Understanding Coastal Seaside Resorts in Sabah: Its Growth Factors, Key Attributes and Operational Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, tourist arrivals have grown steadily, especially for the state of Sabah, Malaysia. This in turn stimulated the growth of the accommodation sector in Sabah (Sabah Tourism Board, 2007), which was supported by aggressive overseas promotion, coupled with the offerings of new tourism products and attractions by inbound tour operators. More importantly, improved air accessibility in the form of more direct or chartered flights to Sabah and Sarawak (such as those from South Korea and Taiwan) and cheaper domestic airfares have encouraged the increase in leisure travel to both states. The introduction of several low cost airlines to Malaysia and Sabah, namely Air Asia, Air Asia X, Malaysian Firefly, Jetstar, Cebu Pacific Airlines, Silk Air and Tiger Airways provide better air linkages to Sabah and thus more affordable travelling opportunities. Indeed, the accommodation sector plays an important role in the tourism industry, especially to achieve sustainable growth in a competitive environment. The extensive coastline and numerous islands located in Sabah represent a valuable tourism resource. The coastal area and islands of Sabah are important assets and for the basis for marine tourism, which encompasses conventional beach holidays and tourism activities such as diving, made possible by the rich marine life and coral reef ecosystems (Basiron, 1995). Similarly, beach destinations have evolved over time along the coast and on certain islands (Wong, 1986). A range of accommodation, from budget to luxury, is made available along the coastal zones to attract a range of visitors. The accommodation ranges from those located on small and remote islands with restricted amenities to those that offer a wide range of facilities and leisure activities alongside clear water, white sandy beaches, coral reef and tropical forests. The coastal seaside resorts in Sabah, Malaysia have been perceived as one of the important tourist attractions to lure tourists to come to Sabah (Chan and Yeoh, 2001). Despite of this, there is a limited understanding of coastal seaside resorts in Sabah. Thus, the paper reports an exploratory qualitative empirical finding of an area of which lack of empirical studies. In particular, it explores the key attributes that attract tourists and the critical factors that influence the growth of seaside resorts in Sabah. It also highlights the operational strategies taken by resort operators in achieving its long term sustainable growth and competitiveness.

SABAH AS A TOURIST DESTINATION AND COASTAL SEASIDE RESORTS IN SABAH

Tourist destination areas are commonly places in which pleasure is sought (Wall and Mathieson, 2006) and generally tourists are attracted by the range of activities that the destination offers. Sabah is a state of Malaysia, situated in the northeast part of the island of Borneo, bordered by the South China Sea, Sulu Sea, and the Celebes Sea. Sabah is a premier nature, adventure and cultural destination and is well-known for its eco-tourism due to its rich...
biodiversity, both on land and in the sea. In their marketing and promotional efforts, Sabah Tourism Promotion Board has placed emphasis on the nature, adventure and cultural attractions. In the same vein, inbound and local tour operators offer nature, adventure and culture tour packages. Since 1995, Sabah has become an attractive tourist destination for investors in the accommodation sector. The increase in tourist arrivals in Sabah over the last few years has brought about a pressing demand for hotel accommodation; this has stimulated a rapid growth in the number of hotels in Sabah, particularly that of small and medium-sized accommodation (Sabah Tourism Board, 2008). Some of these are located along the coastal areas of Sabah, and are categorized as coastal seaside resorts. Similarly, beach destinations have evolved over time along the coast and on certain islands in Sabah just like in Peninsular Malaysia (Wong, 1986).

The coastal zone of Sabah is divided into regions, namely West Coast, North, West Coast South, East Coast and East Coast South. The length of the coastline is 1854 km for islands, 1285 km for mainland and 1189 km for the lagoon, as presented in Map 1 below. The marine part of the coastal zone of Sabah is the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which covers approximately 54,360 km² or around 30% of the Malaysian EEZ. Out of the 23 districts in Sabah, 2 fall entirely within the Coastal Zone (Sandakan and Kuala Penyu) whereas 16 districts are transected by the inland boundary. Only 5 districts have no land in the coastal zone (Ranau, Tenom, Pensiangan, Keningau and Tambunan). Currently, there is a total of 15 coastal seaside resorts located along the coastal zone of Sabah. Seaside resorts in Sabah are located along the coastal areas and islands in Sabah, as shown in Map 1 below. These resorts have been increasing in number over the last few years and have become as one of the important tourist attractions (Chan and Yeoh, 1999). The majority of the coastal resorts are located in the Kota Kinabalu area followed by Tuaran, Papar, Sandakan, Lahad Datu, Semporna and the Labuan areas respectively.

