

**Understanding visitors' experiences in nature-based tourism: A case study of  
Komodo National Park Indonesia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The importance of understanding visitors' experiences has been acknowledged in the tourism field. It is believed that in order to create a successful tourism destination, the local tourism government, management, and providers should explore visitors' motivations, expectations, satisfaction, and what kind of experiences and benefits visitors want to gain. Thus, destination managers and tourism providers have applied research conducted by tourism scholars into visitors' experiences in a variety of tourism settings. However, little research has focused on national parks as a tourism destination in a conservation area. This area may be under-researched as the development may be perceived as a threat to the conservation agenda. In fact, tourism development in national parks may have positive impacts for the local community of the nation, and for the park itself by providing a support to its environmental preservation.

Studies have shown that tourism has occurred since the early establishment of national parks. In addition to that, nature-based tourism is a significant source of income in the tourism industry of developing countries. Thus, in most cases, tourism activities in national parks are inevitable. Nevertheless, only little attention has been paid to tourism development in national parks in developing countries in Asia, especially in Indonesia. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the experiences of visitors to a national park in Indonesia, namely Komodo National Park (KNP), as an example of nature-based tourism in a conservation area in Asia. The knowledge gained from this study can be used to improve the quality of visitors' experiences by maximising the product development of the site, and to strengthen visitors' support of sustainable tourism practices.

This study adopts a qualitative interpretivist approach. It focuses on the examination of visitors' motivations, expectations, satisfaction, and on understanding the benefits that visitors gain from visiting the park. The method used involved the collection of 31 semi-structured interviews and 26 photographs. The data were described and analysed using qualitative content analysis, which was then applied to the ASEB Grid Analysis concept.

The results highlight that the environmental setting is a strong influential factor in visitors' motivations to visit the park. This aspect also has a strong influence on visitors' satisfaction. Furthermore, visitors indicated that wilderness encounters were a strong influential factor

that motivated them to visit the park. The study also found that the experiences exceeded visitors' expectations, due to the opportunity to engage in multiple activities in one location. The findings indicate some weaknesses and threats to the site that were identified by the visitors, but all of them expressed satisfaction towards their overall experiences.

The benefits gained by visitors from their leisure experiences in KNP include immediate benefits, such as learning benefits, improved mood, and mindfulness benefits. In addition to that, visitors also gained long-term benefits which come from self-reflection that triggers personal growth, such as changing habits to be more environmentally conscious, and increasing self-esteem. From the analysis, opportunities arise for the park's management to create a better quality of visitors' experiences including adding more variation in educational activities.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP .....</b>	<b>XI</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>XII</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1        Background of the study .....	1
1.2        Tourism in Indonesian National Parks .....	6
1.3        Tourism in Komodo National Park .....	8
1.4        Statement of the problem .....	14
1.5        Research aim and objectives .....	14
1.6        Significance of the study .....	15
1.7        Structure of the thesis .....	16
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1        Tourism in the national park.....	18
2.1.1    A brief history of the early establishment of national parks.....	18
2.1.2    The role of tourism in the national parks .....	20
2.1.3    Tourism in national park as nature-based tourism product .....	21
2.2        Visitors' experiences .....	24
2.2.1    The benefit gained by visitors from tourism experiences.....	27
2.3        ASEB Grid Analysis .....	28
2.4        Summary .....	30
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>32</b>
3.1        Research paradigm .....	32
3.2        The rationale of qualitative research.....	33
3.3        The rationale for semi-structured interviews.....	34
3.4        Semi-structured interviews.....	35
3.5        Photo elicitation .....	36
3.6        Data sampling .....	37
3.6.1    Semi-structured interview sample .....	37
3.6.2    Photo collection sample .....	39
3.7        Data analysis .....	40
3.7.1    Photo analysis.....	41
3.8        Ethical considerations .....	42
3.9        Trustworthiness of the research.....	43
3.10       Limitations of the study .....	44
3.11       Chapter conclusion .....	44
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>46</b>
4.1        Overall findings .....	46
4.2        Activities.....	49
4.2.1    Strengths (SA) .....	50
4.2.2    Weakness (WA) .....	53
4.2.3    Opportunities (OA) .....	54

4.2.4	Threats (TA) .....	56
4.3	Settings.....	58
4.3.1	Strengths (SS).....	58
4.3.2	Weakness (WS).....	61
4.3.3	Opportunities (OS).....	64
4.3.4	Threats (TS).....	66
4.4	Experiences .....	68
4.4.1	Strengths (SE).....	68
4.4.2	Weakness (WE).....	72
4.4.3	Opportunities (OE).....	73
4.4.4	Threats (TE).....	74
4.5	Benefits .....	75
4.5.1	Strengths (SB) .....	75
4.5.2	Weakness (WB).....	77
4.5.3	Opportunities (OB) .....	78
4.5.4	Threats (TB) .....	79
4.6	Photo collection .....	79
4.6.1	Activities .....	79
4.6.2	Settings .....	80
4.6.3	Experiences.....	80
4.6.4	Benefits.....	81
4.7	Chapter conclusion .....	81
<b>CHAPTER 5:</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>82</b>
5.1	Research summary.....	82
5.2	Recommendations for KNP management .....	84
5.3	Implications of the study .....	84
5.4	Researcher's reflections.....	85
5.4.1	On the method taken .....	86
5.4.2	Personal reflection.....	86
5.5	Recommendations for future research .....	87
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>88</b>	
<b>APPENDIX A. INFORMATION SHEET.....</b>	<b>107</b>	
<b>APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW GUIDE.....</b>	<b>109</b>	
<b>APPENDIX C. CONSENT FORM .....</b>	<b>111</b>	
<b>APPENDIX D. ETHICS APPROVAL FROM AUTEC .....</b>	<b>112</b>	

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A. Information sheet.....	107
APPENDIX B. Interview guide.....	109
APPENDIX C. Consent Form .....	111
APPENDIX D. Ethics approval from AUTEC .....	112

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Komodo dragon on Komodo island. Source: Author's photographs.....	9
Figure 2: The boats of KNP tours, taken from Labuan Bajo. Source: Author's photographs. .	10
Figure 3: Iconic view from Padar Island. Source: Author's photographs. ....	11
Figure 4: KNP Indonesia location .....	12
Figure 5: Map of KNP (Komodo National Park, 2018) .....	13
Figure 6: Levels of the hierarchy of demand for outdoor recreation by (Haas et al., 1980) adapted from Manning (1999) .....	28

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: ASEB grid Analysis and cell identifiers (Beeho & Prentice, 1995) .....	28
Table 2: Interviewees characteristics .....	37
Table 3: KNP tourism and conservation product development on the ASEB matrix .....	48

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ASEB	Activities, settings, experiences, benefits
AUTEC	Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KNP	Komodo National Park
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO	United Nation World Tourism Organization
VERP	Visitor experience and resource protection
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WCPA	World Commission on Protected Areas
WHS	World heritage site
WOM	Word-of-mouth

## **ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

05- 08- 2019

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Signature

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Date

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

This thesis explores visitors' experiences in a national park as a nature-based tourism site in a conservation area. It draws on the perspectives of visitors of Komodo National Park (KNP) as a case study. This thesis explores the different aspects of visitors' experiences in the park, and their behaviour towards these aspects. It will also highlight the benefits they gain from their experiences. This thesis seeks to explore how an examination of visitors' experiences can help improve the development and management of the national park while also committing to the conservation agenda.

This thesis uses leisure visitors of KNP as a case study to gain an understanding from the visitors' perspectives of their experiences in a national park. This information can then be used to ensure that the tourism products on offer satisfy the needs and expectations of the visitors on site. Moreover, the data gained from the visitors reflect their understanding and interpretation of the conservation agenda.

This chapter provides an insight into tourism in national parks, describes the context of the research site, identifies the aim and objectives of the research as well as its significance, and lastly, outlines the structure of this thesis.

### **1.1 Background of the study**

Nowadays, more people are working in urban spaces (United Nations, 2018), surrounded by advanced technology, where every day has a fast and busy pace, and the demands for housing and infrastructure are high. As a result, in many countries, the governments have opted to set aside conservation land to provide a natural environment as a balance to city life. This condition makes people associate nature as an ideal place to escape from their urban life; hence, it grows people's interest in nature-based leisure activities. According to Kahn Jr, Severson, and Ruckert (2009), "technology has begun to change our species' long-standing experiences with nature" (p. 37), meaning that technology has become a disturbance in human's relationship with nature, while this relationship can be important for people's wellbeing. For some people, spending time with nature is considered to be part of a psychological therapy (R. Berger & McLeod, 2006), and for many, getting back in touch with

nature provides an ultimate holiday experience so they can disconnect from their monotonous urban lifestyle (Kuenzi & McNeely, 2008). Considering the reasons above, it is not surprising that nature-based tourism has reportedly emerged as the fastest-growing tourism sector in the early 2000s (Kuenzi & McNeely, 2008). The popularity of nature-based tourism remains significant in many countries, especially with the rise of ecotourism (Fischer, 2019; O'Connor, 2018).

The term ‘nature-based tourism’ refers to the type of tourism activity which depends on the natural resources in underdeveloped areas, such as “scenery, topography, waterways, vegetation, wildlife, and cultural heritage” (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996, p. 19). Both developed and developing countries worldwide have long encouraged nature-based tourism to generate economic opportunities on the national and local scale (MacKenzie, 1997; Remoaldo, Ribeiro, Vareiro, & Santos, 2014; Runte, 1987). However, the excursions to see nature and wildlife, such as tourism in national parks, and other protected areas, is concentrated in developing countries with visitors arriving from developed countries. This phenomenon happened and became an essential economic sector in developing countries because the world's biodiversity is concentrated in these areas (Olson et al., 2001; World Bank, 2015). An additional reason for the trend of nature-focused visitors from developed countries to visit the wilderness in developing countries may be that the developing countries have become more accessible in recent years (Balmford et al., 2009).

National parks are one of the forms of protected areas that are globally known as places for biodiversity preservation and nature appreciation (Frost, Laing, & Beeton, 2014). The longing for wildlife experiences, and the desire to be close to nature brings people to visit a national park in their leisure time regardless of the original conservational purpose of the national park itself. The scientific debate about the relationship between the protection of the natural environment and its economic exploitation is intense. Tourism development plans are usually surrounded by controversy because of fears that a focus on economic development will result in conservational ideas being side-lined. However, a study by the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (1998) found that the two aspects go hand in hand. Most protected areas, especially in developing countries, depend on traditional funding sources, such as national governments, conservation foundations, world heritage conventions, and other international

organisations. The funding is sometimes insufficient for area maintenance. For this reason, park management tries to find a new source of funding by trying to sell products that are generated from the natural resources inside the area, such as making the site the cornerstone for tourism and recreational activity, natural resource harvesting, or open the site up for hunting tourism (WCPA & IUCN, 1998). With proper management, there is an argument therefore that the right nature product can be sold sustainably without decreasing the value of the environment. The revenue from the activities is expected to bring significant benefit not only for the park itself but also to the local and national economy.

In addition to generating income from the natural properties of the park, studies found that national parks also need visitors to survive (Moore, Weiler, Moyle, & Eagles, 2013). Visitors can give political support and promote public awareness of the importance of biodiversity preservation. Therefore, instead of treating tourism activity in national parks as a threat, tourism can be seen as an alternative source of funding to support the conservation agenda.

The growing demand for tourism activity in nature-based sites leads to an increasing number of visitations to the areas that were initially built for conservation purposes, including in national parks. Visitation to national parks was considered inevitable and, in most developing countries, the economic revenue from national park is believed to bring benefits for people's welfare and the country as whole (MacKenzie, 1997; Remoaldo et al., 2014; Runte, 1987). As a consequence, many nature-based destinations, including protected areas, receive a high number of visitors, especially in Asia, where such destinations are a "typical nature-based tourism destination for Western tourists" (Frost, Laing, & Beeton, 2014, p. 721).

The high visitation issue in national parks remains controversial and there is a substantial body of research that highlights both the advantages and disadvantages. The thesis will focus on the positive side of tourism activity in a national park in that it can bring a range of benefits for both visitors and the national park itself. One of the most essential benefits for the national park is that tourism can create sustainability for the park's existence. When talking about sustainability, people should focus on the three key elements of sustainable tourism practice established by the United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (2019) which includes economic, social, and environmental impacts. Meanwhile, studies in the area

of national parks as nature-based tourism products mostly focus on the discussion about environmental and social-cultural impacts of the site, ignoring the economic aspect.

Visitors play a prominent role in creating economic benefits to a destination (Archer, Cooper, & Ruhanen, 2005). However, the sustainability of the national park is rarely discussed from their perspective. Visitors' perspective discourse in sustainable tourism often focuses only on negative impacts. While it is true that the increasing popularity of nature-based tourism destinations brings a threat as big as its economic benefit, it is important to note that visitors are also important stakeholders who can create sustainable tourism by generating income that helps the destinations build economic sustainability. This has led some researchers to highlight that it is important to take visitors' experiences at a site into consideration when evaluating tourism impacts and assessing possible areas for developments of a nature-based destination (Chhetri, Arrowsmith, & Jackson, 2004; Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010). However, there is still a lack of exploration into the subject of visitors' experiences in national parks as both a conservation site and a tourism destination.

According to Carlson (1997), experience means the flow of thoughts and emotional feelings that happen in a human's consciousness during a series of events. From a marketing perspective, tourism is seen as a product that recognises tourists or visitors as the consumers, and experience as a form of consumption (Quan & Wang, 2004). This study highlighted that in tourism activities, consumers demand new kind of experiences that are different from their everyday life. In line with this statement, Pine and Gilmore (1999) introduced the concept of the 'experience economy' to describe the current economic model that is based on the relationship between consumers and the emotional experiences that are offered by the consumption products. This concept is no longer based on the conventional relationship between consumers and products. With this understanding, it can be argued that experience is the main product of tourism activities (Prentice, Witt, & Hamer, 1998). The consumption of the experiences itself is later processed by the visitors to generate unique meaning and experiences that are considered *authentic* by their own perception.

Since the process of consumption in tourism activities involves subjective perspectives and personal psychological processes, it is important to note that visitors' experiences are multidimensional. Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) discussed three approaches that can be used

to understand visitors' subjective experiences: *definitional* refers to the divergent characteristic of experiences from different theories in visitors' experiences studies; *post-hoc satisfaction* "focuses on the perceived motivations, outcomes, and satisfaction" (p. 318); and *immediate conscious experience* inspects the value of real-time and on-site experiences. Based on this classification, this thesis falls into the post-hoc satisfaction category. However, it will also include the inspection of *immediate conscious experience* as Cutler and Carmichael (2010) argued that most of the post hoc satisfaction research is done on-site to examine the real-time experiences.

There are many theories that can be used to contextualize visitors' experiences in nature-based tourism settings. The most established theory is the crowding perception as indicator to the quality of visitors' experiences by Manning, Lime, Hof, and Freimund (1995). The study discussed the importance of creating high-quality experiences in national parks by emphasising the carrying capacities of the sites. Similarly, the study by Manning (1999) also explored how the perception of 'crowding' can have a negative impact on visitors' experiences in nature-based and outdoor recreation sites. Manning suggested that the density of visitors on site influences their subjective view of their experiences and thereby the level of satisfaction they gain from the experiences. The study also found that visitors' experiences were also influenced by other key factors, such as visitors' expectations of the site, previous experiences, what benefits they think they gain, and other visitors' personal backgrounds. However, Vaske and Shelby (2008) pointed out that it is also important to examine visitors' experiences beyond perception of crowding. Such as in a study by Booth, Cessford, McCool, and Espiner (2011) in the Milford Track, New Zealand, that showed visitors' high satisfaction rates despite high visitation to the site, and they found out that the factors which influence visitors' experiences include the biophysical settings, managerial settings, and social settings.

To date, there has been little discussion about visitors' experiences in national parks in Asia, more specifically, in Indonesia. It is important to enrich the existing knowledge of visitors' experiences by focusing on developing countries, which have different cultures, settings, and local attitudes towards nature and conservation. A quantitative study by W. Wang, Chen, Fan, and Lu (2012) discussed the factors that influence visitors' experiences in several national wetland parks in China. However, this study focuses only on measuring the experiences and

does not provide a collection of visitors' personal narratives. The current study will take a more personal and subjective approach in finding the factors influencing visitors' experiences because it is important to look at the experiences from a personal context.

In order to make use of a destination's competitive advantage, it is crucial to know whether the experiences and benefits that visitors received from their leisure activity meet their expectations or not. Therefore, the current study applies an ASEB (activities, settings, experiences, and benefits) grid analysis combined with the component of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis as a strategic management tool with a consumer-oriented approach in marketing research (Beeho & Prentice, 1996), with the goal to explore the experiences and benefits that the visitors gained at KNP.

The ASEB grid Analysis will identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from KNP's aspects of the activities, settings, experiences, and benefits derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews with international visitors. Identifying these aspects can be useful for the park management to optimise the satisfaction of the visitors, so then the park can survive in the competitive nature-based tourism market. Thus, it can yield benefits for the conservation works, tourism industry, and the local community.

## **1.2 Tourism in Indonesian National Parks**

In Indonesia, the first form of natural reservation and conservation effort that had characteristics of a national park is Mount Bromo in East Java, which was designated as a protected area in 1919 under Dutch colonisation (FAO, 1980). Under Dutch colonial rule, the area which is now known as 'Republic of Indonesia' used to be referred to as 'East Indies'. At that time, all the policies and governance happened under the influence of the European colony, including the decision of the establishment of the conservation area.

After the Republic of Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945, the first official conservation initiative happened in 1980. The government started to engage in conservation initiatives by declaring the first five national parks, which included Komodo, Baluran, Gede Pangrango, Ujung Kulon, and Leuser. Another eleven national parks were designated in 1984 (Sumardja, 1981; Sumardja & MacKinnon, 1985). Conservation issues were the main aim of the establishment. At that time, tourism in these areas of Indonesia was not yet common as

there were no sufficient facilities and poor access to reach the sites (Cochrane, 2012). Even though Indonesia had already realised the importance of the tourism industry as a source of income, primarily from the international market, for many years tourism development was only taken seriously in Bali (Picard, 1996).

When tourism to Indonesia began to be encouraged in the early 1980s as part of an export-oriented growth and diversification strategy, the markets targeted were traditional ones from Europe and Australia, and the emerging markets of East Asia. By the late 1980s, tourists from Asia surpassed arrivals from Europe, but European arrivals continued to increase, many of them travelling with the specialist nature, culture and adventure tourism companies, which by then were well-established.

(Cochrane, 2009, p. 257)

A decade later, the international demand for leisure activities in the adventurous and remote parts of Indonesia had increased along with the advancement of infrastructure, which enabled tourism activities in protected areas, including national parks, to develop (Cochrane, 2012).

In 2017, Indonesia's international visitor arrivals reached almost 13 million people, with an estimated 12.5 US\$ generated from international visitors (UNWTO, 2018). The Indonesian Ministry of Tourism claims that the growth of the tourism sector was so significant that the Indonesian President named the tourism industry as one of the leading sectors and core economies of the nation (CNN Indonesia, 2017). As a result, the Indonesian government put much more effort and commitment into stimulating the growth of the industry by developing a new marketing strategy and encouraging investors to build a public infrastructure which can support the activities of holidaymakers. In the 1990s, the Indonesian government sponsored a tourism marketing campaign called "Visit Indonesia", which was changed to "Wonderful Indonesia" in 2011. Thus far, this campaign has become the official country branding and marketing strategy to attract potential international visitors (Rudenko & Tedjakusuma, 2018).

In 2017, a government initiative called "10 new Bali projects" has been announced as a plan to encourage the growth of the tourism industry by expanding tourism hubs in Indonesian regions other than Bali. The appointed destinations are Lake Toba in North Sumatra, Tanjung Kelayang in Bangka Belitung, Tanjung Lesung in Banten, Ten Thousand Islands in North Jakarta, Borobudur in Central Java, Mount Bromo in East Java, Mandalika in Lombok, Labuan

Bajo in East Nusa Tenggara, Wakatobi in South East Sulawesi, and Morotai Island in North Maluku (See Chan (2017)). The areas for support were selected based on the potential of their tourism attractions. The selected destinations should have attractions that are unique but have a problem with accessibility and suffer from a lack of infrastructure. Although this problem is not applicable in appointed destinations in Java Island which already consists of a vast array of infrastructure types (Indonesian Deputy Tourism Minister as cited in Chan (2017)). In other words, almost all of the attractions in this project are at the stage that Butler (1980) described as the early growth/development stage of the tourism area cycle of evolution. Two of the 10 destinations from the list are recognised UNESCO world heritage sites, one cultural and one natural, nine of the 10 sites are nature-based, and three are national parks. The fact that there are three national parks included in the list shows that the government recognised the economic value of conservation areas. Moreover, the list gives an impression that although Indonesia is rich in culture and has diverse cultural sites across the country that have great potential for the tourism industry, nature-based tourism is still dominating the market, and it is still considered to be the most appealing for international recreational visitors.

