Management Risks in Mountain Bike Tourism

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[ABSTRACT]

Sports-based tourism has grown dramatically over the past decades, particularly mountain bike sport. Blessed with tremendous natural resources, beautiful topography, Malaysia offers wonderful settings for various extreme sports opportunities. Mountain bike tourism is one of those sports and is more popular among the younger segment of the population. The growth is clearly seen in the rise of the number of tournaments, at both national and international levels as well as the rising number of participants. Despite this, there is no official data that can substantiate the volume and impacts of this sport. Events staged at more challenging venues or steeper terrains, would attract greater participation due to the greater challenges offered. Difficult geographical settings, however, expose participants to different and various risks that may cause to catastrophic and fatal mountain biking injuries. To date, there is still an absence of a set of specific guideline that can be used by the organisers to manage the risks. This paper reports on a finding of a study on perceived risks by mountain bikers participating in selected tournaments in the Northern Peninsular Malaysia. The surveys conducted revealed that while they acknowledge the importance and potential risks of the events, the level of measures taken by the organisers is still questionable. Results from this survey can serve as guidelines to further improve measures in mitigating risks in adventurous events like mountain bike tournament.

Keywords: Mountain Bike Tourism, Extreme Sports, Risk Management, Malaysia, Risk Assessment

1. Introduction

The concept of sport related tourism has become more prominent in the last decade by both as an academic field of study and an increasingly popular tourism product. In early, sport and tourism have been treated by academic and practitioner alike as separate spheres of activity (Glyptis, 1991). Over the past decades, there are numerous studies devoted to define the term of ‘sports tourism’ (Bentley, Page, & Macky, 2007; De Knop, 1990; Gibson, 1998b; Glyptis, 1991; Green & Chalip, 1998; Tomik, 2013). De Knop (1990) identified three types of active sport activities related
to tourism market. (1) The pure sport holiday (e.g. going skiing); (2) Taking advantage of the sport facilities at a holiday destination, although sport served as the second purpose of the trip; and (3) The private sporting holiday, where tourists take part in non-organised sport activities (e.g. beach volleyball, cricket). Glyptis (1991) also argued that active participation in sport by tourists is more relevant than the definition in their conceptualisation of sport tourism.

Sport tourism is not only included the sport participants, but the spectators of the sport competition shows (e.g. the Olympic, the World Cup) and those who visiting to sport attractions such as famous stadium and halls of fame (Glyptis & Jackson, 1993; Redmond, 1991). Gibson (1998, p. 49) defined sport tourism as ‘leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities, or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities’. Sport tourism has become increasingly salient to tourists, practitioners and academic scholars. This type of tourism has been spearheaded by the western countries to Asian countries (Gibson, 1998b). This is because as what (Whitson & Macintosh, 1993, 1996) argued that international sport has become one of the most powerful and effective channels for showcasing of place and health to the country image. This implies that contemporary major sporting events are as much regard of commercial rivalries and the struggles of cities and regions in a transnational market to attract more and more investors and tourists spending (Silk, 2002).

There are many sport tourism researches have been conducted in Malaysia, as Malaysia is an active sporting tourism that providing a variety of sport activities to the tourists. For instance, Aidid (1997) describe how Penang, Malaysia being developed as a major tourist destination through sport activities. Solberg & Preuss (2007) analysed the tourism impact of hosting major sport events while paying special attention to the long-term economic impact. Silk (2002) concurred that major sporting events in Malaysia have the potential to generate significant economic activity and promote the brand image of a city through the world of mouth and supported media network. Other studies, include occupational analysis of sport tourism (Department of Skills Development & Ministry of Human Resource, 2012); a discussion of sport tourism potentials in Malaysia (Husin, 2003); and to understand sport tourists’ profiles and motives to visit Langkawi in Malaysia (Hamdan & Yusof, 2014), the potential of a small-scale sport events (mountain bike and motor cross) as tourist attraction in Lake Kenyir, Malaysia (Yusof, Omar-Fauzee, Shah, & Geok, 2009).

To date, however, whilst there has been a great deal of research in the field of sport tourism in Malaysia, most of it is focused on the how major sport events affect the tourism market (Aidid, 1997; Silk, 2002; Solberg & Preuss, 2007) and the potential of sport tourism in Malaysia (Department of Skills Development & Ministry of Human Resource, 2012; Husin, 2003). By contrast, there have been relatively few studies of risk management in sport tourism including mountain biking. Yet, Davies and Newsome (2009) emphasised the possibility of collisions happen due to fast moving mountain bikes in the trails, and potential of injury from falls when tackling more technical trails, and therefore they argued the methods for assessing and managing the risk of mountain biking in natural area are imperative.

Additionally, Malaysia encompasses with the nature that is not only beautiful, but also suitable for a variety of adventure sports, including mountain biking. However, the risk management of the mountain bike program often raises safety concerns of the public. Yet there is scarcity in the standard of risk management practices can be used as a guideline to manage or minimise the risks. Therefore, this paper served a preliminary research to understand the view of mountain bikers toward whether they agree that mountain biking as one type of sport tourism and to examine the roles of risk management practices in mountain biking tournament organised in the north of Peninsular Malaysia in Perak, Penang, Perlis, and Kedah.

2. Mountain Bike as Sport Tourism

Mountain biking has become more and more popular in recent years in the Malaysia with many mountain biking competitions hosted, and is consequently becoming one of the popular sports.