Since 2000, statistical data on tourist arrivals to seaside resorts located in several islands of Sabah has shown a rapid increase. Table 1 below shows the tourist arrivals (both local and foreign) at the Pulau Tiga Park, Tunku Abdul Rahman Park, Gaya Island, Melohom Bay, Turtle Islands Park and Sipadan Island (Sabah Parks, 2009). Rapid increases in tourist arrivals have been noted in the Tunku Abdul Rahman Park which consists of Pulau Manukan, Pulau Mamutik and Pulau Sapi. This is followed by tourist arrivals to Gaya Island and to Pulau Tiga. There are slight increases in arrivals for Pulau Tiga, Turtle Islands Park and Sipadan Island. The increase in tourist arrivals as indicated by the above statistical data implies that there is a potential to market these islands and their resorts as a seaside tourist destination. Despite its tropical climate and the marine coastal areas in which several resorts are located, Sabah has hardly been promoted as a tourist destination offering sun, sea and sand. In addition, the resorts located along the coastal areas perceive themselves as providers of overnight sleeping accommodation rather than as unique seaside resorts in their respective areas.
MAP 1 COASTAL DISTRICT OF SABAH

(Source: http://www.townplanning.sabah.gov.my/iczm/)

TABLE 1 TOURIST ARRIVALS TO ISLANDS IN SABAH FROM YEAR 2000 TO 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tunku Abdul Rahman Park</th>
<th>Gaya Island</th>
<th>Pulau Tiga</th>
<th>Melohom Bay</th>
<th>Turtle Islands Park</th>
<th>Sipadan Island</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>205852</td>
<td>1733</td>
<td>1205</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10131</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>198576</td>
<td>1288</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>2202</td>
<td>8250</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>147188</td>
<td>1531</td>
<td>2148</td>
<td>6165</td>
<td>8450</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>130112</td>
<td>1176</td>
<td>1690</td>
<td>5780</td>
<td>8037</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>172072</td>
<td>1507</td>
<td>4097</td>
<td>8297</td>
<td>12655</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>150449</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>4544</td>
<td>6154</td>
<td>14391</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>185032</td>
<td>1413</td>
<td>5264</td>
<td>6202</td>
<td>14419</td>
<td>35644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>234423</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>6313</td>
<td>3223</td>
<td>14336</td>
<td>43382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>272036</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>6657</td>
<td>2192</td>
<td>14493</td>
<td>43625</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Sabah Parks, 2009)
PAST STUDIES ON SEASIDE RESORTS

Predominantly, literature review documents that most investigation on seaside resorts have focused on North American and British seaside resorts (Agarwal, 2002; Corbin, 1992). A small number of studies were performed on seaside resorts in the Eastern Mediterranean basin and Middle East (Shoval and Cohen-Hattab, 2007). Review of literature shows that Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern seaside resorts have emerged and flourished more than British traditional resorts. However, it seems that very little has been published on seaside resorts in other parts, especially in Malaysia. As the tourism industry is growing at a rapid rate in Malaysia, amongst other things, sun, sea and sand have become vital tourism attractions for leisure tourists. This is evidenced by the fact that tourist arrivals to islands in Sabah from year 2005 to 2008—such as the Tunku Abdul Rahman Park (Pulau Manukan, Pulau Mamutik, Pulau Sapi) and Pulau Tiga—have experienced a sharp increase over the years (Sabah Parks, 2009). It is argued that seaside resort tourism can be promoted and can occupy a large share of the Sabah’s entire tourism industry due to its excellent tropical climate and rich natural attractions in Sabah. Subsequently, it can form an element of Sabah’s pleasure periphery and offer domestic, regional and international travellers an alternative beach resort destination. Thus, coastal seaside resorts are likely to continue to play an important role in Sabah’s appeal as a tourist destination beside its nature and culture attractions.