The increasing popularity of national parks becoming visitor attractions that was triggered by this initiative presents both opportunities and challenges. The opportunity is that tourism activity can boost economic development around the park which will benefit not only the tourism stakeholders but will also be beneficial for the conservatory mission because national parks receive the most revenue from entrance fees (Maffly, 2018). The challenge is that maintaining conservation park resources can prove difficult under conditions of high visitation; therefore, national parks can adjust their policies into focus on high-quality visitors' experiences of reasonable value to maintain a high-level economic contribution potential. This statement was echoed by Manning (2001) who stated that high-quality visitors are more likely to appreciate and support the conservation effort of national park resources.

### **1.3 Tourism in Komodo National Park**

Komodo National Park (KNP) is located on Flores Island, West Manggarai regency in East Nusa Tenggara Province. The park was established in 1980, received the UNESCO World Heritage inscription in 1991, and became one of the "New Seven Wonders of Nature" in 2001. The

primary purpose of KNP is to protect the habitat of the Komodo dragon, the world's largest lizard and an endemic animal of Indonesia. This flagship animal is native to Komodo Island, Rinca Island, Gili Motong Island, as well as certain regions in the northern and western parts of Flores Island (Purwandana et al., 2014). Apart from being a sanctuary for the Komodo dragon, KNP is also home to other terrestrial and marine animals and has a rich biodiversity.



*Figure 1: Komodo dragon on Komodo island. Source: Author's photographs*

Aside from its primary purpose as a conservation area, the site also attracts leisure visitors. Since KNP's formal establishment in 1980, the number of visitors visiting the site has increased steadily. In 1995/1996, there were almost 30,000 arrivals, with 93% of all visitors traveling from overseas, with the majority coming from Europe (Walpole, 1997). The Komodo dragon is believed to be the key factor that attracts visitors to this area (Walpole & Leader-Williams, 2002). In 2017, there were around 122,000 arrivals to KNP consisting of 35% domestic and 65% international visitors (Putra, 2017). From this data, it can be seen that the number of domestic visitors increased significantly since the 1990s, but international visitors are still the biggest market for the area.

It is possible that the steady growth may be linked to KNP being awarded World Heritage Sites (WHS) natural status in 1991. UNESCO granted WHS status with the intention to help implement conservation and protection agendas at a site. However, a study by Hall and Piggott (2001) found that this status is believed to also contribute to the popularity of tourism destinations among visitors.

Another possible reason for the boost in tourism is the intensified international promotion of alternative tourism destinations in Indonesia by the Indonesian government. At this point, social networks may also contribute to the promotion of KNP to the travel market. To support the promotion, the government strives for the improvement of infrastructure in this area. For instance, the modern airport that was established in 2015 became an opportunity to support the tourism growth to KNP. Based on the data from Kantor Balai Taman Nasional Komodo (Komodo National Park Management Office) in 2019, the average growth rate of visitor numbers to KNP from 2014-2018 is 23%. The data shows that there was a steady increase from 2014 to 2017, followed by a surge of visitors of 53% in 2018.



*Figure 2: The boats of KNP tours, taken from Labuan Bajo. Source: Author's photographs.*

The only mode of transportation for visitors to reach KNP is by boat, either a privately chartered boat, package tours by travel operators, or cruise ships from Bali. Most of the visitors, at least for this study, arrived by package tours and only one of them came on a

privately chartered boat. Visitors pay upon entry to the park; however, the payment is usually collected by the tour agent before departure or included in the package tour pricing. At the time of this study (2018), the entrance fee was divided into three categories: 20,000 Rupiah (approximately US\$ 1.4) for the local visitor (people residing in the West Manggarai regency) fee; 50,000 Rupiah (approx. US\$ 3.5) for the domestic visitor (Indonesian) fee; and 100,000 rupiah (approx. US\$ 7) for the international visitor. There is an additional fee for those wanting to engage in fishing and diving activities: 20,000 rupiah for local visitor, 50,000 rupiah for the domestic visitor, and 100,000 rupiah for the international visitor per person per day (West Manggarai Regency Government, 2018).

KNP funding sources were recorded in the work by Walpole, Goodwin, and Kari (2001) who revealed the primary funding of the park came from the government. This fund was used for regular expenditure, such as “staff wages, equipment, maintenance, and transport” (p.220). The budget also included expenses for the development of the park, such as construction and community services. The income from tourism activities within the park or visitors’ expenditure such as guide fees, accommodation, food, drinks, and souvenirs were claimed by the tour companies. The revenue from the entrance fee to KNP went back to the government.

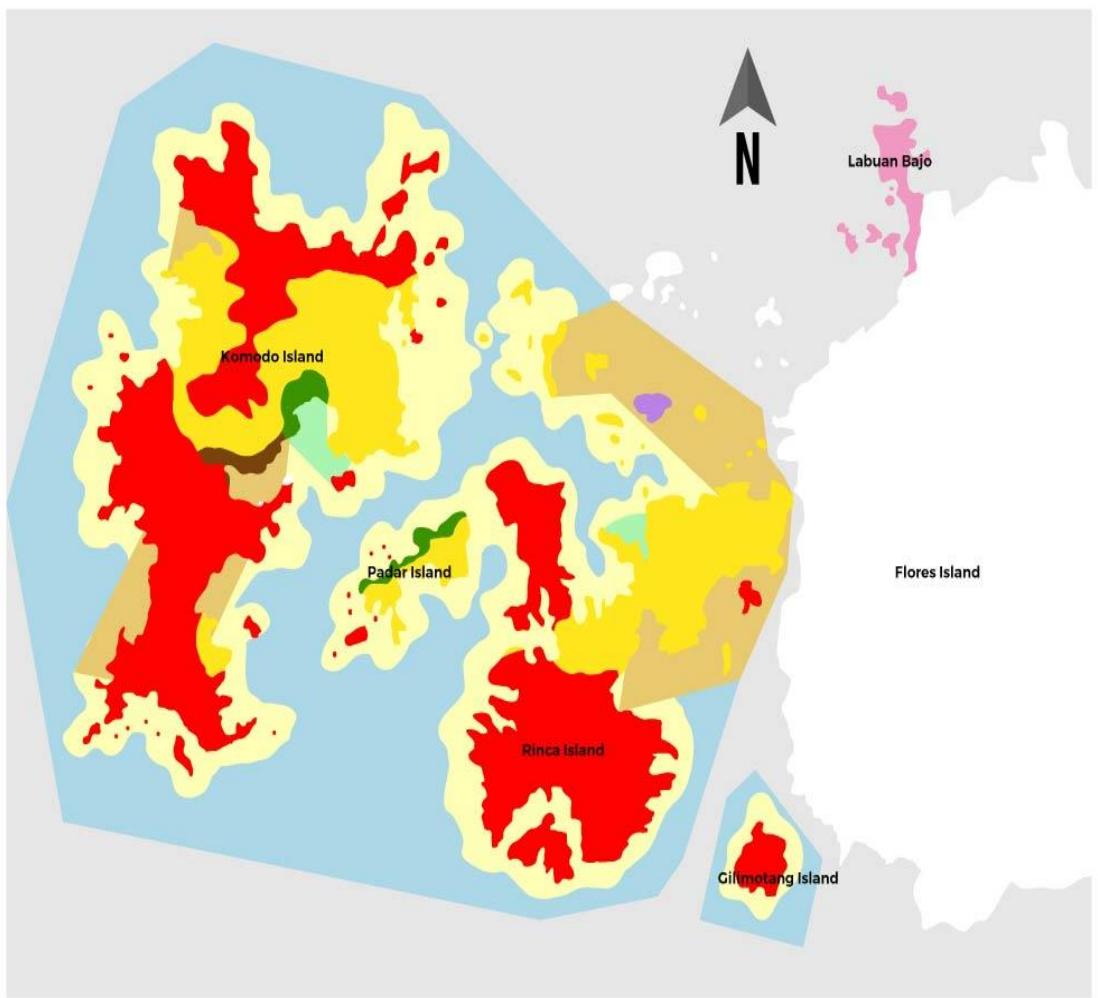


*Figure 3: Iconic view from Padar Island. Source: Author’s photographs.*

Based on the list of activities available at the site, KNP can be categorised as a soft adventure tourism destination (UNWTO & Adventure Travel Association, 2014). The Komodo dragon is the flagship of the site and visitors can engage in various leisure activities, including wildlife watching, hiking, and marine-based recreational activities. The sea surrounding the areas are believed to feature the richest marine biodiversity in Indonesia, and home to the most diverse coral environment in the world (Gallegos, Vaahtera, & Wolfs, 2005). This unique feature makes KNP one of the hot spots for scuba diving. The park adopted zoning for area management, which means that only designated areas are open for tourism purpose, and some parts of the park are not accessible to the public. See Figure 4 for the location of KNP and Figure 5 below for an explanation of the zoning areas.



*Figure 4: KNP Indonesia location*



<span style="background-color: red; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span>	Absolute protection zone, only accessible for research and education
<span style="background-color: yellow; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span>	Mainland protection zone. Accessible for research, education, and limited leisure activity
<span style="background-color: lightyellow; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span>	Marine protection zone. Accessible for research, education, and limited leisure activity
<span style="background-color: green; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span>	Central zone for land tourism activity
<span style="background-color: teal; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span>	Central zone for marine tourism activity
<span style="background-color: blue; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px;"></span>	Marine zone for legal and recreational fishing

Figure 5: Map of KNP (Komodo National Park, 2018)

## **1.4 Statement of the problem**

There are many studies about tourism in national parks, especially in relation to their conservation efforts and sustainability agendas. However, visitors' experiences in national parks in Asia, more specifically in Indonesia, have not yet been explored. There are previous tourism studies on KNP that focused on the issues around tourism's contribution to the conservation effort and local community involvement in the sustainability of the park (Walpole, 2001; Walpole & Goodwin, 2001; Walpole et al., 2001). Another study set in KNP is a work by Hitchcock (1993), which examined tourism development in KNP from the 1980s to 1990s. This study was continued by Borchers (2009), who discussed more recent sustainability challenges and presented forecasts of tourism development in KNP. Yet another study examined the yacht rally event of 'Sail Komodo' and presented a critical perspective on tourism events, their promotion, and tourism development in KNP (Erb, 2015).

The concept of experience as consumption or commodity described by Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggests that visitors want experiences that are more beneficial than merely memorable for their tourism activities. Therefore, understanding this aspect is important if the national parks want to maintain the competitiveness and continue to thrive. However, to date, no previous studies have focused on visitors' perspectives on Indonesian national parks. It is crucial to understand visitors' perspectives by looking at their attitudes towards the activities and settings offered, and how the visit to the park can bring them benefit. These are the key elements to enhance the quality of visitors' experiences, which may help secure economic sustainability of the park (Dangi, 2018). This study will also contribute to the body of research on visitors' experiences in developing countries.

## **1.5 Research aim and objectives**

The main aim of this research is to explore the visitors' experiences, motivations, expectations, and satisfaction toward their overall experience, and to understand the benefits that visitors gain from tourism activities in the national park as a nature-based tourism destination in a conservation area. This aim is supported by these research objectives:

1. To explore visitors' experiences, motivations, expectations, and satisfaction towards the tourism activities and settings in KNP.

2. To investigate the key attributes that influence visitors' experiences when visiting KNP.
3. To identify the benefits that visitors' gain from their personal experiences in KNP.
4. To identify opportunities available for the management to enhance visitors' experiences.

The qualitative methods employed in this study serve to gain a subjective view of the visitors' narratives about their experiences. Thereafter, the application of an ASEB Grid Analysis together with a qualitative content analysis intends to address these objectives by interpreting visitors' on-site experiences.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

Studies that have explored tourism activity in Asian national parks mostly focus on identifying ways to preserve the environment (Borchers, 2009; Hvenegaard & Dearden, 1998; Walpole, 1997). There is a lack of attention to the economic sustainability that can be achieved by delivering outstanding visitors' experiences. The current examination of visitors' experiences in the national park is expected to contribute to the existing knowledge on sustainable tourism development practice. Sustainability in nature-based tourism will be more effective if the focus also involves visitors' experiences, together with a discussion of environmental sustainability and social impacts.

Another reason why this study focuses on visitors' experiences is that the number of visitations to national parks around the world has been increasing rapidly in the past century, and it is predicted to keep growing (Eagles, 2007). Park management should be aware of this trend because it may influence the value of and visitors' interests in the park and will create a tight competition between national parks. Understanding the visitors' experience is vital to help management enhance the quality of visitors' experiences to keep the economic competitiveness of national parks as a tourism product. Pine and Gilmore (1999) have pointed out that the experience economy trend is shifting from the demand of experiences as entertainment to the view that an experience should be meaningful so people can achieve a sense of transformation to reach their full potential. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), the highest point of the pyramid is self-actualisation. In other words, the transforming

meaningful experiences need to be fulfilled in order to provide the highest quality of experiences.

The current study is relevant for several important audiences. Firstly, for the tourism academia, this research provides an opportunity to advance the existing knowledge about visitors' experiences of national parks, especially in the Asia Region. Adding knowledge to visitors' experiences in Asian national parks is important because most studies in this area are set in the western world. Therefore, it will bring a significant contribution to an underdeveloped research topic area.

Furthermore, this study is particularly important for Indonesia because it can also act as a guide for the government when making the tourism-related planning and development decisions for diversification of their tourism products, away from a focus merely on Bali. This makes an essential contribution to KNP by providing recommendations for park management to create better visitors' experiences and customer-centered product development that are in line with the conservation agenda. Many works of literature expressed that the economic development in a national park could interfere with the conservation agenda. However, in many countries, especially in developing countries, economic development in parks is inevitable. This is due to the fact that tourism is the backbone of a country's foreign exchange earnings and nature-based tourism in developing countries bring in desirable financial assets (World Bank, 2015). The result of this study can hopefully assist park management in generating satisfying and beneficial experiences for visitors while, at the same time, maintaining the sustainability of the site. Lastly, for respondents, the result of the research will be useful for their reflection on their visit.

## **1.7 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is composed of five chapters. *Chapter one*, the current chapter, presents an overall introduction to this Master's Thesis. It begins by detailing the background of the study and then continues to describe the context of the study and to discuss the issues that emerged from the topic. Based on the issues identified, the research problem emerged and was developed into the main research aim. Finally, chapter one discusses the purpose of the study as well as its potential contributions.

*Chapter 2* consists of a review of literature relevant to the study. This chapter is divided into three sections with following discussions: Tourism in national parks, visitors' experiences, and ASEB Grid Analysis. The chapter begins by laying out the context of tourism in national parks, providing a history of tourism in national parks as part of nature-based tourism activity in conservation areas, and by reviewing current studies about nature-based tourism in national parks. The next section of this chapter explains the concept of visitors' experiences and discusses the values and benefits gained by tourism activities in national parks. Finally, the chapter explains ASEB Grid Analysis and its applications to tourism research, and presents existing visitors' experiences studies that have previously adopted this analysis tool.

*Chapter 3* is concerned with the methodology used in this study. It provides an overview of the philosophical foundations of the research, as well as the rationale for the qualitative methods taken. Moreover, this chapter provides a detailed description of the various steps involved in the data collection and analysis process used in this study.

*Chapter 4* presents the results of the semi-structured in-depth interviews undertaken in KNP. This chapter consists of respondents' interpretations of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the national park that emerged from the aspects of activities, settings, experiences, and benefits. An examination of photographs taken by visitors are also included in the analysis. The visitors' experiences and influencing factors are then identified for each aspect mentioned above. This analysis is followed by a discussion on alternative management opportunities for tourism planning in KNP, and the benefits gained by respondents from their experiences.

*Chapter 5* summarises the key findings of this research. The implications of the study are also discussed, along with its limitations. Finally, several suggestions for future research are discussed at the end of the chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents the literature review section of this thesis. It is divided into three main sections. The first section offers a closer look at how tourism activities occur in national parks. It also appraises previous studies about tourism in national parks as nature-based tourism products (section 2.1). The next section reviews relevant literature on the visitors' experiences, including factors affecting the experiences and the benefits gained by visitors from tourism experiences (section 2.2). The last section consists of a discussion of the ASEB Grid Analysis method as a tool to analyse outdoor attractions as tourism consumption (section 2.3). The chapter then concludes with a summary of the literature review.

### **2.1 Tourism in the national park**

#### 2.1.1 A brief history of the early establishment of national parks

National parks are one of the forms of protected areas that are globally known as a place for biodiversity preservation and nature appreciation (Frost et al., 2014). The term is believed to have become popular after the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 as a public preservation area located in the western part of the United States (Frost & Hall, 2009). When national parks were first established, they were built because of an increasing awareness of nature conservation, as well as to cater to human's need for recreation to escape their daily life (Frost & Hall, 2012b; Jepson & Whittaker, 2002; Wright, 1989).

Many years later, the national park system in the US, which was influenced by western culture, was adapted worldwide. In Asia, for example, Japan's initiative to establish national parks was inspired by the designation of Yellowstone National Park in the United States (Ministry of the Environment Government of Japan, 2019; Nash, 1970). According to Frost et al. (2014), the awareness to protect natural areas started in the 1920s with Japan as the first politically independent country in Asia to establish the first three national parks in early 1930, Setonaikai, Unzen, and Kirishma. Aside of the influence of Yellowstone National Park, Frost et al. (2014) believed that the early establishment of national parks in Japan was because they have a higher level of respect for nature since it is part of their cultural beliefs. This establishment was considered the earliest in Asia since other Eastern countries showed the

interest to protect wildlife only several decades later by the end of nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Since the concept of national parks first developed in the United States and began to spread around the world from there, the concept of the national park system itself bears American ideals and influences (Frost & Hall, 2009). Cochrane (2012) believed that the adaptation was unsuccessful when applied to other parks located in another part of the world, due to the differences in cultural and social settings. Westerners are believed to indulge and foster a love of nature due to their relatively higher wealth, which allows them to have a more romantic rather than pragmatic view of the value of nature (Frost et al., 2014; Kellert, 1995). In contrast, Asian and Pacific societies see nature as part of their economic development (Henderson, 2011). This means that Westerners are looking at nature more for its aesthetic rather than its economic value, which is slightly different from the Eastern world's view. It may not seem surprising then, that some of the first national parks in Asia were established by European colonial authorities, such as in Malaysia and India (Kathirithamby-Wells, 2005). Meanwhile, national parks in Asia and Africa are very different from the Eurocentric models as they are more concerned with their attractiveness for tourism rather than conservation effectiveness because the focus of the main aim of the development lies on the community welfare instead of the protection of nature (Carruthers, 2012; Cochrane, 2012; Xu & Zhang, 2012).

Up until today, there is no internationally enforceable definition of what constitutes a national park. The IUCN's conceptual dimension of national park categories kept changing and may change overtime (IUCN, 2019). This 'fluid' concept of the national park happened because there is no classification system requirement for national parks, unlike the status of other protected area such as WHS. One of many things that national parks around the globe have in common is the presence of tourism activities. Along with the conservation agenda, these two are often two sides of one coin (Frost & Hall, 2009).

The double roles played by national parks result in endless debates about whether tourism activities should be allowed in conservation and protected area such as national parks. An increase in tourism-related infrastructure, human involvement, and high visitation in nature-based destinations could damage the biodiversity, flora, fauna, and endangered species at

the sites (Coppock, 1982; Forestell & Kaufman, 1990; McKercher, 1993; Spenceley, 2012; Zell, 1992). Scholars have suggested that tourism activities in national parks pose physical threats to the environment and wildlife (Davies, 2018; Orams, 2002; Willard & Marr, 1970), lead to pollution (Kreag, 2001), and have other negative social-cultural impacts. On the other hand, it should be noted that national parks need visitors to survive (Moore et al., 2013), especially in the developing world where the maintenance funding provided by the government alone is often insufficient. Furthermore, visitors play a significant role in giving political support to the park (Buckley, 2009). Visitors can provide public support to government's conservation funding, and in some cases, help secure land from being opened for natural- resources based industries such as mining and agriculture.

Tourism activities in national parks are also necessary since many countries, especially in the developing world, depend on nature-based tourism to gain foreign income (World Bank, 2015). This has led to a strong research interest in tourism in national parks. For instance, Uddhammar (2006) suggested that economic benefit and conservation could go hand in hand if there is good joint management support between each stakeholder. Krüger (2005) also found that tourism activities at nature-based sites made a positive contribution to the local community and brought support to the conservation agenda.

### 2.1.2 The role of tourism in the national parks

The encouragement of tourism activity in national parks does not mean that the nature preservation agenda must be excluded. On the contrary, due to consumer demand for a pristine environment, environmental and biodiversity preservation are deemed important (Puhakka, 2008). Those visiting nature-based tourism sites tend to be mature and experienced travellers who demand and expect a sophisticated product to fulfil their high standards of satisfaction (Shackely, 2006). In other words, the sustainability of natural resources inside a nature-based tourism destination is the key aspect to keep the sustainable tourism practice of the site. In this way, tourism plays a vital role in preserving the site for future generations (Cochrane & Tapper, 2006), which means that tourism and conservation have a similar agenda and should be seen more as a symbiosis (See Budowski (1976).

