



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GLAMPING ACTIVITIES IN MALAYSIA BEFORE AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC PHASE

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Abstract

Beginning 2015, Tourism Malaysia introduced glamping activity as one of Malaysia's new tourism products, but its development seems has been very slow. The activity which is usually expensive and luxurious, besides the lack of ideas in highlighting its uniqueness, makes glamping an activity that is considered for the elites only. Therefore, this study was conducted to discuss the development of astronomy-based glamping activities in Malaysia before and after the pandemic phase. This research is qualitative, using the approach of document analysis and observation regarding the topic under study. Results of the study found that glamping activities which are based on astronomy are seen to be gaining popularity among the people society after pandemic period compared to normal glamping activities. This can also be observed in the increase of venues that offer astronomy-based glamping services. Astronomy-based glamping activities are one of tourism products which is offered to those who are fond of something which is unique and intriguing on objects or phenomena of the universe. This shows that the opportunity and scope for the activity to be carried out are wide. Glamping activities based on astronomy are usually closely related to dark sky areas and heavenly object phenomena such as solar and lunar eclipses. Astronomy-based glamping activity in Malaysia is one of the new products that can be popularised as a tourist attraction, and this activity is also seen capable of contributing to a rise in the nation's economy.

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Introduction:-

The tourism industry is now more advanced through the current of digital technology modernity in facing challenges of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Hariths, 2019). Year in and year out, tourism industry in Malaysia has been showing a positive increase and has even now expanded into a new branch of the tourism industry, which is astronomical tourism. A good and comprehensive astronomical tourism is when the characteristics of astronomy can be applied such as determining *qiblah* direction and determining prayer times (Ibnor et al. 2015). According to Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, tourism can be understood as matters concerning travelling or about people travelling. Meanwhile, astronomical tourism is interpreted as terrestrial space tourism as well as space tourism. Zulhazrin (2021) stated that astronomical tourism should cover these five criteria, namely:

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1. A visit to astronomical observatory.
2. Having a vast and clear area for sky viewing.
3. National Parks or private venues which offer activities of dark sky observation.
4. Official space agency which accepts visitors and organises programs for the public.
5. Preparation of overnight stay and amenities for individuals or organisations to participate in the observation of the sun and other celestial objects in the night sky such as the moon and the stars.

The concept of glamping activities is one of the new products to be introduced in astronomical tourism. It is also a modern recreational activity which combines characteristics of ruggedness and comfort in meeting human desire of exploring nature which can be stunted when feeling discomfort in running the activity. Furthermore, they crave for a comfortable and peaceful atmosphere while being away from the hectic city life and work pressure (Ana & Cristina, 2017). Camping is a recreational activity that is often done by people around the world. Its specialty is that being close to nature can calm the soul. However, some of them do not feel comfortable and safe and are fearful of the prospects of caterpillars, wild animals, and leaky tents as well as limited food sources (Josipa et al. 2017).

Therefore, in 2005, the term “camping” in the English language was morphed into “glamping” and introduced in Europe and was officially inducted into the dictionary in 2016. The word “glamping” is a combination of two English words namely “*glamorous*” and “*camping*”. When combined, it means camping activities which are accompanied by conveniences, comfort and safety such as mattress, pillow, blanket, electricity, toilet, kitchen for cooking, soothing ventilation system, and everything that is not provided in normal camping activities (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

In 2015, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia issued a statement through Tourism Malaysia which outlined that it was serious about promoting glamping activities on a wide-scale commercial basis in the country. This was stated by its Deputy Director General, Dato' Haji AzizanNoordin in a media statement. The uniqueness and specialty of Malaysia which is rich in various natural resources can increase glamping activities as a new Malaysian tourism product (Tourism Malaysia 2015). However, we can see that the development of glamping activities in Malaysia is not encouraging. The society is still focused on other tourism activities and entrepreneurs in this industry have yet to see any new activity which is able to give a lifeline to tourism activities because no good exposure is given well.