Elsewhere, the decline of seaside resorts in developed countries such as in many English seaside resorts and northern Mediterranean coastal areas led to the need for the restructuring of strategies on resorts. These restructuring strategies were focused on promotion and positioning strategies to secure economic sustainability and profitable growth. These strategies involved the transformation of the physical environment such as landscaping, pedestrianisation, diversification and development of niche products (such as cultural tourism) and market repositioning (Agarwal, 2002). Accordingly, market repositioning, environmental quality enhancement and product reorganization have been extensively implemented as resort restructuring strategies. Resort structuring in England and Europe tended to place emphasis on maintaining existing markets and enhancing competitiveness. For example, Crete’s coastal resorts focused on the development of new facilities, upgrading of tourist facilities and businesses, improvement on infrastructure and protection and enhancement of natural and cultural resources (Brassoulis, 2004). Croatia’s coastal resorts emphasised on the creation of a new identity and product repositioning in the market, training of tourism personnel and development of high quality supplementary services (Jordan, 2000). The resorts in the Baltic Islands of Bornholm focused on the training of tourism personnel and the improvement of the island’s market image (Twining-Ward and Baum, 1998). According to Curtis (1997), the Benidorm and Calvia resorts in Spain embarked on investment in resort infrastructure and facilities, upgrading of product and market image, provision of new attractions and the setting of accommodation standards. Similarly, promotion and the targeting of new markets and quality tourists, implementation of development controls, upgrading of product quality, promotion of new image and introduction of new products was done in Mallorca, Spain (Knowles and Curtis, 1999; Morgan, 1991). Arguably, despite extensive studies performed on coastal resorts, little emphasis was given on the understanding of resort attributes and positioning approaches for seaside resorts widely.
RESEARCH METHOD

The paper reports an exploratory qualitative empirical finding of issues relating to resort growth factors, key attributes and operational strategies to undertaken by the resort operators in Sabah, an area which lack empirical study. Data is collected via in-depth personal interviewing. Interviews are commonly used in qualitative research as an effective and powerful method of collecting data. They allow the researcher to interact individually with the seaside resort operators, hence giving the opportunity to ask for clarification if an answer is vague, or to provide clarification if a question is unclear. In addition, in-depth interviewing allows the respondents’ voices to be heard and thus collects more authentic and reliable responses than survey questionnaires.

The study sites cover seaside resorts located along the coastal areas and islands of Sabah, which range from small to mid-sized and from the budget to star-rated category. The sampled respondents of the study consist of the operators or owners of these seaside resorts based on the list provided by the Sabah and Malaysia Tourism Boards. The study used a purposive sampling technique based on the said sample population. Data collection involved a total of 15 seaside resort operators whose resorts were located in Kota Kinabalu, Tuaran, Papar, Sandakan, Lahad Datu, as follows: 10 resorts located in the Kota Kinabalu, Papar, Pulau Tiga; 2 seaside resorts located in Tuaran; 1 resort at the Sandakan-Turtle Island; and 2 resorts located in the Lahad Datu area, namely Semporna and Mabul Island, as presented in Map 2 below.

Interview appointments were scheduled via phone calls and follow-up letters with individual seaside resort operators at their respective establishments. In-depth interviewing using structured open-ended questions was adopted to understand the key attributes, growth factors and operational strategies in managing seaside resorts, including the key issues and challenges faced by seaside resorts in Sabah and as a tourist destination. The interviews were conducted using tape recordings and lasted an average of 30–45 minutes with the consent of the respondents to secure the authenticity and richness of the data. Given the qualitative nature of the interviews, there was no predetermined sample size; the interviews continued until the level of information and theoretical insights reached saturation (no new information emerged from the responses). Data collection stopped after 15 interviews since there was no new insight in the responses or no more information emerged from the data. Data (on-site cross-sectional) were collected over a 6-month period from July–December 2008. Each interview was preceded by an introduction to explain salient details about the interviewer and the research project, to clarify the interviewee's role and importance in the research, to explain what was required of him/her in the interview as well as his/her right to withdraw from the interview.
DATA ANALYSIS