Another idea worth noting is that tourism in national parks accommodates educational activities, not only about nature and the environment but also about the tangible and intangible heritage of the region. National parks can act as an object that embodies “national identity, pride, and enjoyment” (Frost and Hall (2012a, p. 63). Tourism activities encourage the recognition of local culture and the uniqueness of the country, whether it is natural or cultural.

In developing countries, the establishment of national parks also conveys a political message that symbolises national characteristics to both domestic and international visitors. In Indonesia, for example, conservation efforts in some areas existed only as a relic from the previous colonial era, and the establishment of the first national parks in the 1980s was believed to be a demonstration of the new government’s legitimacy, or justification for environmental preservation and conservation which drew international attention (Cochrane, 2012).

### 2.1.3 Tourism in national park as nature-based tourism product

Nature-based tourism experiences are considered to be invoking and authentic, which then motivate visitors who are looking for an enjoyable activity at a venue with an outstanding natural panorama (Boyd & Timothy, 2006; N. Wang, 1999). Public's demand of wildlife experiences and the increasing number of visitations to nature settings motivate further visitors to go to national parks in their leisure time. Furthermore, the number of people who are interested in visiting national parks are growing because the protected areas label, which applies to national parks, suggests that there is something special, unique, and different to be seen. As a result, this label has had a substantial effect on brand identity for tourism promotion to attract visitors (Reinius & Fredman, 2007).

From the supply side, the commercialisation of the natural environment is proliferating due to the fact that it can be an asset for national branding strategies and economic profitability (S. Bell, Simpson, Tyrväinen, Sievänen, & Pröbstl, 2009; Frost et al., 2014; World Bank, 2018). Tourism in nature-based settings is considered to be an important source of foreign income (Davenport, Brockelman, Wright, Ruf, & Rubio del Valle, 2002; Kuenzi & McNeely, 2008; Reinius & Fredman, 2007; Tisdell, 2013). Therefore, it is not a surprise that many nature-based

sites are open for public leisure activities, including the sites with conservation area status. Additionally, because of the high demand for wildlife experiences and the touted tourism's benefits that the governments may earn, many countries worldwide have long encouraged tourism in national parks to generate economic opportunities on a national and local scale (MacKenzie, 1997; Remoaldo et al., 2014; Runte, 1987). Due to the economic importance of the tourism industry in national parks there has been substantial academic interest in researching the tourism development in national parks as nature-based tourism attractions.

UNWTO (2014) classified tourism activities in national parks as soft-adventure tourism. The reason behind this classification was that tourism activities in national parks are identical to other activities that are performed mostly in outdoor settings (nature-based). The products offered are mainly focusing on activities that rely on the natural features of the destination. These activities contain risks and challenges for the visitors, and require special sporting equipment and /or skills during its performance (Buckley, 2006; Cater, 2013; Swarbrooke, 1999; Weaver, 1998). Moreover, the activities are considered to be 'soft' due to the low risk involved, which means that less skill is required from the visitors to do the activities. However, this description does not necessarily apply to all parts of national parks because some national parks also offer hard-adventure tourism activities that require high safety procedures and advanced skills.

A number of previous studies have highlighted how, from the early establishment of national parks, tourism activities were expected to support the conservation agenda and became one of the main methods of preserving the natural area by providing economic sustainability and political support (Butler & Boyd, 2000; Frost & Hall, 2012a). Hall and Frost (2009) hypothesised that the establishment of national parks in most countries in the world were built on the principle that the place does not merely have a rich biodiversity that needed to be preserved, but that the area is also a 'worthless land' without any desirable economic value such as exploitable soil minerals. The encouragement for tourism activity in conservation sites was believed to generate the financial rewards that could benefit the local community as well as the country. For the park itself, the revenue was also believed to help the conservation agenda, especially when it came to generating funding when the international and national funds for preserving heritage sites were inadequate (Cochrane & Tapper, 2006).

Tourism development can be seen as providing support for the conservation agenda instead of only focusing on the negative impacts of human intervention. Higginbottom and Tribe (2019) identified several cases where tourism in protected areas succeeded to contribute positively by generating generous revenue that funded conservation initiatives. The study by Uddhammar (2006), which examined the relationship between tourism development and conservation in several protected areas in Africa and India, pointed out that the Western and Developing Worlds have different points of view on the implementation of conservation projects. In 1972, the Second World Conference on National Parks in Wyoming, USA, declared that the purposes of national parks were preserving biodiversity and providing a space for public recreation (Nepal & Weber, 1995). In order to fulfil this purpose, governments regularly engaged in the relocation of local people. This approach contrasts with the idea of national parks in developing countries, where, according to Uddhamar (2006), conservation efforts were also expected to foster the welfare of the locals and the native people living around the area who heavily depend on the resources. In this case, tourism development could help meet these goals, rather than merely being a place for biodiversity preservation and visitors' enjoyment, as long as there was a strong joint collaboration between stakeholders. Therefore, national parks in developing countries must not only focus on environmental preservation, but also can provide a plan to maintain the fortune of the local people.

Tourism research tends to acknowledge the important role of visitors for the sustainability of the park. Various studies have found that visitors' involvement is deemed important in creating environmental sustainability (Ballantyne, Packer, & Hughes, 2009; Tubb, 2003). For instance, a study about visitors' perceptions of conservation awareness in a Conservation Park in Queensland, Australia, found that visitors perceived high support for the conservation agenda (Ballantyne et al., 2009). This study suggested that the park management should involve visitors as 'conservation partners' because many visitors showed significant interest in contributing to the conservation projects at the park and showed their support for low-impact tourism activities in the area. Moreover, Tubb (2003) pointed out that visitors play an important role in promoting sustainable tourism development goals by supporting environmental sustainability. This research revealed that visitors' engagement with the conservation agenda during their visit to the national park could trigger an attitude change towards nature due to their increasing awareness of environmental issues.

However, not many researchers elaborate on the role of visitors in creating economic sustainability. The studies mentioned in previous paragraphs showed that visitors could help achieve environmental sustainability, but it was deemed important to explain visitors' role in creating economic sustainability too. Therefore, in order to gain economic benefits from visitors and securing political support from them, two key aspects that will contribute to the sustainability of the national park, the park management must thus focus on enhancing visitors' experiences (Moore et al., 2013). The lack of focus on the demand side is also shown in the work by Eagles and McCool (2002), who discussed contemporary issues in creating sustainable tourism developments in national parks. In short, an examination of visitors' perspectives in achieving an economic benefit that is useful for sustainable tourism practice of the park has been missing from the discussion so far.

## 2.2 Visitors' experiences

*Visitors' experiences* is defined as psychological phenomena that occurs inside visitors' minds in response to the tourism products offered by tourism providers (Packer & Ballantyne, 2016; Volo, 2009). It is derived from the exploration of consumer behaviour and marketing research. An investigation of the visitors' experiences revealed the shift in the marketing strategy from focusing on the physical products to focus on the experiences. This trend emphasised the importance of feeling, enjoyment, sensory pleasure, and emotion in product consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). These aspects are referred to as an 'experiential view' by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), which used to be neglected in tourism marketing because consumer behaviour used to be seen as merely part of information processing, rather than an important part of the products.

Moreover, Pine and Gilmore (1999) put forward the concept of the experience economy, which takes an individual's perception, such as the emotional and psychological context into account as part of the economic process, especially in branding strategy and product development. The notion of the experience economy shows that the experience is part of consumption and should be taken seriously. Pine and Gilmore (1999) conceptualised the experience into the degree of visitors' participation and then categorised it into the four realms of experiences: Educational, Aesthetic, Escapism, and Entertainment. *Educational* experiences happen when visitors are actively absorbing their experiences and are actively

involved in the activity. For instance, during a visit to a museum, visitors may enjoy the art but at the same time they learn about the history, culture and the community. *Aesthetic* experiences refer to the state when visitors are intellectually immersed in the activity but at the same time passively absorb the experiences and also passively appreciate the environment, for instance, during a self-guided hiking tour. On the other hand, *Escapism* experiences are when visitors actively immerse themselves in the experience and give an actual contribution to their active involvement. An example of this category would be a camping trip. The last category, *Entertainment* experiences, refers to the state when respondents are passively involved in the activities and at the same time do not absorb their experience, for example, when attending a concert. Oh, Jeoung, and Fiore (2007) used this concept as a practical framework in evaluating visitors' experiences of bed and breakfasts. It provides an example of the application of the experience economy theory in tourism studies and provides empirical evidence on how to measure experiences.

Since experiences involve subjective perspectives and personal psychological processes, it is important to note that the visitors' experiences are multidimensional. Scholars across different disciplines believe that customer experiences in the consumption process are divided into multiple stages (Arnould, Price, & Zinkhan, 2002; Carù & Cova, 2003). This means the experiences happen in several stages: prior to making the decision to engage in the experience, the time of purchase, and post-purchase. Clawson and Knetsch (1966) divided the stages of outdoor experiences into five stages of experiences: *Anticipation* refers to pre-visit and planning the trip; *Travel* to the phase when visitors are on the way to the tourism site; *On-site* alludes to the actual travel activity at the site; *Travel back* is when visitors are on their way home; *Recollection* includes recalling the memory of the experiences. The goal of any tourism activity is to generate meaningful experiences from the products and services offered. Considering it is all about the experience, the products offered by the destination become more important as they can influence the quality of the experiences.

Cohen (1979) pointed out that visitors' experiences are different from everyday experiences because they seek to experience something extraordinary. Cohen conceptualised experiences on several spectrums. The *Recreational mode* applies when the quest of authenticity is low because the visitors are still strongly connected to the 'centre' of their society (p. 180). The *Diversionary mode* applies when visitors who claim not to be attached to the centre try to

escape their everyday life that seems monotonous and boring by doing tourism activities without any deeper meaning. In this case, the tourism activity is seen purely as a distraction from their ordinary everyday life. The *Experiential mode* refers to the type of visitors who are away from its centre but still aware of their ‘otherness’ (p.188) in order to get the desired meaning and authenticity from the tourism activity. The *Experimental mode* describes how travellers do not adhere to the spiritual aspects of their own society but instead are looking for other alternatives in many different forms but are not fully committed to it. The last category is the *Existential mode*, which refers to those visitors who are completely alienated from the centre of their own society and who seek authenticity of their experiences, looking for a new world, getting attached to it, and fully commit to this ‘elective centre’. This analysis of visitor types became the foundational theory for many previous studies on visitor experiences, such as in McCabe (2005) which examined the conceptual categories of tourist or leisure visitor experiences . The modes identified by Cohen (1979) emphasised that visitors' behaviour is affected by their intention and how little it is often based on a longing for authenticity.

According to Iso-Ahola (1983), motivation plays an important part in creating visitors' experiences in leisure activities, especially in the personal dimension. He stated that “recreational travel is a process of the continuous interplay of two forces: to avoid one's daily environment and to seek novelty and other psychological rewards” (p. 55). This means that, when examining visitors' experiences, it is important to look at visitors' motivations, which consist of two elements: personal and interpersonal. These elements work as pull and push motivations. Uysal and Jurowski (1994) defined push motivations as the factors which trigger visitors' intention to travel, and pull factors as the attributes of the destination that attracts visitors to visit them.

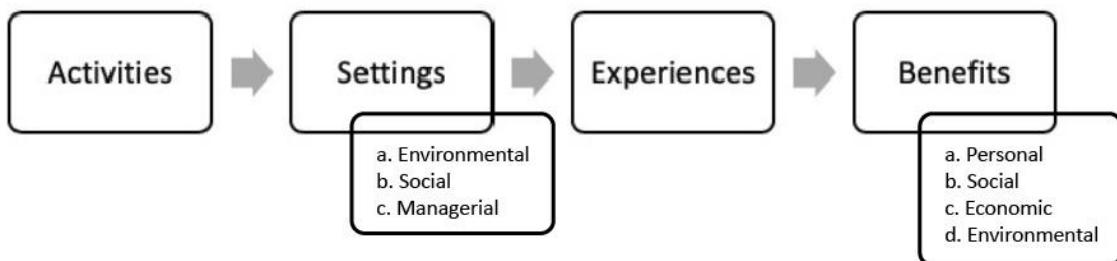
Many works of literature have tried to investigate the underlying factors that affect visitors' experiences in order to create high-quality experiences. The reason behind researching quality of experiences is not merely to get the highest profit for the business (Chen & Chen, 2010; Oh et al., 2007), but also to prepare a development plan to keep the tourism product competitive and sustainable (Jennings et al., 2009). Thus, understanding visitors' experiences in national parks is not only beneficial for boosting revenue, but it can also guide management plans to ensure the sustainability of the park.

### 2.2.1 The benefit gained by visitors from tourism experiences

Understanding what visitors get from their leisure experiences is important because it influences their assessment of the quality of the experiences. Manning (1999) emphasised that humans aim to achieve satisfaction and reach particular goals in every activity that they do, including tourism activities. These motivations were later found to influence their overall satisfaction on their leisure experiences. The reason behind this is because the internal factors brought by the visitors are equally important as the attributes of the tourism products when it comes to influencing the quality of the experiences (Ryan, 2002). Furthermore, the study by Driver and Toucher (1970) explored what lies beyond these motivations, and the study found out that people engage in recreational activity to fulfil particular needs and achieve satisfaction by gaining certain benefits. This psychological approach to analysing visitors' behaviour has led to the development of the 'hierarchy of demand' for recreation by Haas, Driver, and Brown (1980) that was suggested by Manning (1999) in explaining the key aspects of achieving a high degree of customer satisfaction in outdoor recreation: activities, settings, motivations, and benefits.

The Haas-Driver-Brown-Manning hierarchy of demand is divided into four levels. Level 1, *activities*, refers to things that can be done at the tourism site. Level 2, *settings*, is concerned with the recreationists' expectations of the setting with regard to the environmental, social, and managerial properties of the site. Level 3, *experiences*, is based on what motivates recreationists to experience the activity in the setting. Motivation is the driver behind certain behaviour, and the destination management could use knowledge of what drives recreationists to understand what people really need and expect in order to cater to their clients so that high satisfaction can be achieved (Manfredo & Driver, 2002). Level 4, *benefits*, accounts for personal, social, economic, and environmental benefits that were generated from the "satisfying experiences derived from recreation participation" (Manning, 1999, p. 159). This means that a *benefit* is a psychological outcome that is gained from the leisure activity (Beeho & Prentice, 1996). Figure 6 below presents the relationship between the four levels of demands and the examples.

*Figure 6: Levels of the hierarchy of demand for outdoor recreation by (Haas et al., 1980) adapted from Manning (1999)*



In summary, outdoor recreation managers need to understand the importance of the relationship between the benefits desired by visitors and the activities and setting characteristics of the site (Drakou, Costa, Glinia, & Astrapenos, 2002). Manfredo, Driver, and Tarrant (1996) also pointed out that an “improved understanding of the relationship would assist in clarifying the ‘product’ that recreationists seek” (p.189). In other words, in order to understand the visitors’ experiences in terms of the *experiences* (level 3) demand, management also needs to pay attention to the *activities* (level 1), and *settings* (level 2), which can be used to generate *benefits* (level 4) because these levels are all correlative.

### 2.3 ASEB Grid Analysis

ASEB Grid Analysis is an analysis tool developed by Beeho and Prentice (1995) which combines the Haas-Driver-Brown-Manning hierarchy of demand (*activities*, *settings*, *experiences*, and *benefits*), and SWOT (*strengths*, *weaknesses*, *opportunities*, and *threats*) analysis to systematically evaluate visitors’ experiences. This type of method is believed to elucidate visitors’ experiences through a focus on an ASEB (activities, settings, experiences, benefits) and is believed to help improve the development of a site. Table 1 below illustrates an overview of the ASEB Grid Analysis.

*Table 1: ASEB grid Analysis and cell identifiers (Beeho & Prentice, 1995)*

	Activities	Settings	Experiences	Benefits
Strengths	SA	SS	SE	SB
Weaknesses	WA	WS	WE	WB

Opportunities	OA	OS	OE	OB
Threats	TA	TS	TE	TB

Each aspect of SWOT can be defined as follows: *Strengths* refers to those factors that can be manipulated by management in order to build market share and trigger a revisit intention. *Weaknesses* captures what product offerings are lacking based on evaluation of what visitors actually want. *Opportunities* are those factors beyond management's control that bring positive impacts to the site and includes discussions about strategies to gain advantages from these opportunities. Also, to be noted, the opportunities are not necessarily identified solely from visitors' comments, but may be derived from wider assessment, building on the destinations' strengths and fixing the destinations' weaknesses. Meanwhile, *threats* captures the opposite of opportunities in that it focuses on the negative elements or impacts to the site. *Threats* includes discussions of the strategies to overcome the negative limitations that were identified.

With the ASEB Grid, the analysis is undertaken in each row of the matrix from the assessment of the strengths to the activities (SA) to threats of the benefits (TB). The strengths and weaknesses of the activities, settings, experiences, and benefits are based on the respondents' perspectives. Hence, the analysis presents the visitors' insights into tourism consumption in conservation sites, how the experiences may be improved, and if the current experiences meet visitors' expectations of wildlife tourism in conservation sites. Such a consumer-centric analysis would allow management to identify better tourism products that fulfil both conservation and tourism goals.

Applied to previous tourism studies, the ASEB grid Analysis has proved to successfully capture visitors' personal experiences, expressive behaviors, and thoughts about their leisure experiences. An application to ASEB in heritage museum settings by Beeho and Pentice (1995, 1996) generated a consumer-focused analysis of tourism aspects in the museum, using visitors' own words to identify experiences and benefits they gained from the experiences. This information was then used to generate ideas that could be used to help management identify new management opportunities and a suitable marketing approach. In 1997, Beeho and Prentice adapted the framework to an ASEB Demi-Grid Analysis which only focuses on the strengths and weaknesses and excludes opportunities and threats from the analysis. This

study found that the main benefits that visitors gain from their visit to the museum is generally entertainment while also provoking nostalgia and providing educational benefits to the visitors.

Similar research conducted by Schänzel and McIntosh (2000) in New Zealand gained more profound insights into the personal and emotive context of wildlife penguin watching as they demonstrated that wildlife penguin watching is closely linked to visitors' cognitive benefits as well as specific emotional experiences. This study identified several vital attributes about the benefits visitors gained from their experiences, including educational and emotional mood benefits from the wildlife viewing attraction.

## **2.4 Summary**

Research has shown that national parks need visitors' support to ensure their existence, especially in developing countries where there is a lack of government funding and international support. The dependency of locals in developing countries on the resources in and around the parks also makes it crucial for national park managers to think about the sustainability of the area. However, studies that investigate tourism development in national parks from visitors' perspectives tend to focus only on the environmental sustainability of the sites and omit visitors' role in its economic sustainability. There are also only a few studies on the visitors' perspectives of national parks that take place in non-Western settings. Since there is a perceived difference in how Western and Eastern worlds treat and maintain national parks, it seems important to look at this case from the perspective of the developing world.

Enhancing the quality of visitors' experiences is essential in order to maximise the park's potential, competitiveness and sustainability. Thus, this current study will try to understand visitors' experiences by looking at the motivations, expectations, and satisfactions, as well as understanding the benefits that visitors gain from their experiences by using the ASEB Grid Analysis. The ASEG Grid Analysis is derived from the conventional SWOT Analysis and uses psychological criteria of visitors' behaviour as captured by the 'hierarchy of demand', which stresses that their behaviour is influenced by the desire to gain particular goals, and reach

high satisfactions by gaining benefits from their experiences when in outdoor recreation or tourism settings.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will describe the chosen methodology and methods along with discussing their suitability for the research aim and answering the research objectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the data, with photos collected from the respondents to add more context to the experiences they gained in KNP.

### **3.1 Research paradigm**

This research study applies interpretivism as the research paradigm and adopts a subjective epistemology. A paradigm is “the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed” (Kuhn, 1962, p. 45). According to Veal (2018), this paradigm is included as one of the most dominant paradigms in current tourism research, along with positivist, post-positivist, and critical paradigms. This study adopts an interpretative paradigm that is looking at the problems of the social world as a subject. This paradigm seeks to understand the world through the subjective experiences of each individual, and it is designed to “seek understanding and meaning” (Tribe, 2001, p. 13) rather than gaining understanding from measuring objective evidence, like in positivism.

Epistemology means the relationship between the researcher, the phenomenon being studied, and the methodology used in the study (Gray, 2013). The epistemology adopted in this study is subjective, which can be considered the most appropriate in this context, as it regards each experience as unique (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Within an interpretivist framework, the best way to understand visitors’ personal expectations, motivations, satisfactions, experiences, and benefits of their experiences is to let the respondents provide their own explanation about their behaviour (Veal, 2018). This notion is further supported by Jennings (2010), who stated that the interpretivist paradigm is the most appropriate for a study of travel experiences because it provides access to understanding the emotional context of actions and experiences. Considering that interpretative studies are subjective by nature (Veal, 2018), a subjective epistemology is also adopted. This research study is concerned with what people think and feel about their experiences in KNP and a subjective epistemology inherently acknowledges that every experience is different and based on

people's own perceptions and reflections; in other words, a subjective epistemology anticipates diverse explanations and interpretations (Oppenheim, 1992).

