for the victims is difficult too. This case study data collected using semi structured interviews conducted towards the National Park Managers from each study sites. The data analyzed using NVivo 11 version. As findings, the storm seems as the main outdoor recreational risk factors identified at this national park that may cause falling tree cases in this national park. Secondly, if the accident occurs at the deep forest, the rescuing assistance procedure for the victims is very difficult and takes time to reach the accident location. As conclusion, extreme recreationists were highly expose with outdoor recreational risks in outdoor nature wilderness settings and national park operator should look into this risk issue seriously in order to ensure the visitors' safety during their visitation to the national parks. Highly recommended, for national park operator to have a look on the necessity of helipad installation at the risky areas of national park to smoothen the rescuing process for the victims in the wilderness areas.

Keywords: *Risk, Outdoor Recreation, Eco-tourism*

INTRODUCTION

National parks are popular places for having outdoor recreational activities and ecotourism destinations for those who love to outdoors activities to be close to nature (Simoni, 2013) National parks are offering outdoor recreation activities as a way to enjoy the richness of the biodiversity in the nature, this is the valuable ecotourism attraction for the visitors to visiting national park to fulfilled their tourism needs. In addition, national parks also provide a wide range of activities from the adventurous and extreme outdoor recreation activities to simple leisure recreation activities such as picnicking, sightseeing or taking nature photography. The outdoor adventurous activities are hiking, white water rafting, camping, boating, fishing and many other exciting and extreme outdoor activities (Avram & Zarrilli, 2011). This is in line with the National Park Act 1980, Section II (4):

“The objective of the establishment of National Park is the preservation and protection of wildlife, plant life, and object of geological, archeological, historical and ethnological and other scientific and scenic interest and through their conservation and utilization to promote the education, health, aesthetic values and recreation of the people”.

It is shown that, national parks are providing a wide range of action and adventurous activities to fulfill the self-satisfaction of the visitors from hardcore recreational enthusiasts through to the casual visitor adventurers. Visitors come to the national park to fulfill their recreational needs in outdoor settings for the recreational experience, participating in various outdoor recreational activities with families and friends. This outdoor recreation industry is offering different experience, while the national parks and the wilderness areas are places where such experience may be found (Zegre, Needham, Kruger, & Rosenberger, 2012). Outdoor recreation in the nature today becomes the

platform for people to understand the meaning, and the values of the environment while enjoying their physical activities in the nature. There are four main values discovered for leisure participation which include escapism, enhancing relationships, personal mastery and winning (Dillard & Bates, 2011).

Johor National Park (JNP) is one of the important places in Malaysia for preservation of flora and fauna. The high value of biodiversity resources attraction is for the benefit of the people to conduct their outdoor recreational activities, ecotourism destination and leisure in the national park. The objective of this study is to identify the visitors' risk and the difficulties if the incident occurred in the national parks from the managerial point of views.

Outdoor Recreational Risk in National Parks

National park visitors may be highly exposed to a lot of risks while enjoying their outdoor activities at national parks. All the risks are faced by the visitors due to their participation in the outdoor recreational activities or any extreme physical activities in the national parks in order to immerse themselves in many fantastic sights, sounds and smells of the natural wonders of the wilderness of the nature, and to reach a maximum recreational satisfaction. The safety aspect of visitors is in the uncertain level when participating in the outdoor recreation activities in nature, and especially for the extreme recreational adventure activities because it was related with the death cases. However, the fatalities in national parks are not widespread and it is related to more common events of crashes, suicide, swimming and hiking (Heggie, Heggie, & Kliever, 2008).

Many incident cases have occurred on visitors in the adventure parks and the outdoor recreational field and visitors' safety is an international issue. In New Zealand, three nature guides died and three of their clients were swept during their hiking activities at Mount Tasman (Davidson, 2008). In Jeju Island, Korea, the total number of death is 31,747 cases, in which 4305 death cases were due to injuries (Kim, Park, Kang, Park, & Lee, 2011). For Malaysia, even the local authority had enforced the safety campaign, but the frequency of these incidents is still rampant in this recreational area. The total of hiking incidents statistic were 134 cases (Johannis, 2016). They were from the mountain hiking accidents from 1996 to 2014, 665 of victims recorded includes 47 death cases. Additionally, two students fell down and dead while hiking at Gunung Bubu, Kuala Kangsar, Perak, Malaysia (Amanda, 2014). This is a program of a group of vocational school students at Ulu Kenas Recreational Park, two students died while two others were rescued by Search and Rescue team of Kuala Kangsar. In addition, there was another incident where a lawyer drowned at Port Dickson Beach (Teoh, 2015). As for incident at national parks, a female tourist from London slipped and fell into the ravine 7.6 meters deep while sightseeing at Teluk Bahang, Pulau Pinang National Park in 2014 (Pubalan, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methodology had been used to conduct this case study. Semi structured interviews conducted with the national park manager, together with professional instructor and former national park manager of Gunung Ledang National Park.