A total of 15 in-depth interviews were transcribed. Data analysis was carried by using the qualitative method of analysis which is based on a phenomenological approach and thematic analysis. It involves both coding and categorization of data from the interview responses. Key themes and patterns emerged from the coding process. The interview responses were read and re-read, and analyzed by identifying the key themes and variables relating to the descriptive themes—growth factors, key attributes and operational strategies. These themes were categorized based on general accommodation attributes by Aaker and Shamsby (1982), namely price value, use or application, class of users and competition and other such as location, service quality, product and services and environment. These findings are identified from the data that were grounded in respondents’ own descriptions; this is consistent with inductive analysis. Thus, it enhances the reliability and validity of the finding.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Coastal seaside resorts in Sabah can be categorised as star rated and non-star rated. The non star rated category accounted for about 50% of the total number sampled. For the star-rated category, the resorts sampled comprised of: one three star-rated (37.5%), one five star-rated (6.25%) and one two star-rated (6.25%).
A range of growth factors and key attributes emerged from the interview responses are summarised in Table 2 below. The key attributes to attract visitors emerged from the interview responses are: price, natural environment/surrounding, location, facilities and quality of service, as presented in Table 2 below. Many of the seaside resort operators acknowledge the role of the resorts’ attributes in attracting visitors. The growth factors for seaside resorts include the resort attributes, the tourist arrivals in Sabah and promotion /marketing activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Interview responses and respondents</th>
<th>Growth factors and key attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>„seaside resorts are built in low rise areas and blend with the natural environment; and not heavy populated with tourists like other seaside resorts in developed countries – Spain, Hawaii, Bahamas. (Respondents No. 3, 9)</td>
<td>Seaside resort environment, natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>„Our seaside resorts are located in excellent coastal area and perfect place for sun, sea sand activities... these are important attributes and growth factor for our resorts...“ (Respondents No. 3, 5, 8, 10)</td>
<td>Coastal area, location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>„Sabah is perfect place as tourist destination and increase in tourist arrivals contribute to the growth of our seaside resorts here significantly ...“ (Respondents No. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 14, 15)</td>
<td>Tourist arrivals and good tourist destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>„need to promote Sabah as an attractive seaside resort destination, we have with nice weather, beaches, scenery so seaside resorts can attract more tourists ..“ (Respondents No. 1, 3, 4, 15)</td>
<td>Seaside resort promotion, natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>„we offer value for money/good price and continue to enhance the product and service quality at the resorts to attract more tourists ...this is vital for continuous growth .“(Respondents No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9)</td>
<td>value for money Product and service quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>„the natural attractions and natural environment around the resorts are important attractions and complement the seaside resorts in attracting visitors to stay longer... (Respondents No. 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11,13)</td>
<td>Natural attractions and environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>„our seaside resorts need aggressive promotion and marketing activities...and Sabah should be promoted as a seaside resort destination by tourism promotion boards ....“ (Respondents No. 1, 2, 4, 9,13)</td>
<td>Marketing and promotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Right price, good facilities (rooms /transportation ) and nice sandy beaches at the coastal area are key attributes of our seaside resorts...“ (Respondents No. 5, 8, 12)</td>
<td>Price, facilities, natural attractions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the seaside resort operators agreed that Sabah is a unique place as it offers sea, mountain, rainforest, wildlife and ecotourism activities and the majority of respondents agreed that their existing surrounding natural and environment attractions are vital to support the development of their own seaside resorts, as expressed by numerous respondents: “the natural attractions and natural environment around the resorts are important attractions and complement the seaside resorts in attracting visitors to stay ...” (Respondents No. 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13). Thus, there is a need to conserve and protect the said attractions and maintain the natural environmental resources and attractions, as these can be used to promote Sabah as a resort destination. Likewise, many agreed that Sabah possesses good prospects as it has nature, adventure and culture attractions, as pointed out by respondents 1, 2, 7: “we have excellent tourism products like the sun, sea and sand and varieties of cultural and natural attractions!” Sabah is further perceived as a premier ecotourist destination and thus this suggests that more tourist products should be developed, for example for resort destinations in Sandakan, Tawau and Semporna, as pointed out by Respondent No. 14, “Sabah is a premier ecotourism destination, as resort operator, I think it is vital to to conserve out natural attraction...” There is also evidence that Kota Kinabalu is being promoted as a nature resort city, as pointed out by Respondent No. 10, “we are promoting Kota Kinabalu as a resort city and thus we should also focus on our coastal seaside resorts!!”. Nevertheless, this requires substantial promotional and marketing strategies by the Sabah Tourism Board. The empirical evidence reveals that in general, tourist arrivals, attraction of natural environment (seaside, beaches and weather) and infrastructure (accessibility, amenities) are regarded as critical factors which stimulate the growth of coastal seaside resorts in Sabah.