### **3.2 The rationale of qualitative research**

Historically, tourism research relied predominantly on quantitative methods, while many studies about tourism in conservation areas and national parks have adopted an empirical approach (Jennings, 2010; Kgote & Kotze, 2013; Qiu, Zhang, Zhang, & Zheng, 2018; Thapa, 2013). However, in the current research study, a qualitative methodology is applied because the aim is to capture respondents' points of view and the personal meaning of their tourism experiences (Silverman, 2013; Thanh & Thanh, 2015), and not to collect facts and statistics (Beeho & Prentice, 1997; Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000). Thus, to successfully gain knowledge from the study, the qualitative methodology is deemed appropriate.

Methodology refers to "the way by which knowledge and understanding are established through the research" (Veal, 2018, p. 19). Qualitative methodology tools associated with an interpretivist paradigm and subjective epistemology are adopted. These methodological tools include semi-structured interviews, which are used to uncover respondents' perspectives in their tourism experiences in national parks. This type of interview is considered appropriate in interpretivist research, since semi-structured interviews create a more fluid discussion between the researcher and respondent (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012). This type of interview is primarily deductive, as it relies on a well thought out but flexible interview schedule, that was developed based on other similar studies as well as existing theories and phenomena (Blackstone, 2012; Hillman & Radel, 2018), but still allows respondents to reveal their own subjective recounts.

The data from the semi-structured interviews was further supplemented by the collection of respondents' favourite holiday photographs taken during their time at KNP. The photographs were expected to add more context to their emotion and perception of their tourism experiences. J. Berger and Mohr (1982) claimed that photographs can be considered to be another form of reality and another way to tell stories (Albers & James, 1988). In the current study, photos were deemed important to support the results of semi-structured interviews by enhancing insights into the subjectivities of tourists' experiences.

### **3.3 The rationale for semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured exploratory interviews are the primary data collection method used in the current research study. The semi-structured interview is an interview technique where the interviewer has prepared a list of topics and themes, but is flexible in modifying and sequencing them depending on the flow of conversation and direction of discussion with each respondent. Semi-structured interviews are recommended as a tool for studies that seek to explore respondents' subjective points of view (Altinay, Paraskevas, & Jang, 2016; Jennings, 2005). This type of interview is usually used in situations where the information is expected to tell a 'story' of each individual, and the unique nature of each respondents' story is the focus rather than the collection of data to generate percentages (Veal, 2018). Semi-structured interviews have previously also been used in studies which explore visitors' experiences and benefits gained at tourism sites using the ASEB Grid Analysis e.g. in Beeho and Prentice (1996), Prentice et al. (1998), and Schänzel and McIntosh (2000).

The current study is exploratory because it offers new insights into visitors' experiences in a national park in the Asian region, more specifically, in Indonesia. The interview schedule includes questions guided by the principle of laddering. According to Saaka, Sidon, and Blake (2004), laddering is a common technique used in marketing research that investigates customers' purchasing behaviour. This technique encourages respondents to talk about certain products, thereby revealing their attitudes and evaluations of it. The questions in laddering interviews reveal a person's true feelings and values about a product with focused questioning (Veal, 2018). In the current study, the application of interviews using the laddering technique can uncover respondents' underlying feelings about the value of tourism products and services in KNP through a prompted question approach – that is, what the experiences they gained mean to them (Jeng & Yeh, 2016; Veal, 2018). This technique involves asking a series of directed probes in the form of "why is it important to you?", which aims at making respondents think critically about the connection between a product's attributes and their own emotive agenda (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).

### **3.4 Semi-structured interviews**

The set of interview questions (See Appendix B for Interview guide), including both semi-structured and open-ended questions, are based on the interview schedule adapted from previous studies of visitors' experiences in museums and wildlife viewing by Beeho and Prentice (1996), and Schänzel and McIntosh (2000). The open-ended questions are designed to elicit data suitable for a qualitative analysis using ASEB Grid Analysis. The closed-ended questions and lists of variables were adapted from previous ASEB studies by Beeho and Prentice (1995, 1996, 1997). The lists of response variables in the closed-ended questions were derived from the literature review, discussion with a local operator, and personal observations.

The questions designed to discover the main thesis aim, which is an insight into on-site experiences gained by the visitors, are covered in questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 12. Questions 9 and 1 aim to establish the benefits gained by the visitors when they visited KNP. Questions about expectations are covered in 1, 2 and 11. Some questions cover multiple research questions, for instance, in order to identify visitors' motivations to visit KNP, respondents were asked questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 11. Questions 2, 3 and 13 covered satisfaction. Question 14 provided an opportunity to the respondents to speak about any other comments about their experiences in KNP they may have that have not yet been covered in the interview.

The answers were handwritten in the researcher's notebook in the form of field notes for each question. The researcher confirmed the main points of each answer and the accuracy of important statements with respondents to ensure that the data were accurate and reflect their narrative. In this research, an audio-taped interview was deemed to be impractical and uncomfortable for the respondents because the interviews took place at the harbour where there was a lot of background noise, making it impossible to collect good quality recordings. The researcher was worried that the noise would create missing or doubtful words which could lead to a loss of important data during the transcribing process.

The interviews were held in January and February 2019 in Labuan Bajo, by the exit gate of KNP. The data gathering time schedule was limited by timing and funding constraints for

accommodation. Each session lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. Bardon and Harding (1981) pointed out that one of the most useful attributes to on-site data collection is that the researchers are able to collect visitors' perceptions, attitudes, preferences, and behaviours. Respondents provide particular answers based on their own knowledge and reaction to the activity that they have consumed as experiences (Morgan, Lugosi, & Ritchie, 2010). In this current study, the data was collected on site right after the experiences have happened to ensure an immediate and pertinent real-time reflective answer. Interviews were conducted at different times of the day in the most comfortable place around the area to get as many diverse tour groups as possible.

### **3.5 Photo elicitation**

At the end of each interview, respondents were asked to send their three favourite photos taken during their trip to KNP and to briefly explain why the photo(s) mean so much to them by writing a small caption for each picture. The researcher handed over a card containing instructions on how to send photos along with a brief explanation of why the photo(s) mean so much to them. The purpose of this photo elicitation approach is to let the respondents "explain the photographs and identify what and why they took the photographs, a view which could be misinterpreted by analysing the images alone" (Zainuddin, 2010, pp. 10-11).

The researcher did not give them an exact time frame but requested for the photos to be sent before respondents departed Labuan Bajo. Any photos that the researcher received before the end of the analysis process were included in the analysis. The photo collection method is considered important because, as Burns and Lester (2005) argued, qualitative methods in tourism research should add more visual evidence because it adds potential value to the data collected.

The purpose of this photo collection is to support the analysis and add more personal meaning to respondents' narratives because a visual image can have a re-constructive role through which a person relives the experiences via memories and vacation souvenirs (Jenkins, 1999). Moreover, photos can encourage respondents to be reflective; photos provide insight into how visitors' experiences are visualised (Cederholm, 2012; Jennings, 2010; Scarles, 2012).

The photographs and captions were used to complement the interview data on what kind of activities or settings were perceived to be memorable on their leisure experiences. A study by Matteucci (2013) used a photo elicitation method with the researcher found-images were useful as a tool to dig deeper into visitors' experiences of intangible heritage in Spain. Another study of visitors' behaviour that used photographs produced by respondents is the study of Vu, Li, Law, and Ye (2015), which analysed geotagged photos in social media produced by international visitors. The study of Stylianou-Lambert (2012) revealed that personal photographs produced by visitors have highly personal meanings that are shaped by larger entities behind the individual, such as social-cultural construction, values, and other factors.

### **3.6 Data sampling**

#### 3.6.1 Semi-structured interview sample

This research employed a convenience sampling technique with on-site visitors in terms of selecting respondents. This sampling method is used by researchers who need easy access to respondents; for this approach, respondents are selected based on their proximity to the researcher (Jennings, 2010). In this case, the author selected respondents on a next-to-pass basis. This refers to the data gathering technique that as soon as the researcher finished interviewing one respondent, she requested the next person to pass to take part in the study (Booth, 1988). That is, the researcher was waiting by the park main exit gate to recruit and interview any visitors that walked by. Moreover, if the next person to pass was a group of people, then the researcher would select the person to have the next birthday as the respondent (Salmon & Nichols, 1983). This method is consistent with previous studies about visitor experiences using ASEB Grid Analysis (Beeho & Prentice, 1996; Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000). This approach further minimised interview sampling bias on selecting respondents as it precluded visitors from the same group to participate. Table 2 presents the data of interviewees' characteristics.

*Table 2: Interviewees characteristics*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education level	Travelling companion

<b>Interviewee 1</b>	27	Female	British	Bachelor's degree	Friend
<b>Interviewee 2</b>	26	Female	British	Bachelor's degree	Friend
<b>Interviewee 3</b>	62	Male	USA	Bachelor's degree	Friend
<b>Interviewee 4</b>	28	Male	German	Bachelor's degree	Solo
<b>Interviewee 5</b>	28	Female	Dutch	Postgraduate	Solo
<b>Interviewee 6</b>	33	Male	USA	Postgraduate	Family
<b>Interviewee 7</b>	33	Female	USA	Bachelor's degree	Solo
<b>Interviewee 8</b>	26	Male	Austrian	Secondary school	Solo
<b>Interviewee 9</b>	41	Male	Dutch	Secondary school	Solo
<b>Interviewee 10</b>	45	Female	French	Secondary school	Family
<b>Interviewee 11</b>	43	Male	British	Secondary school	Solo
<b>Interviewee 12</b>	24	Male	USA	Diploma	Family
<b>Interviewee 13</b>	44	Female	Australian	Bachelor's degree	Family
<b>Interviewee 14</b>	45	Male	Australian	Secondary school	Family
<b>Interviewee 15</b>	22	Female	French	Bachelor's degree	Solo
<b>Interviewee 16</b>	73	Male	Dutch	Bachelor's degree	Solo
<b>Interviewee 17</b>	27	Male	USA	Bachelor's degree	Family
<b>Interviewee 18</b>	32	Female	Chinese	Diploma	Family
<b>Interviewee 19</b>	22	Male	Dutch	Bachelor's degree	Solo
<b>Interviewee 20</b>	23	Female	USA	Bachelor's degree	Solo
<b>Interviewee 21</b>	23	Male	Canadian	Bachelor's degree	Friend
<b>Interviewee 22</b>	21	Male	Swiss	Diploma	Solo
<b>Interviewee 23</b>	20	Female	Canadian	Diploma	Friend
<b>Interviewee 24</b>	30	Female	Australian	Secondary school	Friend
<b>Interviewee 25</b>	28	Female	Australian	Bachelor's degree	Friend
<b>Interviewee 26</b>	72	Female	Dutch	Bachelor's degree	Family
<b>Interviewee 27</b>	25	Female	USA	Bachelor's degree	Family
<b>Interviewee 28</b>	32	Male	Chinese	Bachelor's degree	Solo
<b>Interviewee 29</b>	24	Female	Dutch	Bachelor's degree	Solo
<b>Interviewee 30</b>	19	Female	Dutch	Diploma	Friend
<b>Interviewee 31</b>	21	Male	Australian	Bachelor's degree	Friend

Demographic data shows that the number of visitors to the national park is growing year by year, and international visitors are dominating the site (“Foreign Visitors to Komodo”, 2018). Given the profile of visitors to the national park, and to look for different views and experiences, only international visitors were sampled. For domestic visitors, considering that national parks are regarded as symbols of national identity (Frost & Hall, 2012a), the motivations to visit a national park in their own home country tend to be similar, which is to “reinforce their national pride and devotion” (p.64). Therefore, their experiences can be distinctive and did not fit the aim of this thesis research. The experiences of international visitors is considered different. Another selection criterion is that the respondents should be aged 18 and above, according to the AUT Ethics Committee, 18 is the age where respondents

can provide informed consent. Due to the researcher's language repertoire, the selected respondents had to be international visitors who are able to speak English.

The reason why the exit gate was the preferred location for data sampling was because the city of Labuan Bajo is treated as the "buffer zone" according to Tourism Authority (2018). This means visitors may visit the city only to enter the islands of KNP before they move to another destination in Indonesia. Furthermore, the most popular option for a visitor who visits KNP is the live-aboard boat programme, rather than stop in Labuan Bajo and stay on the land ("Choosing staying in a hotel", 2018). The live aboard programme is available for scuba divers and non-scuba divers who only want to have experiences living on the boat for a few days. Therefore, the researcher aimed to include the live-on-board visitors within the sample.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 31 international visitors to KNP. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) argued that a small-sized sample is best for qualitative methods, because the main aim of the interview is to "generate data which give an authentic insight into people's experiences" (Silverman, 2015, p. 173) rather than establishing objective facts and patterns (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). The researcher aimed to collect a similar sample size to other studies that have used ASEB Grid Analysis, which tend to be based on around 40 semi-structured interviews (Beeho & Prentice, 1996; Schänzel & McIntosh, 2000). In qualitative research, there is no rule for how many interviews are required; however, the samples size should represent the information needed to answer the research questions with confidence (Krippendorff, 2004; Patton, 2002).

### 3.6.2 Photo collection sample

At the end of the interview, respondents were asked to send their three favourite pictures with captions to the researcher. Only 28 respondents agreed to send the photographs. Then, only ten respondents contacted the researcher to send their photographs. Most of the respondents sent three photos, but some of them sent only one or two photographs. In total, 28 photographs were collected. Seven of them were sent with captions, five of them had titles that the researcher treated as captions, and the rest were photographs only. However, only 26 photographs were used in the analysis since two photographs were taken outside the KNP area.

### 3.7 Data analysis

The interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The definition of qualitative content analysis is “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). In this analysis, the presentation of the data are in words and themes (Bengtsson, 2016). It focuses on the manifest content which is based on respondents’ narratives (Robson, 1993).

For a better understanding of the analysis, it is important to understand how it differs from its quantitative counterpart. According to Weber (2001), a quantitative content analysis only focuses on counting textual elements. Qualitative content analysis, on the other hand, focusses on the underlying meaning of the text by examining the semantic and syntactic information in the text. Moreover, since it derived from social sciences such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology, qualitative content analysis tries to look at the phenomenon behind the text rather than focusing only on the textual element. Thus, the analysis is particularly useful in shaping respondents’ statements about their experiences into meaningful and reflective data.

This study applied the analysis process using the steps proposed by Robson (1993):

1. *Preparing the data.* At the beginning of the process, the researcher needs to make sure that all data from the interviews are well organised. In this process, the researcher reviews and re-writes the field notes into neat interview documentation. Each interview document is assigned a number and pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of respondents. Preparing the data also involves the researcher getting to know the data. Since the interview data in the current study is based on the researchers’ own notes, the familiarisation of the data was relatively easy. This process aims to immerse researchers in the data and allow researchers to undertake a preliminary analysis during the reading process.
2. *Assigning unit of analysis.* The next step in the analysis process is defining the units of analysis, which consists of a meaningful line or several lines from the interview documents. After all units of analysis are identified, the researcher gives codes to each

of the meaningful lines, and puts them into similar categories. Before moving to the next step, the researcher re-checks the data to make sure that all aspects from the interviews that are relevant to addressing the research aim have been covered.

3. *Categorization.* In this step, the researcher breaks-down the identified categories, and puts them into the pre-determined topics and guidelines of the ASEB Grid Analysis (Beeho & Prentice, 1995, 1996, 1997).
4. *Applying analysis techniques.* ASEB Grid Analysis was applied to highlight the national park's physical characteristics and activities that form the basis of respondents' experiences, and the personal benefits and experiences most enjoyed by visitors (Beeho & Prentice, 1997). The application of the categories into ASEB Grid Analysis can be found in Table 3.

### 3.7.1 Photo analysis

For the photographs, 28 photos were received from ten respondents, and only 26 photographs were used. Content analysis was applied in analysing the data, using the same process as outlined above. This type of analysis usually goes with text data, but it can also be applied to images (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Krippendorff, 2004). Content analysis can filter the variety and uniformity in a vast and diverse set of visual data (Albers & James, 1988; Rose, 2007; Stylianou-Lambert, 2012). However, text descriptions of the photos are still needed before starting the analysis process; to generate coding from an image which stands by itself is challenging (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). Therefore, the researcher wrote a descriptive paragraph about what can be seen on the photos, guided by the caption sent by the respondents.

The photo analysis followed similar steps to the interview data. The researcher made a table that consisted of the photos, a description of the photos provided by the researcher, and the captions provided by respondents about what happens in the photos or what they feel about the photos. The captions were also used as the content to ensure that the description of the photo made by the researcher is based on respondents' real intention in describing the experiences. In other words, the descriptions consist of a reflection of the researcher's interpretation and the captions. This can be regarded as the researcher's guide to understand the underlying meaning of the photos. These descriptions and captions were used for

establishing coding and identified the categories. Furthermore, similar to the analysis of the interview data, the researcher then divided these themes according to the ASEB categories into the examination of visitors' experiences in the following categories: activities, settings, experiences, and benefits gained by the visitors. The analysis of the photo data can be found in the Findings chapter (section 4.5).

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

The research was reviewed and approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (See Appendix D for a copy of the ethics application and approval). Participation in the study was voluntary, and the researcher was always asking respondents' permission to include them as a sample before the data collection began. First, they were given the Information sheet containing brief information about the research, which also highlights that their participation is voluntary and informed. Other important points mentioned in the Information sheet are the researcher's and supervisors' names and work contacts (AUT email address and phone number) to allow respondents to make contact in the future should they have any concerns. After that, respondents gave their consent to participate by signing the Consent form (see Appendix A for the copies of Information Sheet and Appendix C for Consent Form).

At the end of the interview, the researcher gave each respondent a card containing brief instructions for sending photos to the researcher's AUT email address, asking respondents to send her their three favourite photos taken during their trip to KNP and briefly explain why the photo(s) are their favourites. Respondents were assured that photos will only be used as part of the analysis process and will not be published in any form given the confidentiality could not be assured (see Appendix for a copy of Ethics Application). Interviews were held in a public area that was a safe, comfortable, and appropriate place to talk.

Data of all respondents were treated as confidential. No personal information such as name and address were collected. All research data gathered from respondents can be accessed only by the researcher and supervisors. The written information was digitally copied, and the original paper copies were destroyed after the analysis stage was finished. Electronic copies

are kept in a password protected computer and a USB stick stored in a locked storage room in a postgraduate room at the School of Hospitality and Tourism, AUT.

### **3.9 Trustworthiness of the research**

Creswell (2007) argued that the need for validation of qualitative research was established to facilitate positivists to accept “qualitative research in a quantitative world” (p. 202). To address this issue, the current research adopted the trustworthiness approach suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to establish the validity of the qualitative analysis.

As suggested by Shenton (2004), to ensure the research is credible, a well-establish qualitative research method is adopted. This is to make sure that every step in the procedure were accurate and relevant for the research aim. The current research adopts the ASEB Grid Analysis method that was used in previous studies on visitor experiences. Moreover, the current research adopts a multi-methods approach to enhance the validity of the research by using semi-structured interviews supported by the photo-collection method. Brewer and Hunter (1989) believed that using more than one method can generate better assessment in data measurement and analysis.

Furthermore, Shenton (2004) also mentioned the importance of preparing interview strategies to get honest answers from respondents. In this current research, the researcher tried to establish rapport before the interview began and told respondents that their names would not be used. Therefore, the respondents could feel comfortable to talk about their experiences in KNP. It is important to ensure confidentiality, not only to keep respondents' privacy, but also to make sure that their statements will never be used against them. By assuring them of complete privacy, respondents are encouraged to be honest in answering the interview questions.

Another thing to be noted is the importance of proving the transferability, which means that the research findings are applicable to other research or applicable to a real-life phenomenon. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that qualitative researchers explain the background to the context of the study to the readers and explicitly discuss the significance of the study and what it will contribute to the phenomenon under investigation. This research has stated the

importance of examining tourism development from the visitors' perspective and the reason why KNP was chosen as a case study.

### **3.10 Limitations of the study**

The main limitation of this current study is that the generalizability of the findings is limited. This study is only meant to explore one topic area, KNP Indonesia. However, the data collection and analysis methods are adapted from previous study designs focusing on evaluation of visitors' experiences, and case studies are valuable for shedding new insights into areas and contexts that have been previously unexplored, such as in KNP, Indonesia.