Lately, glamping activities in Malaysia have been expanding. Many tourism destinations and resorts with elements of glamping activities have been built or renovated after the nation entered into post-pandemic phase. The movement of tourists has been seen to be more focused onto sites for glamping activities, camping and even extreme activities as compared to staying over at city hotels and resorts (Craig et al. 2021). Seen from a positive point of view, the covid-19 pandemic is the beginning of glamping activity industrial revolution which is growing rapidly. The pressure that grips the community compels them to find extraordinary activities to do in permitted areas in the quest of peace after more than 12 months of being under lockdown when the Movement Control Order (MCO) was tightened (Glossing et al. 2020).

Most of the glamping activity sites that exist throughout the country are built in suburban areas which only take into account the factors of distance, time, and quietness from densely populated areas. However, not many entrepreneurs of glamping take into consideration the factor of light pollution before setting up a glamping activity site. Polluted night sky is caused by several factors such as scattered starlight, airglow, and light pollution. This causes a limitation to human vision using the naked eye. In fact, light that can be detected using telescope is not that clear either. The lower the rate of light pollution occurs, the higher the probability of observing the dark night sky without cloud interference is (Fathin, Raihana 2018).

Governmental organisations should also be capable of playing an important role as a prime mover in promoting and recognizing existing glamping activity sites. Such effort is seen as an effective step to improve the quality of service and the quality of built sites (Martyr et al. 2019). Strengthening activities for glamping site entrepreneurs can be provided through courses and training as well as ongoing site supervision. Efforts made by operators of glamping activity sites in fulfilling visitors' demands can be improved by government contribution and initiatives to ensure that the astronomical tourism industry grows and is well received by the people (Syuhada et al. 2019). If entrepreneurs only rely on assistance from the government without finding a solution, this would still not be a success because government incentives, extended in various forms, never stop (Shuib& Aziz 1989). The recognition

by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture to glamping activity sites is seen as one of the many forms of government assistance which is able contribute to an increase in the number of visitors to glamping activity site locations (MOTAC 2022).

Therefore, growth of glamping activities in Malaysia is seen to occur during post-pandemic periods until today. Adaptation of astronomical tourism concept which is applied can be a stepping stone to the progress of and an increase in visitor attendance to those glamping activity venues. The correct location selection also plays an important role in determining the success of the built glamping activity site (Kazaretc al. 2017). For example, a glamping activity site which is built complete with astronomy tourism features can give a higher number of opportunities of finding and observing natural phenomena that occur around the country.

Tourism Activities in Malaysia

Through reviewing past information sources, glamping activities in Malaysia began in the year of 2015. At that time, the said activities were already well-known in most other countries. The unique topography of Malaysia, which is located close to the equator, makes this country ideal for exploring its nature rich in lush tropical rainforests, clear rivers and mesmerizing waterfalls. This is proven by UNESCO's recognition of two National Parks in Sabah and Sarawak as World Heritage Sites in the Natural Category (Zuliskandar et al. 2015). However, progress in glamping activities has not been very encouraging and the knowledge about it among the society was also still at a low level. This was because the vibrancy of tourism activities in Malaysia in that year was focused on the theme of MYFEST 2015. The government focused on four main objectives which are to showcase cultural diversity and festivals, ensure the stability of tourist arrivals, promote Malaysia by organizing large-scale programs and provide valuable experiences for tourists with multi-racial national festival celebrations. Through the MYFEST 2015 campaign, the number of tourists staying at hotels showed a decrease by 1.7% compared with that of 2014. Table 1 shows the number of hotel guests and the percentage breakdown of guests throughout 2015 and Table 2 meanwhile shows the number of hotel guests by state.

Table 1:- Number of hotel guests and its percentage according to type of guests.