The purposive sampling was decided to be used due to the study conducted was specifically at JNP of Gunung Ledang and they are the best respondent to be interviews in order to explain the actual phenomenon at JNP of Gunung Ledang. Secondly, due to their field experiences in providing outdoor recreational services to the visitors and also the challenges in managing the protected area of JNP of Gunung Ledang. They are important as main sources of data in this study to answer the question given, and able to give a response based on the current situation of risks facing by the visitors and the management team of JNP. The data collected was analyzed using NVivo 10th Version.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION:

Even though enjoying nature in national parks as one of the nice ecotourism attraction but it clearly shown by the finding that the ecotourism destination at JNP of Gunung Ledang was highly exposed with the risk and hazards, especially for the extreme outdoor recreationists those enjoying extreme

outdoor adventure activities in the protected areas of national park. Disasters are dangerous for the adventurers who take risks in the wilderness area (Singgih, 2014). Below are the comments from the Interviewee 1 about the risk faced by the visitors:

“This is sub-mountain area, so the storm is frequently occurring here. It could be risky due to the occurrence of the strong wind or I call it as, the storm is very unpredictable. This is dangerous because it may cause some falling trees and those falling trees may harm the hikers if the hikers are not aware of their surroundings. Death cases were recorded due to the storm attacks” (Interviewee 1)

The risk of recreational activities mainly occurred in earth demography with varied structure at the mountain and forest compound which become the important resource to ecotourism industry (Wo’ran & Arnberger, 2012). As mentioned by the by the interviewees from the JNP of Gunung Ledang, they highlighted the rescue assistance procedure do exist during delivering emergency cases at the locations. They have some difficulties in delivering the rescue task due to the challenging nature of the geographical setting in the deep forest area. They are going to the incident location, by manual hiking and no special trail for the rescuers. Below are the comments:

“For serious and major injuries that occurred during hiking, our team will be helping out the victim through the search and rescue assistance. We do not have any exclusive trail for the rescue team. It is understood that the assistance will take time to reach there, sometimes more than 2 hours, depending on the incident location” (Interviewee 1).

At the same time, this also supported by the Senior Instructor at JNP of Gunung Ledang. The instructor is the responsible person for any hiking group lead by them. At the same time, it is more difficult for the rescuer team because the rescuers teams are carrying the safety tools and equipment such as the bucket stretcher and all the medication kit with them.

“They will hike manually to go to the incident location and bring over with them all the rescue equipment such as bucket stretcher and the medication kit. Our rescue team will also be using the same trail” (Interviewee 2)

If the incident location is further at the remote areas, the deep forest areas and also depends on the geographical factor, it affect the rescue team in delivering their tasks because of the surrounding is a wild area and the trail to reach to the incident location is also very challenging due to the topography of the area. As impact, the victim with major injury also in a risky situation. They need to wait for a long time for assistance from the management team to reach the incident location due to rescuer itself need time to reach the victim.

“If the accident of major physical injuries occurs in the deep areas, and far from the main trail, the assistance will take time to arrive because the rescue team also needed to hike manually using the same trail. So, the waiting time to get assistance could be too long” (Interviewee 1).

Late to be rescued also lead to a worse situation towards the victims, especially for any critical case. Furthermore, the rescue teams have to bring out the victim by carrying them using the bucket stretcher together with the challenging topography in the tropical rainforest area of national park.

“If the incident location were too far from the main trail, the rescuing also needed some time to get them out of that area. Secondly, we have to carry the victim by hand using the bucket stretcher” (Interviewee 3)

Clearly mentioned by the Interviewees that the challenging of the topography settings in the national park was delaying the rescuing the victim procedures. Furthermore, they are carrying the victim manually from the incident location. Waiting time for the victim to be rescued is longer and this is risky for the critical victim with the major injuries.

Safety aspects which cause injury and accidents are influenced by many factors in relation to risk management practices especially towards outdoor adventure recreational activity because the accidents in sports and recreational activity give huge impact to the recreational and ecotourism industry. When the manager shows the commitment to putting the interests on safety issues, it makes people to feel safer and more welcome (Abudayyeh et al, 2006).

Therefore, highly recomend to the stakeholders of the national park that offering extreme outdoor activities to look into alternative strategy in managing the the extreme outdoor recreational

activities at the risky areas of national parks. Due to the difficulties in delivering the search and rescue operation in the wilderness areas of tropical rainforest, installation of helipad at this area is recommended. Even though it is a drastic recommendation, it is relevant recommendation in order to keep the safety of the extreme recreationists and to make sure the rescuing assistance is faster to avoid casualty of the victim in the protected areas of national park due to the risky outdoor recreational activities. Helicopter with the medical assistance is of great important to save and help the victim in the calamity area (Buiu, 2014). The usage of helicopter is widely used internationally in helping the victims in the wilderness areas, such as mountain, forest and also the sea. Helicopter assistance had been used for rescuing the stranded or injured victims in the wildlife areas and it improved the survival of the victims (Zhan, 2016).

Consequently, the installation of the helipad in the wild land areas of national park is significantly important in order to reduce the time consumption in delivering the search and rescue operation in the remote areas of national park. By this helipad installation, the rescue process will be faster for the critical victims in the wild land areas. At the same time, the health risk could also be reduced and the welfare of the victims would also be better especially for the critical situation due to the major injuries. Rescue operation by helicopter is beneficial for the rescuers and also beneficial to the victim in order to save lives in the remote areas (Doherty, Guo, & Alvarez, 2013).

There is no place that perfectly safe in this world includes the national parks. Furthermore, the national parks itself are the places of the wilderness natural resources. Environmental risks are very unpredictable and serious attention should be prioritized by the national park managers in order to mitigate the risk for the recreationists who enjoying their outdoor recreational experiences in the protected areas of national parks. Development and awareness about the risk injury are important to be emphasized by the national park operators to ensure the risk of the recreationist are under well cared while the recreationist visiting and having outdoor recreational activities. It is the challenge and the responsibility of the national park stakeholders or all authority departments to look into this issue in order to prevent damages, losses, injuries or deaths among the visitors while visiting the protected area of national parks and for the development of the recreational and ecotourism industry in Malaysia.

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