Furthermore, the data collection was conducted between January and February 2019. This period coincides with the low season of the year in KNP. The high season usually occurs in March (Kantor Balai Taman Nasional Komodo, 2019). Based on the researcher's observation, the weather is unpredictable, as heavy rain one week can be followed by clear blue sky the next day. Weather and crowd numbers in the area are likely to impact the experiences of the visitors. This may cause a potential bias in term of their level of respondents' satisfaction because weather plays an important part in the overall experiences of outdoor activities (M. Martín, 2005). In addition to that, the low season means there is not as many people around visiting the area. This may influence visitors' satisfaction and influence visitors' assessment to the overall quality of their experiences (Manning et al., 1995). However, since the aim of this current study is to look visitors experience beyond attention to crowding perception, the researcher is confident that she managed to get enough quality interviews, although interviewing in both the high and low seasons would have been ideal.

### **3.11 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter explains the methodology the researcher used for the study. It begins with an explanation of the philosophical standpoint of the research, which adopts an interpretivist paradigm and a subjective epistemology. Thereafter, an explanation of why semi-structured in-depth interviews and the photo methods were chosen is provided, together with an explanation of how the methods and analysis can help justify the aim and objectives of this research. The chapter continues with the illustration of the analytical method adopted for

this study. Ethical considerations of this research are also described. Finally, the last part of this chapter discusses the trustworthiness and limitations of the research approach.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents findings and discussion of the analysis of the visitors' experiences regarding the motivations, expectations, satisfactions, and the benefits they gained from their experiences in KNP as a nature-based tourism destination in a conservation area. Strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats of the activities, settings, experiences, and benefits are evaluated from the visitors' perspectives based on semi-structured interviews that were described using ASEB Grid. A content analysis of the photo elicitation data is also presented to support the interview findings of the overall experiences in KNP.

### **4.1 Overall findings**

The findings of the ASEB Grid Analysis revealed that visitors have high satisfaction with their overall experiences. KNP offers a wide range of activities, including land and marine wildlife encounters, and educational activities. However, it emerged from the interviews that visitors' experiences of the educational activities are not optimal. Visitors have a higher expectation of educational activities than what was offered inside the park. This finding is significant because management can consider this weakness as an opportunity to develop a tourism framework that implements variations in existing and future educational activities run at KNP. It emerged from the data that the main threat to the activities in KNP is that activities depend too much on the weather conditions. This finding is consistent with the body of literature about nature-based tourism, which points out the vulnerability of nature-based tourism due to weather conditions (Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Smith, 1993).

With regard to the setting, the analysis revealed that the environmental setting is the main strength of KNP. The distinctive features of KNP are the unique natural environment of the national park, which consists of a pleasant panoramic scenery, Komodo dragon as the flagship animal, the wildlife, and the underwater biodiversity. However, a perceived waste problem was found to interfere with the strength of the aesthetic setting. Since the environmental setting is one of most central aspects of nature-based tourism experiences, management should take serious action to instigate a working waste management programme in order to maintain the provision of high-quality experiences. The examination of the respondents' comments on the aspects of the settings highlighted that there may be an opportunity for

tourism development in the city-hub/ buffer zone of KNP, Labuan Bajo. However, such a development should be considered carefully since, based on the examination of visitors' perspectives, visitors are worried that the danger of over-tourism could be haunting the site.

The examination of visitors' main motivation to visit is *escapism*. Respondents indicated that they visited KNP for the wilderness and animal encounter experiences (Komodo dragon and manta ray), to enjoy the general view, and experience nature. The analysis also found that visitors seek experiences that can bring them benefits through thoughtful and educational information. Tour guides play an important role in delivering this kind of experience. Furthermore, even though the experiences happened in a nature-based destination, visitors' comments also suggested that they appreciated the experiences of a new culture.

From the analysis of visitors' interviews, it emerged that visitors gained both immediate benefits and perceived longer lasting benefits from their experiences in KNP. Immediate benefits include unforgettable memories, learning about new things, and rewarding feelings such as those caused by contributing to conservation or the local economy. The potentially longer term benefits include the spiritual feelings of connection to the nature that can result in visitors becoming more aware of the environment. This can include changing their everyday habits to become eco-friendlier. Comments also indicated that the experiences visitors engaged in allowed them to find their authentic selves by doing things they are interested in and experiencing each moment to the fullest. These feelings helped them improve their social skills and self-confidence.

The summary of the findings presented in Table 3 and the findings in each section of the Grid will be discussed below.

*Table 3: KNP tourism and conservation product development on the ASEB matrix*

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Settings</b>	<b>Experiences</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	Satisfy different needs of experiences; Offers educational activity; Offers both land and marine discovery activities; Wildlife encounter; Provide photographic opportunities; Word-of-mouth referrals; High satisfaction.	Environmental: A unique natural feature of pleasant scenery, flagship species, wildlife, and pristine underwater biodiversity; Conserve wildlife with little human intervention; Social: Local culture. Managerial: The rangers provided satisfying guided tour; Terrestrial conservation at work.	Unique wildlife experiences; Pleasurable and relaxing; Stimulate the awareness of conservation issues; Provides multiple experiences; Provides educational experiences; Provides an opportunity to self-actualisation; Sense of adventure; Exceeds expectation.	Provides a range of benefits; Facilitates unique way to learn about nature; Self-reflection stimulates responsible behaviour; Trigger positive behaviour towards environmental awareness; Mindfulness; Valuable experiences of contributing to conservation and local economy; Better social relationship; Trigger the growth of self-esteem.
<b>Weakness</b>	Satisfaction depends on the weather condition, Lack of variation on the educational activity	Poor waste management; Crammed tour schedule; Lack of safety procedures in the tour boat; Komodo interaction looks staged; Limited place to explore; Not enough information about the conservation; Existing facilities do not accommodate people who speak others than English and Indonesian;	Exploration in the educational experiences is not optimal; Less local culture involvement; No standard in tour operator service.	Not necessarily bringing up practical information about helping environmental preservation; Different benefit gained caused by the operational standard for tour operators.

<b>Opportunities</b>	Campaign to support on the conservation effort involving visitors, Encourage tourism development in base city (Labuan Bajo)	Tourism development in Labuan Bajo as city hub; improvement in the operation of the information centred; Build a museum; Language training for tour guide (Mandarin)	Make use of technology to create better educational experiences; Encourage local community involvement;	Management planning and policy that encourages educational tour and visitors' involvement in nature preservation; Providing tourism infrastructure that is suitable for all ages.
<b>Threats</b>	Weather condition; Overcrowding; Exploitation to nature and animal.	Over-tourism; Environmental damage from hiking trails; Climate change;	The experiences gained loses its authenticity because it looks staged;	Some international visitors who did not speak Bahasa Indonesia & English, the language barrier, may delay visitors to gain benefits.

## 4.2 Activities

As stated in Chapter 2, according to the Manning-Haas' (1999) hierarchy of demand, *Activities* refer to the actual demand of tourism activities in the destination. This section reviews the demand from respondents in visiting KNP by outlining what activities they did in KNP, their motivations, and perceived satisfaction gained from the activities undertaken. In the discussion of the findings below, *Strengths activities* (SA) refers to the positive aspects of the destination, which could be unique, and help distinguish KNP from its competitors. These aspects could be a motivation why visitors want to visit and can also trigger re-visit intentions. *Weaknesses Activities* (WA) refers to aspects of the activities in KNP that are missing. It also includes what the visitors really want to do at the destination that management might not be aware of. *Opportunities Activities* (OA) captures the examination of the potential non-existing activities that visitors can undertake at the site that will have positive impacts on visitors' experiences. Lastly, *Threats Activities* (TA) discusses those aspects that negatively affect visitors' activities in KNP. The discussion of TA is followed by suggestions for strategies to overcome the identified threats.

#### 4.2.1 Strengths (SA)

Respondents reported high satisfaction with their visit at the national park. All of the 31 respondents gave a positive response to the question, “Did you enjoy your visit to KNP today?” All of them enjoyed the national park despite the negative experiences they may have encountered. Most of them stated that the activities they engaged in inside KNP were *memorable* and *amazing*. Respondents commented that what made their experiences positive was because they were able to undertake various kinds of activities during a single visit. The activities include hiking through impressive natural scenery, Komodo dragon viewing, wildlife encounters, terrestrial and marine animal watching, to marine activities such as snorkelling or diving. The site offers a wide range of discovery experiences because it can be explored both by land and sea.

Moreover, the analysis suggested that it was the elements of surprise that resulted in respondents commenting that their experiences towards activities in KNP were above expectation. From the unprompted answers, several respondents said that their impression of the range of activities inside the national park was above what they had expected. The unexpected happened mostly underwater. Some respondents did not expect any other activities to be more thrilling than the Komodo dragon encounter. When probed further, the respondents were obviously non-scuba divers, and their ideas of the leisure activities on offer in KNP that they knew about from the media were activities that were mostly focused on terrestrial activities, such as hiking and Komodo dragon viewing. In fact, these respondents commented that they had more fun when the tour brought them to the snorkelling site than during the terrestrial activities such as hiking and watching the Komodo dragon. During their marine activities they encountered underwater wildlife that they never expected to see before. The satisfaction derived from the underwater activities came from the element of surprise, which is in line with Vanhamme's (2000) finding that surprises can influence customers' satisfaction levels.

When asked to reflect on their experiences in KNP, all respondents expressed that they learned about the history of the Komodo dragon and animal behaviour from the rangers at Komodo and Rinca Island. However, only 15 of 31 respondents expressed that they learned about a different part of the KNP's natural environment. When probed further, 15

participants stated that they learned about the behaviour of different animals such as manta rays, dolphins, and birds and nine respondents said that they received brief information about conservation projects at KNP, all from their tour guides.

In response to the question about their main motivation to visit KNP, almost half of the respondents (14 out of 31 respondents) stated that their primary motivation to visit KNP was for diving. When probed further, two respondents mentioned that even if there were no flagship species (Komodo dragon) in the area, the national park would still be worth a visit mainly for the underwater exploration of the pristine coral reefs and marine environment. Different responses to this question included a desire for a close up viewing opportunity with Komodo dragons in their natural habitat and comments suggesting that the respondents merely thought KNP was interesting to visit during their trip in Indonesia and not because they planned to engage in a specific activity on offer.

Respondents' accounts of their experiences suggested that a lot of satisfaction was derived from how visitors encountered animals in their natural habitats after walking, hiking, or diving in a wild and untouched area that could be dangerous for humans. This seems related to the pull factors, which were to see extraordinary things that were different from their everyday life. In relation to this statement, 17 respondents confirmed that the close-up viewing opportunity of wildlife animals and other activities that they did in the wilderness focused on the chance to take pictures. Taking photographs of the wilderness is a push factor for the activity, with the aim to show and keep the memories of unique things they saw and did at KNP, that is different from their everyday activities. All of the respondents explained that capturing memories is important, and when probed further, some of them (11 of 31) mentioned that they would or may be upload and share the photos to social media.

The advancement of internet technology has changed the way people treat photos as a way to collect memories of their leisure activity. Photos are no longer an "aide-mémoire" facilitator to human memory (Bate, 2010), but now it is also a tool to prove existential and personal authenticity. After being asked about why social media sharing of their activities at KNP was important, respondents answered that it was for fun, and to inform their friends about their well-being. The social media that respondents were going to use for photo sharing are Instagram, Facebook, or Sina Weibo (the biggest social media website in China). Two

respondents took videos that they planned to share on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Sharing photos of experiences on social media has become a push factor to travel for postmodern people as the technology has become more advanced and a new way to communicate via social networking is developing (Liu, Wu, & Li, 2019). An increasing number of people share photos on social media (Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011) with the intention to prove their existence by digital immediacy that communicates “I am here, right now, having this experience in real time, and here is the evidence that this is the case” (C. Bell & Lyall, 2005, p. 136). In the research, it was therefore surprising to find that only a few respondents indicated sharing their photos of KNP on social media, although further research is needed to build on the findings made in this research.

When probed further about their motivations to visit KNP, 11 respondents answered that the recommendations of friends or family influenced their decision to visit, and three respondents indicated that they were influenced by recommendations from Lonely Planet. According to Vogt and Stewart (1998), visitors go through different stages of travel decision making by collecting ideas from various sources of information, and Word-of-Mouth (WOM) marketing has been identified an important source during this travel decision process (Bieger & Laesser, 2004; Murphy, Mascardo, & Benckendorff, 2007).

Another reason given to the question of what caused the high satisfaction with KNP was the variety of activities on offer inside the national park. The activities that respondents' highlighted were marine-based activities such as scuba diving and snorkelling, land outdoor activities such as trekking and wildlife watching on Komodo island, hiking the hill on Padar Island, hanging out at the beach restaurant on Kanawa Island, and relaxing on the beach.

When the respondents were asked if they would recommend KNP to friends and relatives, an overwhelming majority, 30 out of 31, commented that they would recommend KNP to friends or relatives whenever they are visiting Indonesia. The reasons given included the beautiful setting of the park, that KNP is off the beaten tracks, and that it is less touristy compared to other nearby famous travel destinations in Indonesia, such as Bali or Gilis in Lombok. One respondent specifically said that they would only recommend the national park to like-minded friends or relatives who are environmentally responsible individuals. This respondent believed that visitors with a high understanding of environmental awareness should be the

primary market for KNP to keep the balance between economic and conservation benefit. For the park, having a recommendation from visitors means they can successfully apply the Word of Mouth (WOM) marketing. WOM is considered to be one of the most valuable tourism marketing strategies because nowadays people tend to trust the information from real people, especially people they know well. In contrast to information provided through advertising, which usually focuses on the positives but hides the negatives, the opinions of friends and family appear to be genuine and balanced reviews. A study about WOM marketing in decision-making by Nielsen (2012) found that 92% of customers are more confident in friends' and relatives' recommendation of a product rather than its advertising. The significance of WOM for tourism destinations comes from the intangible nature of tourism products that are based on experiences and services. A review from a person, with pictures and comments from real-life moments, are regarded as more valuable for customers and proved to help enhancing brand equity (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

#### 4.2.2 Weakness (WA)

In terms of weaknesses of the activities at KNP, one respondent had an issue with the wildlife viewing from the boat, commenting that too many people were on the boat, and that some people were blocking his view. Also, some respondents revealed that there are not many choices of educational activities that they can do around the park, whether it is inside or outside the area of the park. All respondents mentioned that a ranger inside KNP gave them some brief information about the Komodo dragon. However, only 15 indicated that they gained additional knowledge about another part of the natural world that can be found in the park. Fifteen respondents stated that their tour guide gave them information about other animals, such as manta rays, dolphins, and birds; and nine out of 15 commented that the tour also gave them information about conservation. However, respondents considered the information given inadequate and presented in a very casual style compared to the detailed information about Komodo dragons delivered by the rangers. One respondent also reported that the rangers did not provide further information on any animal other than the Komodo dragon, which he found disappointing since he expected to learn new things about native plants or another native animal, they might encounter during their hiking activities with the rangers.

When the researcher probed further about respondents' conservation knowledge, 19 respondents admitted that they did not hear or see any related information regarding the conservation agenda during their journey. Only 11 respondents believed that their tour guide provided some brief information about how to be responsible visitors in the ocean, and about their conservation campaign. The rest (one respondent) were not sure if they received this information. The important thing to be noted are that there is a lack of written information, such as information boards or printed brochures, about the story of the Komodo dragon as well as other native flora and fauna in the park, and about the conservation campaigns around the park. The analysis of respondents' comments about the educational activities run by the Komodo Rangers highlights that, while park management has developed successful strategies to deliver educational activities about the Komodo dragon as the flagship animal, more educational activities that include information about another biodiversity inside the park, including the marine area, need to be encouraged to ultimately fulfil visitors' demand of learning in KNP. Staiff, Bushell, and Kennedy (2002) pointed out that nature-based tourism, especially in protected areas, provides an opportunity for on-site education. Therefore, park management would need to develop a programme of activities that encourages visitors to understand about benefits of protecting the natural environment.

#### 4.2.3 Opportunities (OA)

Although the park has numerous strengths to build on, there are some opportunities to enhance satisfaction that could relate to the original conservation focused purpose of the park. Even though 19 visitors found that the educational activities merely focus on the Komodo dragon, all of them expressed that they would be interested to know more about specific conservation related programmes that are run in KNP. Furthermore, 28 of 31 respondents indicated that they did not experience activities relating to an increase in conservation awareness after visiting KNP. This is in part due to the respondents' belief that they already have had a good understanding about environmental preservation but also because there is minimal information about conservation issues available in KNP. This issue can be tackled by fulfilling visitors' demands for educational activities about conservation issues. A research study about wildlife visitors in Mon Repos Conservation Park found that wildlife visitors have a high awareness of conservation related issues but are interested in

practical information about how they can be actively involved in conserving the nature (Ballantyne et al., 2009).

Park management and the government should consider catering to visitors' expectations of having access to conservation education input. One way to increase the provision of educational information on conservation to visitors would be by providing guided activities involving tour operators, who could provide conservation messages to visitors. A framework for an educational programme that is led by tour operators might be expensive. It will take great effort for management to provide the training and the materials, but it would likely be worth it and manageable. It would add value to visitor experiences and could also provide learning experiences about conservation education for local residents who depend on the tourism sector. Furthermore, educational activities inside the national park could have a positive impact on conservation. For instance, Higginbottom and Tribe (2019) discussed tourism's contribution to conservation and suggested that to educate visitors can be one of the ways to benefit conservation since visitors with a positive attitude towards wildlife could encourage political support and pressure and encourage voluntary donations to conservation efforts.

Another opportunity in this context would be for the city hub of KNP, Labuan Bajo, to further develop its ecotourism activity. A study by Maikhuri, Rana, Rao, Nautiyal, and Saxena (2000) found that ecotourism activities in buffer zone areas have the potential to provide job opportunities for local people, while at the same time helping the environmental preservation agenda. In this sense, this approach can provide a solution to enhance local people's welfare that is threatened by the conservation regulation, since they can no longer use the natural resources that were once essential for their livelihood. With this approach, the tourism activities will not only be focused on environmental sustainability, but also provide an economic benefit for local communities. Currently, there is lack of general infrastructure and tourism facilities in Labuan Bajo. Some respondents stated that there are not many activities on offer in Labuan Bajo during their transit time, before or after their visit to KNP. Initiatives that include educational activities, such as those discussed in previous paragraphs, could be built somewhere in this city, rather than solely inside the national park. This would be an excellent opportunity for visitors to learn more about the national park. Such an initiative would allow park management to maximise its financial benefit by providing more high-

quality tourism products, promote the conservation campaign of the national park, and create employment opportunities for the locals around the park. However, Maikhuri et al. (2000) suggested that prior to the encouragement of tourism development in the buffer zone, there should be a programme for stakeholders and guidelines for visitors aimed at keeping the biodiversity and local culture protected while earning from tourism at the same time.

#### 4.2.4 Threats (TA)

Weather was found to be the most significant threat to the activity aspect. Nature-based tourism depends so much on the weather conditions, and from this finding, it is clear that visitors' satisfaction levels depends on the weather conditions. Three respondents commented that they were disappointed because they were not able to see manta rays because of the strong current and low visibility in the ocean or mentioned that bad weather had led to seasickness so that the respondent could not fully enjoy the tour. One respondent also mentioned that the activity would be more interesting if the sky was clear instead of gloomy because it would look more beautiful in photos. Weather conditions are vital for many reasons, and can influence how enjoyable the experience is, especially for nature-based tourism attractions and activities (Becken, 2010). Some research suggests that there is a relationship between weather, climate, and outdoor activities that influenced the degree of satisfaction. Thus, a study by Coghlan and Prideaux (2009) at Great Barrier Reef Australia found that poor weather had a greater influence on visitor satisfaction than good weather. Smith (1993), who conducted research in Scotland, also noted that;

The relationship between the weather that a visitor expects (or hopes) to find at a holiday destination and the weather that is actually experienced can affect the level of tourist satisfaction and by implication the likelihood of a return visit. (p. 400)

In the interviews, only one respondent had an issue with overcrowding, which happened during an activity on a boat and influenced the respondents' marine animal watching enjoyment because some people were blocking his view. However, four out 31 of respondents were concerned about the increasing number of visitors and that the activities they do, such as hiking, diving, and snorkelling, might contribute to the damage to the environment. Environmental degradation has always been a problem caused by tourism in nature-based tourism attraction. The current study found that the crowding perception is

normal in KNP. However, based on data provided by National Park Management (2019), the number of visitors can increase up to 200% in peak season, from July to September. Therefore, the growing number of visitors must be addressed with caution because it can lead to negative consequences such as animal or environment exploitation.

Overcrowding is not only harmful because it would harm nature by resource over-exploitation; it can also impact visitor satisfaction as they are both related. Tourism research has presented evidence that perceptions of crowding in national parks needs to be well managed in order to generate high visitor satisfaction (see the works of Ryan and Cessford (2003) and Vaske, Donnelly, and Heberlein (1980)).

To mitigate these threats, park management could focus on the development of ecotourism to ensure the conservation agenda goes hand in hand with the economic agenda. The establishment of marketing promotions that target ecotourists as a primary market is also important and can involve, for example, the promotion of more environmentally friendly tourism activities and products or services. This plan needs support from all tourism stakeholders. Thus, there should be a strong relationship between all stakeholders of a park, including the government, park management, locals, and the business community, to manage protected areas.