In short, four important coastal seaside resorts’ attributes, namely price, natural attractions and environment, quality products and services as well as location are perceived by the respondents to be important elements to attract tourists and as growth factors. Predominantly, location is seems to be the prime factor that will determine the decision of choosing a resort to stay. The coastal environment, for example the attractive white sandy beaches and crystal clear water, are important natural assets for any seaside resort development in Sabah. Tourists are generally sensitive to the coastal environment and the impact on the said environment where the resorts are located. This is evident in some of the island resorts, for example, the resort located on Pulau Tiga. Pulau Tiga consists of three islands, and is demarcated as a protected area. It is located at northern Borneo and the South China Sea, and offers excellent wildlife and a shallow, healthy coral reef with crystal clear waters. Visitors are exposed to conservation and preservation work at the island on a voluntary basis. Visitors participate in monitoring and surveying the artificial reef, and their work includes replacing and/or repairing damaged corals, continuing the development of the reef, clearing underwater rubbish, collecting and replanting coral fragments, mentoring, surveying house reef, conducting inventory of marine life and encounters at the designated area, feeding fish, reporting the quality of water, developing an artificial reef, forming the foundation for planting corals and setting up coral nursery units (Travellers Worldwide, Year, 2006).

The research point outs that the conservation and protection of the attractions, and maintenance of the natural resources and attractions in particular coastal area can be used to promote Sabah as a resort destination. It is clear that tourists who visit coastal seaside resorts are of a particular type, attracted to the area by a unique natural physical feature such as the sun/climate, sea/beach, natural scenery, as well as beach activities or conservation activities.
Likewise, the level of cleanliness, adequate infrastructure and marketing cum promotion activities are the critical factors that influence the growth of coastal seaside resorts in Sabah. In light of this, it can be argued that besides the location of seaside resorts, the right pricing and conservation of the relevant natural attractions are crucial in terms of promoting and attracting visitors.

**OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES OF COASTAL SEASIDE RESORTS IN SABAH**

The empirical evidence shows that Sabah can be promoted as seaside resort destination; and the opportunities of seaside resorts are correlated to both the promotional work on Sabah as a tourist destination. Simply, if Sabah is well-promoted and marketed as a tourist destination, more tourists will be attracted to visit Sabah. Indirectly, more opportunities will arise for seaside resorts to attract tourists. The existing natural environment and the excellent location of the seaside resorts also present excellent opportunities to attract visitors. The sources of opportunities for seaside resorts are associated with the positive growth of the tourism industry resulting from aggressive marketing and promotional activities, the existing attractive coastal areas or locations of the seaside resorts and the available rich and natural attractions and environment, as evidenced in Table 2 above.

The findings show that the majority of coastal seaside resorts have low to medium occupancy rates except for the four and five star resorts which have annual occupancy rates of 80-90%. The paper reveals key challenges faced by coastal seaside resort operators include recruiting well-trained and experienced human resource, reducing staff turnover (supervisory and managerial level); improving occupancy rate via marketing and promotion activities as well as ensuring adequate supply of water, electricity and good road systems.