	International Guests	Domestic Guests
Total number	25,571,078	45,941,761
Percentage	35.8%	64.2%

Source: Author (2023); Tourism Annual Report 2015 (2015)

Table 2:- Number of hotel guests by state

	Number of Guests	Percentage
Kuala Lumpur	15,894,155	22%
Pahang	10,334,754	14%
Johor	6,953,327	9%
Penang	6,347,618	8%
Sabah	6,054,307	8%

Source: Writer (2023); Tourism Annual Report 2015 (2015)

Based on the data above, if the government continues to actively promote and spread information about glamping activities, it will definitely more or less be able to provide options for local and international tourists. Through the Tourism Annual Reports 2016-2019, efforts to push for glamping activities as one of new products of the tourism industry have not been clearly seen. However, the Homestay Malaysia Program is carried out frequently for tourists from outside and within the country. This good effort can help homestay operators all over the country to register under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, enabling their places to be known and visited frequently.

During the spread of coronavirus pandemic, the whole world was affected, and this severed the world economy. Throughout the 2-year period, tourism industry was among the sectors which was severely affected, registering an average 74% decrease in tourist entrance for the whole world in 2020 compared with that in 2019 (Alexandra & Sanaa, 2021). The tourism industry was only seen to be able to recover after the Malaysian government announced that the country's borders were completely open in April 2022. The phase of building back the economy was taken

up by operators of glamping activity sites after having not been receiving tourists for more than a year, amid some being affected by major floods which occurred in 2021 almost all over the country.

Comparison of Glamping Sites Sky Brightness in Malaysia

Following that, with the increasing current demand and market for glamping activities in Malaysia, a major factor needs to be considered in selecting location before a glamping activity site is built, which is the level of light pollution. Based on the existing 5 locations of glamping activity site, an assessment of the light pollution level was done using the software lightpollutionmap as in the following. Figures 1 to 5 show the light pollution level for Boulder Valley Glamping (Penang), Glamping@Kongkoi (Negeri Sembilan), Buana Kita Rembau (Negeri Sembilan), Glamping Wetlands (Putrajaya) and RumahKebun Hulu Langat (Selangor), respectively.

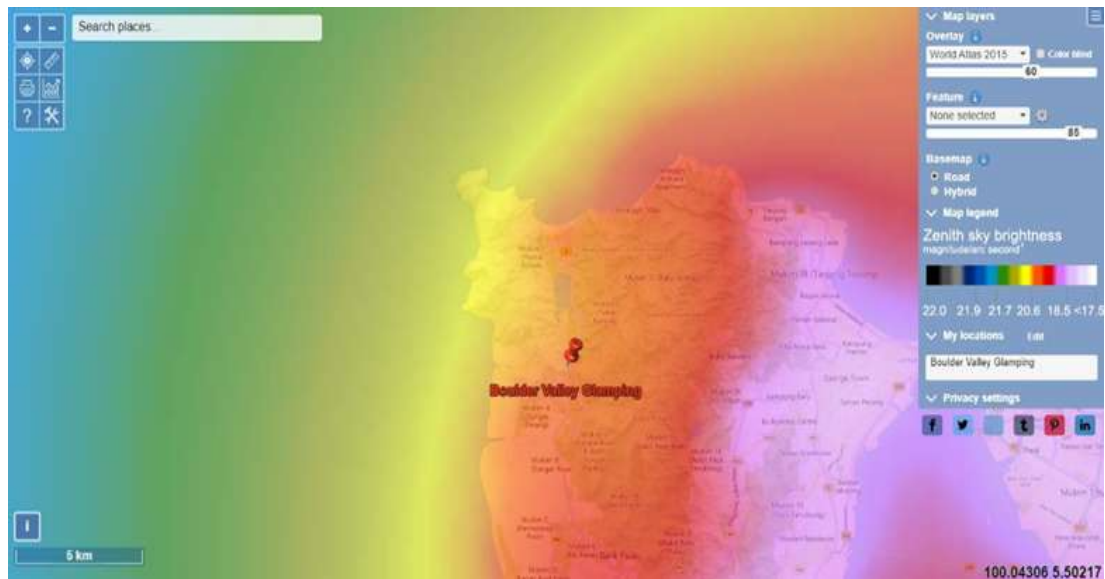


Figure 1:- Boulder Valley Glamping, Penang Island.