Moreover, there should be a strategic action plan in handling overcrowding before it becomes an insurmountable problem. Developing new choices of ecotourism activities and expanding the operations into different spots or destinations can avoid the development of stress points which are dangerous for the sustainability of the area.

Another way that might help control overcrowding would be the introduction of a reservation system for visitors. From the revenue side, large numbers during peak season would be seen as a benefit for the management. However, in fact, it will create a more complex problem for both management and for the visitors. Visitors might have diminished experiences and lower satisfaction due to overcrowding. On the other side, park management will need an extra effort and funding for doing the environmental recovery programme caused by the overflowing human activities inside protected areas. Overtourism can also bring negative impacts to the locals by degrading local community empowerment (J. Martín, Martínez, &

Fernández, 2018). Sipadan Island in Sabah Park Malaysia, which has similar marine characteristics to KNP, has applied a reservation system called Sipadan quota permit since 2006. Only 120 visitors permits are issued daily for visitors who come for diving and snorkelling (Jeyacheya, Lee, & Hampton, 2017). The quota system is based on controlling the number of visitors through the tour operators and the resorts around the area. Each tour operator and resort are given several allocated permits for the divers to enter the area, for instance, Borneo Divers Resorts has 14 permits for 14 visitors, and other officially recognised resorts and tour operators have another 14 permits. The visitors are expected to stay at a resort or join a guided tour and pay these permits before their arrival to the parks. This model shows that the reservation system represents a potentially sustainable way to derive financial benefit from tourism (by paying the permit, staying at the resort, or joining the tour operator) that goes well with the conservation programme.

### 4.3 Settings

The theory of the hierarchy of demand by Manning-Haas (1999) acknowledges settings as the place where activities take place that can be described in regard to their environmental, social, and managerial features. This section discusses visitors' expectations and satisfaction levels regarding the settings of their leisure activities. *Strengths Settings* (SS) are those factors that are related to the settings of the leisure site that support visitors in getting a satisfying outcome. The category of *Weaknesses Settings* (WS) points out visitors' expectation of and satisfaction with the settings that the management failed to provide. *Opportunities Settings* (OS) refers to the external factors of the setting that management can use to develop further. *Threats Settings* (TS) describes the external factors of the settings which could have a negative impact on the overall visitors' experiences that are often uncontrollable by management.

#### 4.3.1 Strengths (SS)

The *environmental setting*, which refers to the natural feature of the national park, is apparently the main strength of KNP. While answering the question about the most satisfying and most enjoyable part of KNP, all the participants mentioned at least one distinctive natural feature of the park. Twenty-six respondents stated that they were amazed by the nature and enjoyed seeing wildlife in its natural environment. Several respondents expressed that they

enjoyed the environmental settings in KNP because the wildlife is still pristine with little human intervention. Several respondents described the natural features of the park as surreal, never seen before, and commented that it has a pristine marine environment.

Based on respondents' comments about the strength of the setting of KNP, the underwater and marine environment was deemed the most enjoyable feature of the park (19 from 31 respondents), followed by Komodo Island (16 from 31), Padar Island, and Rinca Island. Manta Point and Batu Bolong were mentioned as the most favourite places in the sea. This highlights that novelty is important for visitors. The manta ray is not only a rare sea creature and can only be found in tropical waters, it is also a deep-sea animal, but it sometimes comes to the surface to eat plankton. KNP is home to one of these common feeding spots at Manta Point. What makes Manta Point special is that people who want to snorkel have access to see Manta Point too, which makes it possible to swim with the manta rays, leading visitors to experience the feeling of novelty at this site. This finding may highlight the theory of biophilia as the main trigger and motivation for humans to engage in nature-based tourism. A theory developed by Wilson (1984) explains congenital human emotional affiliation to other living organisms. While visitors entered the ocean to observe animals living underwater, they insert themselves as active players, rather than only passively 'gazing,' which creates a feeling of connectedness with nature more than when watching the same fishes in an aquarium (Curtin, 2009). Thus, it is not a surprise that the underwater world on Komodo Island is considered to be the most satisfying setting in KNP.

Rare animals such as the Komodo dragon and manta rays also add to visitors' positive views of the setting. KNP is the only place where people can see dragons in their real habitat, and it is one of the few places in the world where people can dive and snorkel with manta rays. Thus, many respondents thought these characteristics made the setting of KNP *special* and *extraordinary*. Wildlife diversity is also one of the setting's strongest attributes. Besides Komodo dragons, respondents cited other notable terrestrial species they met on the tour such as deer and birds as well as ocean species such as sea turtles, manta rays, marine mammals such as dolphins, dugongs, several types of sharks (grey reef, whale shark, tiger shark) and other types of fishes. Moreover, respondents liked that the site was quiet with *not many people* around. Research into outdoor recreation has shown that satisfaction in this setting tends to be linked to the crowding perception factor (Ryan & Cessford, 2003).

However, in this case, the reason behind the lack of crowds might be because the data collection took place during off-peak travel season.

Respondents also seemed satisfied with the *social setting*. *Social setting* refers to the physical condition in a tourism destination where visitors are able to interact with other individuals, culture, or tourism stakeholders. In this study, 30 respondents had joined the public tour instead of a privately chartered boat. Six respondents mentioned their boat tours constituted an enjoyable part of their experiences. It emerged from the interviews that the boat crews, guides, and rangers, which are mostly local or people who have lived around the area long enough, also gave them a *new local culture experience*. From the visitors' perspectives, this social setting allowed them to actively interact with the destination attributes which can trigger experiences that flow from the setting, such as education and escapism (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). A study by Sangpikul (2018) about travel experiences in Phuket, Thailand, found that the environmental setting is not the only attribute that influences visitors' satisfaction and loyalty to the destination. Instead, they found that the interaction with local people and their hospitality is just as important. Furthermore, enabling local people to earn from tourism around the national park is not only good for visitors, it also engages locals as important stakeholders in the environmental preservation in the national park.

If local people secure a sustainable income (a tangible economic benefit) from tourism to these protected areas, they will be less likely to exploit them in other less sustainable ways – obvious examples include fuel collection, charcoal burning, over-fishing, poaching or coral blasting. If local people gain from the sustainable use of, for example, a coral reef or wild animals through tourism they will protect their asset and may invest further resources into it (Goodwin, 2002, p. 341)

Two respondents were also satisfied because of the relatively small number of people who joined the open trip for the tour boat. They commented that the diving trip was *adequate*, not too small and not too big, which allowed them to enjoy the tour without feeling packed but were able to interact with other new people at the same time. Schmidt (1979) stated that most tour groups limited the number because they realised how important it is for visitors to have informal in-group interaction, participation, intimacy, and extra attention.

The *managerial setting* refers to those features of the national park, including the infrastructure or park management system, that are built or 'staged' by the management to

create meaningful experiences. The managerial setting that respondents enjoyed were the guided tours on Komodo and Rinca Island by an official guide called a park ranger who provided information about the Komodo dragon and showed respondents around the islands. The aspects of this setting that the visitors liked included that the rangers were interactive and open to answer any questions that visitors had about the Komodo dragon. Respondents also noted that the park rangers' English skills were "unexpectedly good". After some further questioning, six of 31 respondents also mentioned that they appreciated how the guided trip by the rangers was included in the park entrance fee.

#### 4.3.2 Weakness (WS)

Even though all respondents generally expressed positive attitudes towards the settings of KNP, some issues were addressed in the interviews. Sixteen of 31 respondents believed that KNP needs better waste management. According to respondents, trash management was better on land rather than in the ocean. Twenty-eight respondents said that the land is overall clean. However, piles of trash were spotted many times in the ocean. Eight respondents specifically mentioned that they noticed a lack of marine conservation at KNP. Marine pollution at KNP consisted of plastic garbage and oil spills. A study by Taşeli (2007) proved that tourism development increases the number of waste in protected areas. However, in the case of KNP, it is essential to note that it is possible that the rubbish comes from the local people living on the islands since there are villages on Komodo Island, Rinca Island, Messah Island, and Papagarang Island, which are still in the area of KNP, that are home to around 6600 people (Adil, 2013). The locals might have a lack of understanding of sustainable development and conservation principles among KNP population, which may result in a lack of concern about waste management (Brandon & Wells, 1992; WCED, 1987). The factor that may influence their behaviour is that they have little education since they tend to live in poor conditions with very limited access to government services and no political power. Aside of that, the rubbish could also just come from the open sea.

Poor waste management is an issue for both the conservation agenda and tourism development at KNP as it interferes with environmental preservation goals and could lead to low visitor satisfaction. Plastic pollution poses a threat to marine biota that can cause underwater environment degradation (Derraik, 2002). According to one respondent,

considering that the distinguished marine environment is a critical aspect of KNP's appeal, visiting and re-visiting KNP would be no longer appealing if it was damaged. Therefore, park management could aim to ensure the park's cleanliness and maintenance to provide high-quality experiences for visitors (Fletcher & Fletcher, 2003).

Another point that emerged from the interviews with five respondents who joined the day trip was that there were some issues with timing in the guided boat tour schedule that can be described as *overflowing*. In this context, *overflowing* means that the visitors there taken to many different places but only had a little time to enjoy them. With the same length of duration, respondents wanted to 'spend more time in a few specific places' rather than visit many spots and always feel hurried. Three out of five respondents mentioned that they would like to spend more time walking around Komodo Island with rangers, the other respondents would have liked to spend more time swimming at Manta Point. The tour guides should consider offering several itineraries for visitors with specific destinations, characteristics, and activities to accommodate different motivations.

In addition to the dissatisfaction towards tour groups, the respondents mentioned the boat crews' and tour guide's *lack of knowledge about safety procedures*. Respondents demanded to get clear information about the safety procedures on the boat as the weather conditions were unpredictable, so extra safety precautions were expected. Tour boats should be required to provide boat safety information in order to protect the safety of everyone aboard.

With regard to the guided tours offered by rangers on Komodo and Rinca Island, three respondents described their interaction with Komodo dragons on Komodo island as unnatural and *staged*. Hiking around the island, respondents met the Komodo near the restaurant, which seemed unnatural, 'the dragon hangs out near the restaurant, looked like they used to be fed in that area and always waiting for food in there.' Respondents expected to see the Komodo in their original habitat in the jungle, instead of next to a restaurant. Tourism is constructed, presented, interpreted, and consumed as experiences and discourses, which means that all kind of tourism destinations have a certain degree of 'staging' (Urry, 1990), even in the most 'natural' destination (Markwell, 2001). In tourism, nature becomes a social and cultural construction that through its processes and practices involve the 'interventions of all kinds of producers" (Binkhorst & Van der Duim, 1995, p. 70), such as marketing

promotion materials, tour guides, management, and advertising. In KNP, other instances of this ‘staged’ nature that can be found include a ladder built on Padar Island to help visitors reach the top of the hills, paved walking trails, fences, and other infrastructure features. However, park management may need to reconsider the extent of the staging that can be done while maintaining a sense of ‘wilderness’ at the same time. KNP is pictured as a wilderness place full of adventure with wild animals, and this is what motivates visitors to visit the place. A restaurant, which is a symbol of modern civilisation, establishes a boundary between wilderness and visitors. In this case, the ‘staged’ concept takes place outside the wilderness context that visitors value the most from the setting aspects.

Three respondents commented about the *limited place to explore* at KNP. As discussed in the previous chapter about zoning in KNP, less than 30% of the area is open for exploration by visitors. When asked further, respondents did not know about the conservation zoning, which means that some areas are prohibited for any activity not related to research and conservation matters. However, some other respondents knew about this information from the tour operator they went with. This information disparity highlights that there was a different operation standard between the tour groups. Therefore, KNP management should strongly advise all tour groups to inform visitors about this zoning before the tour begins to avoid any negative experience about the limited exploration space.

Nineteen respondents expressed that they did not get information about any conservation project run at KNP. Respondents demanded the conservation agenda to be easily accessible, for instance in writing on information boards or brochures. Respondents expressed interest in information about on-going conservation projects and about where the money from entrance fee goes (i.e., “How many percentages from the income goes to conservation?”, and “How much the on-going conservation project costs”). A study by Lück (2003) also found that marine wildlife visitors demand interpretation and education programmes from their tours. To educate travellers about conservation work can encourage responsible behaviour during their travel times, which may then extend to their everyday life (Orams, 1997).

Other areas of dissatisfaction with the setting came from respondents from non-English speaking countries. Two respondents pointed out that the existing facilities and information did not accommodate people who speak languages other than English and Indonesian. The

inaccessibility of information can have negative impacts for this type of visitors as it prevents visitors from getting the benefit of tourism activities such as gaining new knowledge about biodiversity and conservation imperatives. This can lead to lower satisfaction levels because they got a lower quality experience compared to visitors whose languages are accessible at the park.

Overall, the settings are considered as successful. However, from the in-depth interviews, there are three points that need to be addressed in order to secure the long-term conservation agenda in KNP. These points are the sustainability of the physical environment, boat tour management, and information availability.

#### 4.3.3 Opportunities (OS)

There are many opportunities for the setting aspect that park management could develop. Management should consider the rehabilitation of the ecosystem inside the national park. The natural environment, which includes wilderness, biodiversity, and flagship animals, was the most satisfying aspect of the setting and an important motivation for visitors to travel to KNP. A study by Yoon and Uysal (2005) found that push and pull factors influence destination loyalty, which can lead to re-visit intentions. Moreover, the physical environment is considered to be the most important aspect for sustainable tourism development in KNP because the social and economic impacts depend so much on this aspect. To illustrate this statement, most respondents expressed that the pristine natural feature was the main motivation and one of the most influential aspects in their satisfaction, thus keeping the environment to be as good as visitors' expectation is the key to generate high-quality visitor experiences that lead to economic benefits for the park. Therefore, tourism authorities should contribute to conservation activities and collaborate with the conservation organisation of KNP if they want the industry to be more sustainable.

From the unprompted answers, respondents indicated the opportunities that emerged regarding the tourism development at Labuan Bajo, the city hub to KNP. Five respondents expressed that it would be better if there was more tourism-related infrastructure in the Labuan Bajo area, which is the hub for people who want to visit KNP. Several respondents demanded 'more restaurants to enjoy the view of KNP.' Two from the 28 photographs

submitted were also photographs of KNP taken from Labuan Bajo city. It would be an excellent opportunity for park management to consider the investment to build more eco-friendly hospitality services and facilities in Labuan Bajo.

Other respondents discussed the opportunity to build a well-run information centre. Based on the researcher's observation, there is a visitor information centre located in Mutiara Road in Labuan Bajo. However, analysis from the interview data showed that not many people know about it because it is not located on the main road and is quite far from the harbour. One respondent also mentioned there were brochures and maps available, but overall the visitor centre is not equipped to provide information and recommendations about the different tour group options. Thus, respondents needed to visit the tour groups' offices one by one in order to look for information about the tours offered. The researcher also noted that the visitor information centre is not always open to the public.

It is not possible to build information centres inside KNP because the construction projects may harm protected areas and conservation guidelines. Therefore, an information centre in Labuan Bajo city near the entrance gate would be favourable. Therefore, tourism authorities should consider the provision of an information centre that is located in the city centre with skilled staff members and integrated information about the tours to KNP and other tourism sites nearby.

Another opportunity for Labuan Bajo would be to build a KNP museum. As previously mentioned in the discussion of WS, 19 respondents suggested that management could provide more information about past, current or future conservation projects. Several respondents also brought up the idea to build a museum that is related to the environment, biodiversity, and conservation projects conducted at KNP. Combining the two ideas, such a museum could be the place where visitors could find detailed information about conservation efforts. The museum could also facilitate more educational activities, for example for children to learn more about the animals inside the park to encourage more student visitation, including students from local schools near KNP. Eustace and Mathew Gunda (2018) proposed that student visitation to protected areas could encourage a deeper involvement of future generations in environmental conservation. From an economic side, this museum may be beneficial for local people living around KNP as it may attract visitors to stay in Labuan Bajo

for longer, which would involve spending more money. In conclusion, the provision of a museum in the KNP area may enrich visitors' visitation experiences and benefit both visitors and the local community.

The last opportunity that emerged from the interviews is Mandarin language training for tour guides and rangers. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) about tourism in Indonesia, "Chinese tourists became the largest source market in 2017, surpassing Malaysia, Singapore and Australia" (Ollivaud & Haxton, 2019, p. 7). The language barrier is one of the main constraining factors that influence the intention of Chinese visitors to travel outside Chinese speaking areas (Sparks & Pan, 2009). Given that the Indonesian government aims to attract more Chinese visitors in the future, providing written information on notice boards and brochures in Chinese as well as language training for tour guides and rangers should be considered.

#### 4.3.4 Threats (TS)

In the interviews, respondents expressed the belief that *overtourism worries* was the ultimate threat to KNP. The current growth of social media, tourism investments, and a marketing strategy boost by the government promoting Flores Island as a tourism destination are some of the factors that may lead to visitor overcrowding in the future. Based on the data from KNP management (2019), inbound visitor numbers keep growing annually. Overtourism refers to an imbalance where the destination receives more visitors than the community can accommodate (Cheer, Milano, & Novelli, 2019; Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2018). Tourist floods can be a threat to both natural resources and local communities around the area. It may also influence visitors by generating a low quality experience (Tourtellot, 2018). The fact that many respondents were aware of the danger of overcrowding suggests that nature-based visitors have the desire to travel sustainably. To tackle this issue, management should develop a system that allows them to control or manage the crowds in preparation of the forthcoming increase visitation. Moreover, it is strongly suggested that every ecotourism development in protected areas should include a carrying capacity agenda; all stakeholders such as the government, park management, and tours operators, should be included in the discussion of determining the carrying capacity of the site (Rahman, Hashim, Aziz, & Khalid, 2010).

Another threat to the setting aspect that was mentioned in the interviews is the *environmental impact* caused by hiking trails in several sites including Padar Island and Komodo Island. The positive side of the artificial trail on Padar Island is that it allowed respondents to enjoy the view from the top of the hills regardless of their fitness level. Older adult respondents expressed that this trail helped them reach the summit, which would probably have been hard to accomplish with a pristine trail. However, hiking trails are the connector between visitors and nature and, according to previous research about tourism in nature-based settings, the resulting increase in tourism activity may have resulted in many environmental problems such as vegetation loss, soil compaction, landscape degradation, erosion, and other problems that are linked to animals' welfare (Cole, 1983; Li, Ge, & Liu, 2005; Lindenmayer, Margules, & Botkin, 2000; Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry, 2000). Therefore, KNP management and related stakeholders should compile ecological maintenance plans, and also consider environmentally friendly designs for any upcoming infrastructure development inside KNP.

Climate change may be a threat to the wellbeing of the earth in general, including protected areas such as a national park. A study about natural climate change in a national park in Tanzania showed that it might influence wildlife migration patterns (Kilungu, Leemans, Munishi, & Amelung, 2017). The study showed that the impacts include the extinction of endemic species and the disappearance of geographical features due to natural decay and erosion. Additionally, a study by natural and environmental scientists Gonzalez, Wang, Notaro, Vimont, and Williams (2018) found that 'anthropological climate change', which is caused by human-made emissions, proved to adversely affect 417 national parks in the US. These negative impacts, of course, will affect human activities, including tourism.

Changes in the natural settings may cause visitors to experience dissatisfaction, which could influence their overall satisfaction with their leisure experiences. At KNP, climate change may disturb the conservation agenda of protecting endangered animals such as the Komodo dragon, destroy sea biodiversity, and cause erosion and wildfires. Since climate change is affecting every part of the world, KNP management could publicly acknowledge this global issue and base all future policies and decisions on the questions of how to protect the park from the effects of climate change, and what the park can do to help diminish its contribution to global warming.

## **4.4 Experiences**

### **4.4.1 Strengths (SE)**

Based on analysis of the interviews with 31 respondents, KNP reportedly provides enjoyable and educational experiences. Unprompted, the main experiences mentioned by visitors to KNP were gaining an appreciation for being in nature (mentioned by all respondents), having access to wildlife in their real habitat (mentioned by all respondents), and learning about biodiversity (21 of the 31).

Most respondents felt *pleasure* and *relaxed* being on the pristine islands of KNP. When respondents were asked to explain how the scenery made them feel, some respondents described it as an overall feeling of awe. The comments about the scenery that respondents shared include ‘healing moment’, ‘inspirational’, ‘mind refreshing’, and other comments that convey their appreciation for the opportunity to get away from their everyday problems.

An opportunity to see wildlife in their natural habitat was deemed *unique* by 29 respondents, especially when the animals are indigenous or endangered such as manta rays and Komodo dragons. When probed further about the most memorable aspect of their experiences, all respondents mentioned the experience of meeting at least one animal, either in the water or on land. Manta rays and Komodo dragons were the most commonly mentioned animals in this context. Other animals mentioned were sea turtles, dolphins, dugongs, and deer. Respondents expressed that the close-up encounters with animals were very interesting because ‘it felt surreal’ to encounter living animals that they had never seen before, or even if they had seen them, it was in a different human-made setting such as zoo or oceanarium.