It is suggested that seaside resort operators pay attention to the key attributes and develop relevant strategies for their respective seaside resorts in order to attract more visitors. The key attributes of seaside resorts as presented in Table 2 above are vital in formulating operational strategies for the seaside resorts. It suggests three operational strategies that can be taken by resort operators, based on: price value, surrounded natural attractions/environment and service quality features. These strategies are deemed relevant to improve the performance of coastal seaside resorts and to build their competitiveness and sustainability in the long term. It is interesting to note that only a few respondents from large seaside resorts stated their key attributes to be their quality products and services and quality control, which is also part of their strategic planning, as evidenced from the respondents who stated that “we will continue to enhance the product and service quality (Interview Respondents No. 1, 5, 6 & 10). This finding is also revealed in the study by Agarwal and Brunt (2005) in developed countries whereby promotion and marketing, product enhancement and competitiveness as well as the upgrading and maintenance of existing facilities were considered important strategies. In the same vein, for long term sustainability of coastal seaside resorts, it is suggested that key strategies should also focus on the setting of resort standards and quality services, implementation of resort development controls, branding and attracting quality visitors.

As evidenced from the responses, strategies for conservation and preservation of natural attractions and environment are a vital part of the seaside resort operational activities. This finding concurs with Agarwal and Brunt (2005) who pointed out the importance of the natural
environment for sustaining the growth of a seaside resort. In this regard, seaside resorts in Sabah can be an important component of tourism for the conservation and preservation of natural resources; it has the potential to become a major economic activity in the coastal areas (King, 2005). Marketing and promotion have been identified as one of the key issues faced by these seaside resorts to attract more visitors. For the long term development and sustainable growth of seaside resorts in Sabah, it is pertinent that Sabah Tourism Board and Tourism Malaysia promote and position coastal seaside resorts by focusing on their key attributes – price value, surrounding natural attractions and environment, location and physical features.

Worldwide, faster-growing resort areas have given emphasis to the development of more sustainable forms of coastal or seaside tourism. It is suggested that in order for Sabah to attract visitors to its coastal or seaside resorts, emphasis should be given to low-density developments and caution should be taken to protect the coastal environment, by working closely to meet ecotourism criteria within the market area. Tourists to seaside resorts in Sabah are interested in sun, sea and sand attractions; exposure to environmental education during their stay is deemed suitable to protect and support the coastal area (Weaver, 2007). Likewise, previous research findings showed that resort hotels are being promoted as attractions by local inbound tour operators in their tour packages; and further confirmed that tourists were attracted to visit Sabah because of the picturesque and beautiful islands, beaches and internationally-renowned beach resorts (Chan and Yeoh (2001).

CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The paper is a pioneering investigation into seaside resorts located on the coastline of Sabah. It aims to broadly understand the growth factors, key attributes and operational strategies for coastal seaside resorts in Sabah. It has presented four key attributes of coastal resorts to attract visitors: price, natural environment/surrounding, location and facilities. Operational strategies should relate to the said key attributes - price value, surrounded natural attractions/environment, location and features to ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of their operations. It is suggested that the provision of value for money, natural environment, quality services and well-maintained physical facilities will strengthen the growth and performance of coastal seaside resort. It strongly suggests that seaside resorts can be promoted as one of the tourism products for Sabah due to the existing coastline resources, which are rich and natural, and also due to the excellent climate. Simply, Sabah has an attractive long coastline stretch of white sandy beaches. Above all, the research strongly suggests that both state and federal tourism ministries should re-examine the possibility of promoting Sabah as a seaside resort destination in addition to its nature, culture and adventure activities.

The paper contributes to an improved understanding of coastal resort in term of its growth factors, key attributes and operational strategies for coastal seaside resorts in Sabah. It adds to the existing literature of resort attributes, growth factors and operational strategies and marketing of coastal seaside resorts, which are areas that have been under-researched. The findings can also serve as useful baseline information for the seaside resort sector in Malaysia which can be used for further descriptive research. As for the researchers, the findings of the study provide an insightful understanding into the seaside resort hotel sector in Sabah and identify new avenue for further research in the context of seaside resort hotel development in Malaysia. The study provides only a snapshot of seaside resorts in Sabah. In the context of
seaside resort hotel development in Malaysia, areas for future research could encompass other promotional and marketing activities, penetration of new markets and the performance of seaside resorts.

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**REFERENCE**