Three respondents mentioned the feeling of traveling back in time as Komodo dragons are famous for their connection with dinosaurs. One respondent said his experience ‘felt like visiting Jurassic Park in the movie.’ These respondents also stated that they were feeling unsafe being in the wild, especially when observing the Komodo dragon. Even though it is rare, there are several known cases of human fatalities caused by dragons’ bite, including attacks on tourists (BBC Indonesia, 2017; Holland, 2014). However, respondents felt that it was this potential of danger that made the encounter seem adventurous and exciting. Thus,

it can be said that KNP provided stimulation to fulfil visitors' desire for adventure and exploration.

From the responses given to the interview question about their experiences at KNP, it emerged that visitors seek experiences that take them away from daily routines and offer *novelty*. For 28 respondents, 'enjoying the marine life inside the national park' was important; 25 respondents suggested that they 'enjoy wildlife in their natural environment'; 22 respondents liked 'meeting and seeing the Komodo dragons'; and 20 responded that 'taking photos and videos' was important. According to Urry (1990), photo taking is the way visitors collect visual signs of an experience that is extraordinary and that is different from their everyday mundane life. Urry (1992) described this phenomenon as a sign of 'tourist gaze.' The term 'tourist gaze' describes the way visitors see the experience and consume it, and the way the site is promoted by the destination marketing organisation. The images are usually extraordinary, striking, and distinctive. Also, 14 respondents wanted to 'get away from the everyday problem.'

The novelty factor is not limited to experiencing nature but also extends to social interactions. In this study, 20 respondents mentioned that 'meeting new people' is an important experience. When probed further about why this experience is essential, respondents expressed that they were happy because they could meet new people, including locals, to share their travel experiences and stories.

The data also revealed that visitors seek the experiences that can provide them with the benefit of educational information: 14 respondents were interested in land conservation; 21 respondents were interested in marine conservation; nine responded that they 'learned about other flora and fauna inside the park'; six respondents liked that they could 'learn about environmental preservation'; and finally, one respondent liked the opportunity to 'experience new local foods'. The respondent explained that experiencing local foods and cuisines were very important because they enrich the respondent's knowledge about the dynamics of local culture.

The in-depth interviews further revealed that visitors conceived of their experiences at KNP as the opportunity for self-discovery by reflecting towards the importance nature has for

them. In this study, 16 respondents expressed that it was important ‘to enjoy myself with family and friends’ and that during their trip they could build a better connection with their own mind or within their relationship. A comment from one respondent stated that “I enjoyed myself in the wilderness like this because this makes me sane and heal.”

Also, KNP experiences triggered personal growth for some respondents. Six respondents answered that it felt good to ‘give a contribution to conservation’. All respondents certainly contributed to the conservation of the park via the entrance fee. However, from the in-depth interviews, it emerged that some respondents also engaged in extra conservation work that was encouraged by their tour guide. Some of the respondents participated in a beach clean-up or collected trash from the sea while diving or snorkelling. These respondents felt they gained a greater appreciation for the importance of environmental preservation and increased their awareness of conservation issues from these activities.

There were various answers from the respondents in response to the question about the highlight or the most enjoyable part of their visit to KNP. Twenty-five respondents mentioned something specific, eight respondents asserted the whole experience was their highlight, and the other eight respondents stated that the underwater experience was their highlight. From the specific experiences, ‘meeting manta rays’ was mentioned by nine respondents as their highlight, including ‘first time meeting manta ray,’ ‘seeing manta ray was special because we cannot see in many places’. This was followed by ‘interaction with Komodo’ (eight respondents), which for some included ‘taking photos with Komodo,’ and ‘finally seeing Komodo in real life.’ The experiences on ‘Padar Island’ were listed by three respondents and included ‘seeing all three beaches from the top of Padar Island,’ and ‘doing yoga in Padar Island beach after seeing the sunrise.’ The boat trip was the highlight of the trip for two respondents: ‘Seeing the dolphin jumping out the water,’ and ‘seeing the sunset from the boat was the most amazing experience.’ Surprisingly, two respondents mentioned bad experiences as their highlight; both were talking about the storm they experienced during their trip on the boat, which, as one respondent put it, ‘added to the thrill.’ These statements support the finding of a study by Arsenault and Gale (2004), which revealed that something unplanned that comes as a surprise could trigger memorable leisure experiences. It is also argued that emotional feelings toward an event or experience is subsequently memorable for

people, whether the feeling is positive or negative (Bohanek, Fivush, & Walker, 2005; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004)

Based on analysis of the interview data, respondents' *feelings* about their on-site experiences in KNP can be categorised as follows: pleasure, self-fulfilment, adventure, fantasy, hope, and concern. Hull (1990) proposed the notion of 'mood' categorisation as the subjective feelings resulting from leisure experiences. These moods are essential because they are bringing benefits for visitors as they impact an individual's social aspects, cognitive skills, and help them shape responsible behaviour in their everyday life.

In this study, all respondents indicated that they experienced a sense of *pleasure* which, following the classification by Hull (1990), can be characterised by satisfaction, enjoyment, amusement, and serenity. Out of 31 interviewees, 26 felt 'the pleasure from being in nature'; Twenty-one respondents felt 'awe and inspired by nature'; Nineteen respondents felt 'amused and had fun' in KNP; and another respondent conveyed that 'the park is unexploited unlike most nature-based attractions in Asia, especially in Indonesia.'

The interviews further revealed that the experiences brought a feeling of *self-fulfilment* for respondents. Fourteen respondents mentioned that it felt 'self-rewarding to contribute to the conservation at KNP by spending some money for the entrance fee'; 11 respondents mentioned that the experiences 'made me think/reflect about my own life', and one respondent mentioned that they 'felt so blessed.'

Respondents also experienced a sense of *adventure* that refers to the feelings of exploration, wondrous, and curiosity as characterised by Gunter (1987). Five respondents felt admiration for the Komodo dragon. One respondent mentioned that 'Komodo is scary to see, very calm but deadly, that's what makes it interesting to see it', meaning the interaction between a Komodo dragon and human is dangerous but thrilling at the same time. Therefore, the danger aspect in nature-based tourism can be appealing for visitors. This is in line with the finding of the study by Ryan (1998) which found leisure visitors' perceptions towards the saltwater crocodile in Northern Territory National Park that is regarded as an exciting and appealing aspect of the visit to a national park.

Two respondents expressed feelings that were categorized as *fantasy* in Gunter (1987). The feeling of fantasy is based on visitors' sense of imagination and wonder that was triggered by the tourism activity they engaged in. Three respondents who did an underwater activity (scuba diving) mentioned how the experiences seemed like something unreal: 'like a dream,' a 'dream come true,' and 'imagining myself in the space.' One respondent expressed how they felt like 'back in the dinosaur era,' another respondent said they had the 'feeling like in a Jurassic Park movie.'

Another emotional feeling expressed by respondents was the feeling of being *hopeful* with regard to the conservation effort and the natural condition of the park. Fourteen respondents stated that they 'appreciate the conservation effort to save biodiversity inside the park', and one respondent felt hopeful that 'pristine biodiversity still exists in this world.'

While most emotional responses identified were positive, some respondents also felt *concerned* in the sense of being aware, critical, and worried about the environmental preservation efforts. Five respondents expressed that they were worried about the future of environmental preservation and that they were wondering if the park can survive natural and human-made threats.

Overall, the respondents conveyed high satisfaction with their experiences during their visit in KNP. High satisfaction is reached when the value exceeds expectation (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). Six people mentioned that their experience was above expectations. When probed further as to why, the answers included that the overall scenery was better than on the pictures on the internet, 'the variation of the activities inside KNP was more than expected', 'no pollution unlike most places in Indonesia', and 'less touristy compared to Bali' (place where most respondents had visited before they arrived in KNP).

#### 4.4.2 Weakness (WE)

As previously noted in the SA and SE sections, many respondents were interested in learning about flora and fauna, and all of the participants gained knowledge about Komodo dragons from the Komodo dragon watching guided tour by the rangers. However, only 15 respondents believed that they learned about other things, and only nine of 15 respondents learned about conservation. These respondents claimed that their tour guides or boat crew should be

capable of delivering information about conservation instead of solely being a ‘pathfinder’ (Cohen, 1985). Several comments about the tour guides include: ‘tour guide organised beach cleaning in the itinerary’, ‘tour guide encouraged visitors to collect trash from the sea’, ‘guide briefed us to not touch the corals with clear explanation why’, and ‘new information from the boat crew about animal behaviour such as manta, dolphins, and the deer’. As educational experiences are an important aspect of respondents’ motivations and expectations, there could be a standard tour guide training for each boat tour operator. An incompetent guide can lead to a missed opportunity of a transformative experience as tour guides have a role as intellectual mentor for visitors during the trip (Cohen, 1985). Also, a study by Lopez (1980) found that the tour guide could affect visitors’ satisfaction. Establishing a standard of tour guide competency could be considered, thereby delivering benefits to tour operators, park management, and visitors.

Two respondents mentioned that their experiences did not involve as much contact with the local culture as expected. Based on their knowledge that there were several villages around the park area, these visitors expected to experience the local culture of the indigenous people of Komodo Island. However, there was not enough information about the trip to the village, and one respondent mentioned that ‘there would be nice to see a little bit of culture of the native people of Komodo’, although care would need to be taken not to commodify the local culture.

#### 4.4.3 Opportunities (OE)

Several opportunities arise to accommodate better visitors’ experiences. If management wants to convey the value of conservation successfully, tour guides play a significant role. As suggested by Peake, Innes, and Dyer (2009), in addition to being essential for the business sustenance, tour guides could effectively deliver a clear message about the importance of preservation. In the end, individuals can ponder the messages within themselves and make their experiences transformative. From the interviews, it emerged that only 15 respondents felt that their guide gave educational information. This suggests that there must be a different standard of quality between different tour guides. Park management need to strive to keep controlling the tour organisers to ensure a high-quality experience for visitors, promote sustainable use of the natural resource of the park, and most importantly continue to make

sure that locals can benefit from tourism activity to improve their quality of life. Better improvement of the communication strategies used to effectively deliver the conservation messages such as information boards and brochures could also be considered.

Using technology to create better educational experiences might also be considered depending on the resources and availability of the facilities. One respondent mentioned that ‘interactive devices’ inside a museum or visitor centre could be made available to make the learning experiences more fun; a strategy which might attract younger visitors and families to visit KNP. The effect would be beneficial for the park both financially and for the sake of conservation matters. Teaching environmental lessons to children can increase their empathy for nature, and it can lead to environmentally responsible behaviour when they grow up (White & Stoecklin, 2008). As a result, future generations may have a stronger desire to protect nature.

Furthermore, many visitors demanded to experience more local culture inside the national park. In this case, local culture can be a new ‘product’ for visitors in tourism development. A study by Goodwin (2002) about local community’s involvement in National Park tourism found that a large proportion of nature visitors listed culture as their “single most important reason to travel” (p.341). Involving the local community in cultural tourism activities would mean that the community earns economic stability from the tourism sector, and visitors can get the benefit of the cultural experiences, which can influence their satisfaction levels. However, there should be proper planning, strong collaboration between all stakeholders, including the local community as decision-maker, to develop a tourism development policy that respects the local wisdom and promotes visitors’ awareness to avoid cultural exploitation.

#### 4.4.4 Threats (TE)

As discussed previously in the WS section, three respondents labeled their interaction with Komodo dragons as unnatural and *staged*, which suggests that management needs to be careful because nature-based visitors are looking for an experience that unites sightseeing with the process of learning, and feeds their sense of adventure at the same time (Laarman & Durst, 1987). *Staged* settings for the sake of tourism consumption can generate an

inauthentic experience because, as N. Wang (1999) argues, authenticity comes from visitors' own perspectives, beliefs, and expectations. Thus, as nature-based visitors are longing for 'biophilia' (Curtin, 2009), which refers to natural interactions between humans and nature, staged encounters will lead to an unsatisfying experience (Pearce & Moscardo, 1986). Moreover, staged settings are also dangerous for the environment since they can cause ecological imbalance, which would interfere with the main aim of conservation.

## 4.5 Benefits

### 4.5.1 Strengths (SB)

All respondents of the interviews reported that they gained benefits from their visit to KNP. Their experiences in KNP provided a range of benefits that ranged from their on-site experiences of learning about the biodiversity inside the park, gaining insight into the life of KNP's flagship animals in their natural habitat, and reflecting on their own awareness about the importance of the national park for conserving nature and animal species, all of which may trigger various emotions that are transformative and benefit visitors' mindfulness. The most frequent benefit reported was having a new unique experience (23 of 31). Visitors found novelty from the beautiful scenery and the wildlife viewing activities. When visitors spent time in KNP's natural surroundings, they experienced a combination of being connected with nature, learning about the environment, and engaging in outdoor adventures at the same time. This can be demonstrated in the quotes from respondents, such as: 'finally witnessing conserve wildlife in Indonesia', 'seeing manta ray was special because we cannot see it in many places', 'incomparable scenery from the top of Padar Island, I will always remember it'.

Another theme was environmental awareness. It includes an appreciation of the conservation effort (14 of 31). Eight of 31 respondents expressed that their experiences at KNP increased their comprehension of environmental issues and their awareness that their actions can be harmful for the environment. Hence, this experience may lead to more environmentally responsible behaviour in their everyday life. Some comments from respondents about how their experiences in KNP increased their concern about the environment include: 'I want to start using environmental-friendly sunblock because the guide told me that it is dangerous for corals', 'Looking at the plastic trash on the seafloor made me realise that I need to reduce

my plastic consumption', 'I will not geotag the pictures on Instagram, I think it may be helpful to avoid more human intervention in KNP'. It can be seen from these comments that 'emotional affinity' from being so close to vulnerable nature or endangered species are a strong influence on visitors' responsible behaviour and attitude (Ballantyne et al., 2009). Respondents' comments revealed that the tour operator's role in conveying the conservation message is important. Other responses from respondents disclosed that they benefited from the reaffirmation of their previous interest about preserving the environment (4 of 31) in general, such as: 'Growing my interest to protect coral reefs', and 'I know several endangered animals that need to be protected like we protect the Komodo here'. This statement shows enthusiasm for a better human and nature relationship.

Beside environmental awareness, some respondents believed that they gained 'mood benefits', a psychological feeling derived from leisure activity that brings benefits beyond mere enjoyment or having fun. The comments in this category included: 'feeling inspired while surrounded by nature' (7 of 31), 'being relaxed while enjoying the view' (5 of 31), 'feeling at peace with nature' (2 of 31), and 'being refreshed.' These statements seem to be linked with respondents' feelings of being disconnected from their daily life, the benefits that they get when they are in the stage of 'experiential mode' (Cohen, 1985). Two respondents also expressed a sense of blessing: 'I am feeling grateful and blessed by being here,' and 'seeing the beautiful underwater made me feel so small in this universe.' Thus, KNP can potentially generate a spiritual feeling of harmony with nature for its visitors. This is in line with findings by Driver, Dustin, Baltic, Elsner, and Peterson (1997), who noted that nature-based leisure activities can bring an individual to the broader spiritual domain, such as encouraging a connection to something greater in life, and this spiritual feeling could fulfil the human's basic emotional need to connect with nature.

Still from the 'mood benefit' theme, respondents stated that it felt personally rewarding to contribute to conservation (17 of 31) and the local economy (3 of 31). These respondents were 'feeling good' that they engaged in positive actions which help the national park and locals, not merely 'consuming' the experiences. This finding shows that visitors tried to achieve a 'meaningful life' by their travel journey. The term 'meaningful life' was introduced by Rátz and Michalkó (2013) and means that a person can use their strength to contribute to the "greater good" (p. 56) of their own life or the environment around them. This supports

the statement by Bowen and Clarke (2009) that individuals have the need to lead a meaningful life, and to seek for life satisfaction and happiness from their travel experiences. Hence, contributing to KNP is not only positive for the park and its conservation effort; visitors could gain positive well-being from this as well.

Another benefit that emerged from the interviews was that visitors had positive interpersonal relationship experiences. Four respondents believed that to ‘meet new friends’ was a benefit for them. This highlights that the presence of other people was not always a negative attribute and disturbance for nature-based visitors (Dorwart, Moore, & Leung, 2009). Aside from that, two respondents stated: ‘I am feeling confident that finally I can ‘fulfil a dream’. Now I believe all my other dreams will come true too’. These respondents signalled that their experiences in KNP stimulated ‘greater competence’ (as in Filep and Pearce (2013)), meaning a greater capability of something that visitors achieved from the experiences. Two other respondents expressed that their experience was beneficial because they have a ‘story to tell to friends or family’. When probed why this was important, respondents provided identical responses: travel stories make a person more interesting. These statements suggest that one of the benefits that visitors can gain while doing leisure activities in KNP includes triggering the growth of self-esteem for better social standing.

#### 4.5.2 Weakness (WB)

One critical weakness that emerged from the interviews is that some respondents (11 of 31) who are interested in land and marine conservation expressed that they need more information about how they can actively support or contribute to the conservation agenda, instead of only getting general information about the park. Three of them expressed that they were ‘feeling guilty’ that they can only contribute to the national park by paying the entrance fee. This shows that, compared to the enjoyment benefit, environmental awareness benefit is still not optimal. The National Conservation Plan (1980 as cited in Cochrane, 2018) for Indonesia included an expectation that the establishment of the national park should foster both awareness of conservation issues and nature-based leisure activities. Hence, KNP needs more options for visitors to engage in conservation activities, and also more practical information about the conservation effort at the park itself. An increase in conservation

focused activities and information can avoid an imbalance between the conservation agenda and tourism activity as well as increase the benefits gained by visitors.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, as there are no standardised tour operator guidelines, visitor experiences may vary, and some people who go with a less experienced and responsible tour operator may not receive as much information about the conservation projects, and related information about the biodiversity in KNP. The standard of quality of less experienced tour operators may be improved overtime to be equal with the experienced tour operator. In the other words, if there are no standardised guidelines, some visitors may not get the full benefits. To lessen this limitation, the management could start making policy or guidelines and be aware of the importance of keeping a standard of quality for each tour operator.

#### 4.5.3 Opportunities (OB)

As mentioned before, the national park allows visitors to gain new unique experiences while learning about its flagship species in a natural setting with the goals to increase environmental awareness. However, many visitors had difficulties finding information about the overall biodiversity of the park, and did not learn much about the conservation history, ongoing projects, or plans for the future. Therefore, management should plan to formulate a policy to encourage educational tours and visitors' involvement in nature preservation. Information boards, brochures, an information centre, and trained tour guides that would all create opportunities for visitors to learn about the benefits of the national park could be provided.

Another thing to note is that park management together with several stakeholders, such as destination marketing, and tour operators, could think about providing activities that are suitable for visitors of all ages. Kids activities would be desired because, based on the researcher's observation, there are not many activities that cater to the needs of younger visitors. Thus, children could also enjoy their time in KNP while learning about nature at the same time. This would hopefully make their time in KNP memorable, as well as grow environmental awareness among future generations.

#### 4.5.4 Threats (TB)

New experiences and environmental awareness were two themes that respondents expected to gain in order to foster both the business side of the tourism industry and the conservation agenda. However, it might be hard for people who speak languages others than Bahasa Indonesia and English to receive the conservation messages due to the language barrier. This is especially true for Asian visitors who often have limited ability in English (Bui, Wilkins, & Lee, 2013). The solution for this threat can be eliminated from KNP by the addition of other languages, including Mandarin, to its information materials. China was the largest incoming visitor market in Indonesia in 2018 (Ollivaud & Haxton, 2019), and if the government aims to attract more Chinese visitors to different Indonesian tourism destinations, including KNP, greater provisions need to be made to accommodate to their needs. Hence, management could add Mandarin language training and information materials as a key priority to their tourism development strategy. In the end, this may benefit both visitors and the national park's environmental aims to make conservation messages more accessible.

### 4.6 Photo collection

This section will discuss the analysis of 26 photographs taken by respondents during their leisure experiences in KNP. Six photographs were taken underwater, and the rest on the surface. Since the photographs sent are the respondents' favourite shots, the photographs will only reflect something positive about the activities, settings, experiences, and benefits. The findings are significant because they add evidence to the findings of the semi-structured interviews about the key attributes that influence visitors' experiences at KNP.

#### 4.6.1 Activities

Based on the analysis of the photographs, it is clear that the main strength of the activities in KNP are wildlife encounters as 11 out of 26 respondent shared photographs of animals. This demonstrates that respondents enjoyed their close-up wildlife viewing activities. The other activity that was captured on the photographs was hiking (seven out of 26). All hiking photos were taken from the top of hills. Some of these pictures also include captions that expressed the respondents' enjoyment of the hike. The composition of the pictures also suggests that visitors were very fond of the photographic opportunities during their leisure activities, as five

out of 26 respondents included themselves and their friends or family on the photos. Another activity that respondents found to be satisfying was meeting new friends. Two different respondents sent photographs showing them with other people who, according to the captions, they just met at KNP. One of the captions read, “Diving with new friends in Batu Bolong. They made my trip memorable”.

#### 4.6.2 Settings

The evidence also showed that environmental settings are considered to be the most satisfying aspects of the park by the respondents. Twelve photographs of animals in the wilderness made it clear that the wild animal is the most influential attribute of the setting aspect. Six photographs are close-up photos of the flagship animal Komodo dragon, four photos are underwater photos of manta rays, and one underwater photo is of sea turtles swimming free in the sea. Another eight photographs capture the general pleasant scenery of KNP. The photos feature hillside landscapes (four out of 26), and seaside sceneries (four out of 26). One of the captions reads, “Beautiful view of the islands after a brief hike up a mountain on a smaller island!” Moreover, four photographs show respondents’ satisfaction with the unique natural features. These four photos were taken at the top of Padar Island, which is famous for its iconic landscape and include respondents’ facial expressions (big smile), respondents posed with thumbs up, and the captions that expressed an enthusiasm, such as, “Padar island. Magnificent view”. The findings give further support to the statement by Urry (1990), who argued that the centre of visitors’ experiences, in general, is of visual nature.

#### 4.6.3 Experiences

All of the photographs and captions showed visitors’ wildlife experiences. Fifteen of them feature an element of adventure, such as hiking, diving, and snorkelling. This finding supports the results of the in-depth interviews, which found that the strongest aspect of the experiences offered in KNP are the unique wildlife experiences. Furthermore, two photographs conveyed the respondents’ feelings while enjoying the view. These photos feature captions that include comments such as “Incredible view from up here. I am lost for words”, and, “I cannot believe a view like this is real!!!”. The first photograph was taken on

Padar Island, and the latter is an underwater diving photo. This also shows that the experiences at KNP provide pleasurable feelings and fulfilled visitors' sense of adventure.

#### 4.6.4 Benefits

It emerged from the analysis of the photographs that KNP provides a range of benefits for the visitors, which is a finding that was also reflected in the interview data. Four photographs tell a story about friendships formed at KNP, and one photograph shows family bonding time and expressed in captions such as "...seeing these prehistoric (and lazy) beasts in person with my little brother!". This is in line with the findings from the interview analysis, which found that the benefits gained by visitors at KNP included the benefit of fostering the desire for human social connection.

### 4.7 Chapter conclusion

The ASEB Grid Analysis provides a framework in which to investigate and understand visitors' feelings, emotions, perceptions and expectations towards the activities, settings, experiences offered by the park and benefits they gain in KNP. From the examination of these aspects, the motivations and satisfaction levels of visitors are revealed. Understanding these aspects can help the researcher consider the opportunities and threats that may arise in relation to the park's management. This chapter also showed the importance of including the analysis of visitors' photographs to help the researcher gain a deeper insight into visitors' perceptions of the activities, settings, experiences and benefits provided by the park. These findings were then compared with previous research relating to visitors' experiences' studies to highlight the wider implications of the findings.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter will summarise the evaluation of visitors' experiences in KNP. It provides a research summary that outlines the study's primary findings which includes an opportunity to revisit the research objectives, discusses the implications of the study, provides research reflections, and identifies recommendations for future research.

### **5.1 Research summary**

According to the "experience economy" theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), a successful tourism destination is a destination that provides opportunities for visitors to gain meaningful and memorable experiences. It is also important to note that meaningful experiences should be able to create an environment where visitors can enhance their personal growth and well-being. Thus, the main aim of this thesis was to explore visitors' experiences, motivations, expectations, satisfactions toward their overall experiences in KNP, as well as the benefits gained from their experiences. A qualitative approach was applied to explore visitors' perspectives of their experiences. Thirty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with international visitors from nine countries, and 26 photographs shared by 10 respondents. The data was then analysed and described using the ASEB Grid Analysis framework.

The first research objective was to evaluate visitors' experiences, motivations, expectations, and satisfaction towards the tourism activities and settings at KNP. The study found eight key factors in examining respondents' main motivations to visit KNP. The researcher grouped the motivations into push and pull factors. The push motivations, which refer to the individual forces to visit the destination, included escapism, WOM influence, novelty-seeking, nature and conservation knowledge-seeking. Meanwhile, the pull motivations, which refer to the strong motivations derived from the destination, included the environmental setting, marine-related activities, and Komodo dragon-related activities. From these motivations, novelty-seeking was the most influential aspect in visitors' push motivations, and the environmental setting was identified as the strongest in the pull motivations.

The analysis also showed that respondents indicated that they have high satisfaction towards the overall experiences at KNP. Some respondents described their experiences in their activities as ‘above expectation’, because of the various adventurous activities offered in KNP. The high satisfaction also related to the environmental setting. This is proved by the environmental setting as the strongest aspect in SS. Moreover, visitors showed high satisfaction towards the managerial setting. They found that the Komodo rangers are very knowledgeable about Komodo dragons, and the ranger service is included in the park fee. However, visitors expressed their low satisfaction towards the educational activities due to limited access to gain educational information in KNP. They also showed low satisfaction towards several factors in the managerial settings, which derived from the staged setting in Komodo dragon activity watching, and different tour operator standards. Moreover, visitors demanded more local culture in their leisure experience in KNP.

Research objective two, focused on identifying key attributes that influence visitors' experiences. Based on the findings of the ASEB Grid Analysis, the affirming influencing factors in visitors' experiences came from the main benefits that visitors gain from each aspect of their experiences. The main benefit from the activities came from the engaging physical activities such as diving, hiking, and wildlife encounters. Furthermore, the main benefit from the settings comes from the destination's natural features, including the landscape, and the flagship species. These factors offered novelty for the visitors. Furthermore, the main benefit from the experiences came from the unique experiences, which fulfil visitors' desire for adventure. And lastly, the main benefit from the visit is providing a self-reflection for visitors from the pleasant feelings, the educational benefit gained, and increasing awareness of environmental preservation.

The research objective three focuses on examining the beneficial experiences gained by visitors. From the semi-structured interviews and the photos elicitation, two sets of benefits gained by visitors were identified, *immediate benefits*, which directly influence visitors' feelings and experiences. This includes educational benefit, and affective benefits which relate to visitors' feelings and moods. The visitors also gained reflective benefits that might be perceived to be longer-lasting. The benefits included increasing awareness to the environment, mindfulness, and improved social relationships. These may trigger

transformative attitudes and habits that affect an individual's behaviour for a longer period of time.

## **5.2 Recommendations for KNP management**

The recommendations for KNP management is the last research objective which aimed to identify opportunities available for park management to enhance visitors' experiences. The main opportunities that management can consider include *variations in educational activities*. KNP proved to foster educational experiences. Management provides the Komodo dragon watching land tour on Komodo Island and Rinca Island, which are led by park rangers. However, the knowledge shared during the tour is limited to information about Komodo dragons and their behaviours. Visitors indicated that they would be interested to also learn about other aspects of the park, such as the biodiversity, and other flora and fauna native to KNP.

Furthermore, KNP management should consider the policy for improve *tour operator regulations*. The engaging in activities aspect was found to be one of the strongest factors to influence the experiences of visitors to KNP. Thus, the role of tour operators is crucial in creating high-quality visitors' experiences. Meanwhile, this thesis research found that the standard of operation is not standardised across tour operators. Therefore, management should pay attention to the regulation of tour operators.

The last opportunity that KNP management can add to enhance the quality of visitors' experiences is encouraging *local community involvement*.

## **5.3 Implications of the thesis research**

The following implications were identified from the findings of the study:

1. This thesis contributes insights valuable to the Indonesia sustainable tourism programme by providing information relevant for the strategy to attract more high-quality visitors to KNP. The main focus of the "10 New Bali project", is to keep tourism focus away from Bali by bringing more visitors to other alternative destinations, including KNP. Since currently, KNP is not visited to the same extent as Bali, the findings may help the management to provide a well-managed nature-based tourism

destination. Also, it may add valuable insights towards economic and environmental sustainability.

2. The natural environment is fundamental for tourism development at KNP. Most visitors mentioned the natural features of the park such as the landscape, flagship species, and underwater biodiversity as the main reasons to visit KNP. Therefore, management should be aware that it would be important to maintain the naturalness of the sites. Anything that intrudes into the sense of wilderness and nature at the site might negatively influence the quality of the experiences, as could be seen from the visitors' negative reaction to what was perceived as a staged setting of the Komodo dragon viewing tour on Komodo island.
3. Visitors can be treated as a stakeholder partner in creating sustainable tourism developments. In this study, visitors' requests for educational information about conservation shows that nature visitors are ecologically sensitive. This can also be seen from the fact that visitors gained a rewarding feeling through contributions to conservation activities at the park. This shows their interest in taking part in the natural preservation agenda.
4. Boat tour operators play an essential role in creating a high-quality visitor experience. They could positively support the conservation agenda and contribute to the protection of biodiversity at KNP by delivering conservation messages, educating visitors about the importance of environmental preservation, and protecting the environment. However, the lack of standard regulations for operators also means that they could potentially have negative impacts and inhibit management in achieving its objectives. Therefore, it seems important for management to maintain a valuable partnership with tour operators and monitor their performance.

#### **5.4 Researcher's reflections**

This section discusses the success and challenges of the method taken to this study, as well as provide a personal reflection about what this research means for the researcher as an Indonesian.

#### 5.4.1 On the method taken

A qualitative approach was successfully applied to this thesis research in identifying the factors influencing visitors' experiences from individual narratives.

Furthermore, the use of the ASEB Grid Analysis method as a consumer-focused management tool introduced by Beeho and Prentice (1995) may be regarded as somewhat outdated. However, the good results that this research generated prove its continuing usefulness for research especially in evaluating visitor experiences in different tourism settings.

The challenges of conducting visitor experience research was also noted by the researcher. In particular, it can take a long time to collect data as visitors exit an attraction (especially noting that they can generally leave at similar times, and dependent upon weather conditions), and more importantly, the need to ensure that the visitors' experience itself is not impacted negatively by the intrusion of a researcher at the end of an exhausting boat trip. Giving a little souvenir (in this study, a cheap official Komodo postcard from the local post office) is recommended to thank respondents for their time.

#### 5.4.2 Personal reflection

I have no personal or cultural background story to KNP. However, as an Indonesian growing up and living in a developed part of Indonesia, I have always been interested in contributing to the Eastern part of Indonesia as an underdeveloped region, including Flores island where KNP is located. I see the potential of creating economic growth in this region. Thus, it is my hope that this thesis can help the Indonesian Government to provide a sustainable tourism strategy in "10 New Bali projects" for Indonesia in general, and Bali in particular by saving this region from overtourism while preserving its rich environmental settings.

Furthermore, I think that for international visitors, KNP offers a different 'face' of Indonesia. It has a visibly different culture than the Western part of Indonesia since people who live in the Eastern part of Indonesia (including Flores) are more Melanesians, rather than Malays. With these unique features, I am curious to explore international visitors' perceptions towards the tourism development in KNP by understanding their personal experiences.

## **5.5 Recommendations for future research**

The thesis has identified factors that influence visitors' experiences in KNP from the perspectives of: activities, settings, experiences, and benefits. This thesis showed the relationship between each aspect and how the various aspects can influence each other. For instance, the research highlighted how the activities and the settings can influence the benefits that visitors gained, and how the factors in settings and opportunities can influence the activities aspect. However, the research was not designed to provide an empirical examination of the relationship between factors and aspects. Further research might consider using different methods, more specifically mixed methods, to determine the relationships between experiential aspects, and also to evaluate whether the findings presented in this thesis may also be applicable to other national parks. This approach would be beneficial to give more comprehensive data and provide generalizability of the results.

Furthermore, the thesis revealed that the personal benefits gained by visitors at KNP include educational and potentially longer-lasting benefits. Further research is needed to examine, at a post-visit point in time, to what extent the benefits of the experiences in nature-based tourism result in a new perspective on their daily behaviour, how it gives meaning to their lives, and how it potentially changes their way of life and attitudes. This sort of knowledge could be used to achieve a better understanding of the role of tourism in sustainable tourism development, as well as providing essential information to ensure the sustainable operation of the world's national parks.

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## APPENDIX A. Information sheet



### Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced: 11 January 2019

#### Project Title

Visitors' experiences at a natural heritage site: Komodo Natural Park, Indonesia.

#### An Invitation

My name is Kenyo Kurniasari and I am a student studying at Auckland University of Technology University, New Zealand in the Master of International Tourism Management programme (MITM). I am currently doing a research project exploring visitors' motivations, satisfaction, experiences, and benefits gained from visiting the Komodo National Park.

I would like to invite you to participate in a short interview about your visit to the Komodo National Park today. With your permission, I will take notes during the interview to ensure accurate data is collected. If you have taken any, I will also ask you to share your personal photos about anything that is memorable to you about Komodo National Park. I will ensure that any information you provide will be stored securely and will only be accessed by myself and my supervisors. The photos that you share with me will only be used for the purposes of my study and not published in any forum. Additionally, all information will remain confidential.

Participation in this interview project is voluntary and greatly appreciated.

#### What is the purpose of this research?

This research aims to explore and understand tourists' experiences in a natural heritage destination, specifically the Komodo National Park. The research is expected to provide important information that can be used as a product development strategy for the site.

The research will be reported in a Master's Thesis and a summary will be provided to you at that time if requested. I also intend to publish the findings in an academic journal article or other publication.

#### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Only international tourists aged 18 years and above visiting Komodo National Park will be selected to participate in the interview. I will only have your contact details if you supply them to me voluntarily in response.

#### How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. By signing the consent form, you indicate your agreement to participate. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

#### What will happen in this research?

Once you have agreed to participate, I will proceed to interview you. This should take about 10-15 minutes. The interview consists of a set of questions with topics about your experiences in the National Park today. You will have every opportunity to speak freely and expand on any topic. I will take notes during the interview. You may decline to answer any question. The data and analysis will only be used for this research and not for any other. All information will remain confidential.

#### What are the discomforts and risks?

There should be very little risk to you participating in the research. However, this data collection might interrupt your leisure time.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If you do experience discomfort, you do not have to discuss anything you are not comfortable with and are free to withdraw at any time.

**What are the benefits?**

By taking part, you will help in contributing to the underdeveloped area of research related to visitor experiences of natural heritage sites and conservation areas, especially in the Asia region. Also, it will help destination managers, marketers, and policy-makers in generating effective strategy in the future.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Your personal details will be kept confidential in the course of this study. That is your name or identifying characteristics will not be included in any reports or data recorded from this study. Written and oral reports that come from this study will only report aggregate data and information. Your interview data will be held on USB drive stored in locked storage at AUT University. If you provide me with photos, your photo will be secure on both my work email address and the USB drive, and they will only be used for analysis purposes and not be published in any forum

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There is no financial cost to participating in this research, other than your time in taking part in the interview.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

Please ensure you are fully informed about the purpose of this interview before I begin the interview. You are welcome to ask any questions that you may have; please direct them to the contact details listed below.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Yes. A one-page summary of the findings of this research will be provided to all participants (if requested) within 12 months of completion of the project.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Professor Alison McIntosh, [alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz), +642 9 921 9999 ext 6983, and Assoc. Professor Heike Schanzel, [hschanze@aut.ac.nz](mailto:hschanze@aut.ac.nz), +642 9 921 9999 ext 6923.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), +642 9 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Keny Kharisma Kurniasari

Email: [xmx5957@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:xmx5957@autuni.ac.nz)

**Project Supervisors Contact Details:**

- Professor Alison McIntosh

Email: [alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz)

Work phone number: +642 9 921 9999 ext 6983.

Assoc. Professor Heike Schanzel

Email: [hschanze@aut.ac.nz](mailto:hschanze@aut.ac.nz)

Work phone number: +642 9 921 9999 ext 6923.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on type the date final ethics approval was granted, AUTEC Reference number type the reference number.

## APPENDIX B. Interview guide

### Interview guide- Visitors' Experience in Komodo National Park

My name is Kenyo Kurniasari and I am a postgraduate student in the Master of International Tourism Management programme at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. I would like to ask you about your experience during your visit in Komodo National Park today. This information will be helpful for me because I'm currently working on a thesis research project about visitor experiences as part of my degree. Before starting, I would like to ask your permission to take notes during the interview [yes/no].

#### Part 1. Screening questions:

Before I proceed, may I please confirm the following? (if no, thank them and move on to next respondent)

1. Are you 18 and above?
2. Are you travelling from overseas?
3. What is your nationality?
4. Are you here for holiday?

#### Part 2. Demographic questions (on separate sheet):

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Gender:                                      | Secondary school <input type="checkbox"/>              |
| Male <input type="checkbox"/>                   | Diploma <input type="checkbox"/>                       |
| Female <input type="checkbox"/>                 | Bachelor's degree <input type="checkbox"/>             |
|   | Postgraduate degree and above <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Age _____ years old                          | 4. I'm travelling:                                     |
| 3. Education level:                             | Solo <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| No schooling completed <input type="checkbox"/> | With friends/family <input type="checkbox"/>           |
| Primary school <input type="checkbox"/>         |  |

#### Part 3. In-depth visitor questions:

1. Could you please explain why you decided to come to the Komodo National Park today?  
(Why is that important?)
2. Did you enjoy your visit to the Komodo National Park today? [yes/no]
3. Which aspect/part of this place did you find most satisfying? (Why? In what ways was it satisfying? How did it make you feel?)

4. What was the highlight of your experience? What is the reason that this experience is important to you? How did it make you feel?
5. Reflecting on your visit to the Komodo National Park, which of the following phrases best describes the experiences that you received? Is that what you expected?
  - a. Meeting/seeing the Komodo dragons.
  - b. Learning about other fauna or floral species inside the national park.
  - c. Learning about environmental preservation.
  - d. Taking photos and videos.
  - e. Enjoying wildlife in their natural environment.
  - f. Meeting new people.
  - g. Enjoying myself with family / friend.
  - h. Enjoying the marine life inside national park.
  - i. Get away from everyday problems.
  - j. Contribute to the conservation.
  - k. Anything else?
6. I would like you to think the most enjoyable aspect of Komodo National Park, can you name this aspect? Thinking on this aspect can you please tell me in a few words how you felt/what thoughts come to your mind?
7. Could you please indicate from the following list, which phrases(s) best describe(s) how you felt/what thoughts came to mind at that aspect of the Komodo National Park?
  - a. Sympathy for the Komodo dragons.
  - b. Appreciation of the conservation effort to save bio diversity inside the park.
  - c. Interest in the land conservation.
  - d. Interest in the marine conservation.
  - e. An overall feeling of awe or inspiration.
  - f. Made me think/reflect about my own life.
  - g. I felt amused/I had fun.
  - h. Pleasure from being in natural surroundings.
  - i. Feeling good to spend money on park entrance fee for contribution to conservation.
  - j. Anything else?
8. What was the most disappointing aspect of your experience? Why?
9. How do you think you have benefited from coming here? (Why is that important that you gain...?)
10. Do you think this experience has changed your thinking or your behavior towards national park conservation in particular? (If the answer is yes: How does it affect you?)
11. Have you visited any other national park in the past two years? If yes which attractions and how does it/they compare to the Komodo National Park?
12. What changes would you make to the Komodo National Park to improve the experience? What kind of experience would you like to have had?
13. Would you recommend this national park to a friend or relative visiting the area? Why?
14. Any other comments you would like to make about this national park?
15. Last, several weeks from now or when you are at home, can you please send me your three most favourite photographs about the experience in Komodo National Park to me? Please rank them as the most meaningful to you and please provide brief captions of why are they your favourite. (Hand a card consists of primary researcher's name and her AUT email as below).

Please send your three most favourite photographs about the experience in Komodo National park to [xmx3937@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:xmx3937@autuni.ac.nz). Please rank them as the most meaningful and please provide brief captions for each photos of why are they your favourite.

Your photos will only be used for analysis purposes only, be kept confidential, and will not be published in any forum

Appreciate your help in this matter. Enjoy the rest of your holiday!- Kenya

## Consent Form

*Project title : Visitors' experiences in a natural heritage site: Komodo Natural Park, Indonesia.*

*Project Supervisors : Professor Alison McIntosh, Assoc. Professor Heike Schanzel*

*Researcher: Kenyo Kharisma Kurniasari*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 11 January 2019
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes  No

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on type the date on which the final approval was granted AUTEC Reference number type the AUTEC reference number**

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

## APPENDIX D. Ethics approval from AUTEC



### Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

TE WĀHANGA AYONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

27 November 2018

Alison McIntosh  
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Alison

Re Ethics Application: 18/417 Visitor's experiences at a natural heritage site: Komodo Natural Park, Indonesia

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 26 November 2021.

#### Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation, then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor  
Executive Manager  
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: [xmx3957@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:xmx3957@autuni.ac.nz); Heike Schanzel