Figure 2:- Glamping @ Kongkoi, Negeri Sembilan.

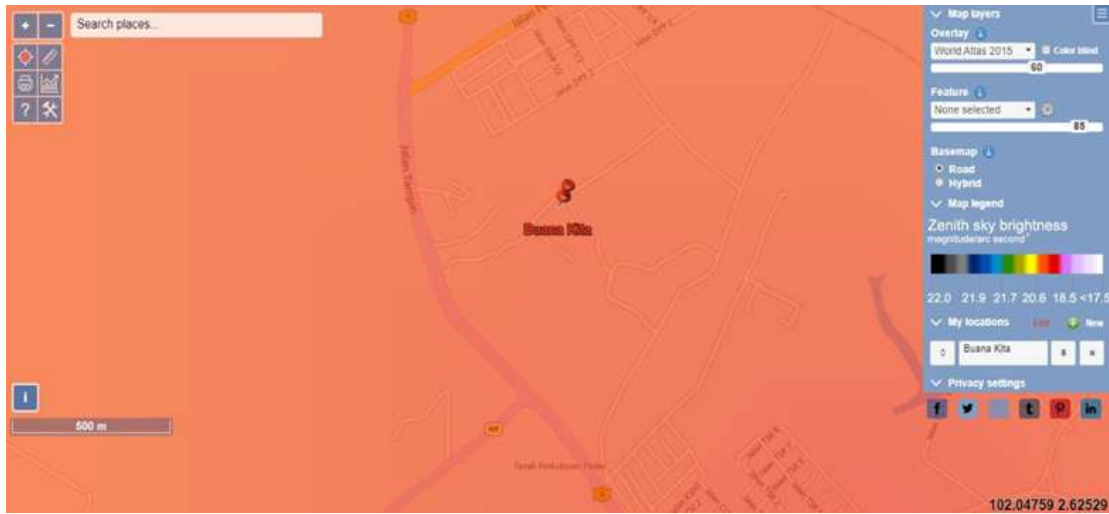


Figure 3:-Buana Kita Rembau, Negeri Sembilan.

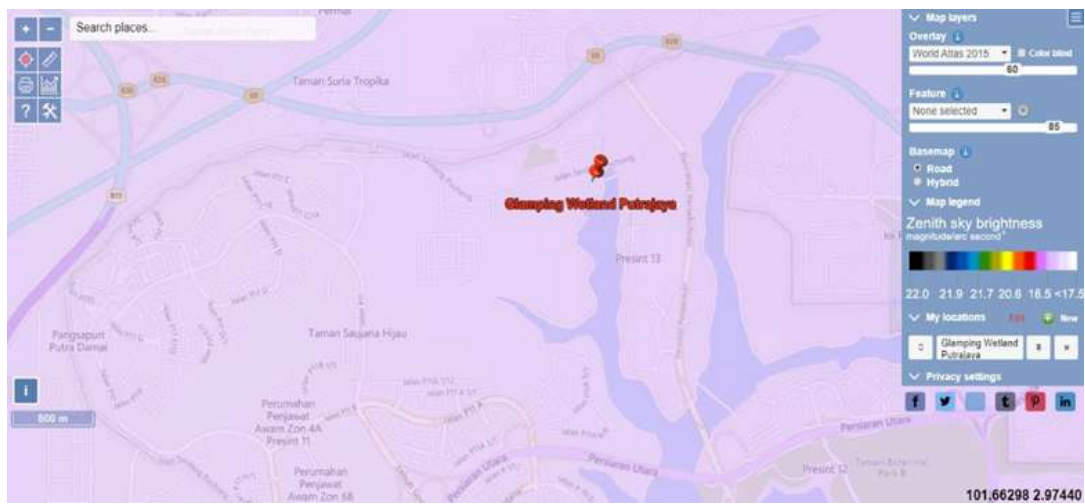


Figure 4:- Glamping Wetlands, Putrajaya.

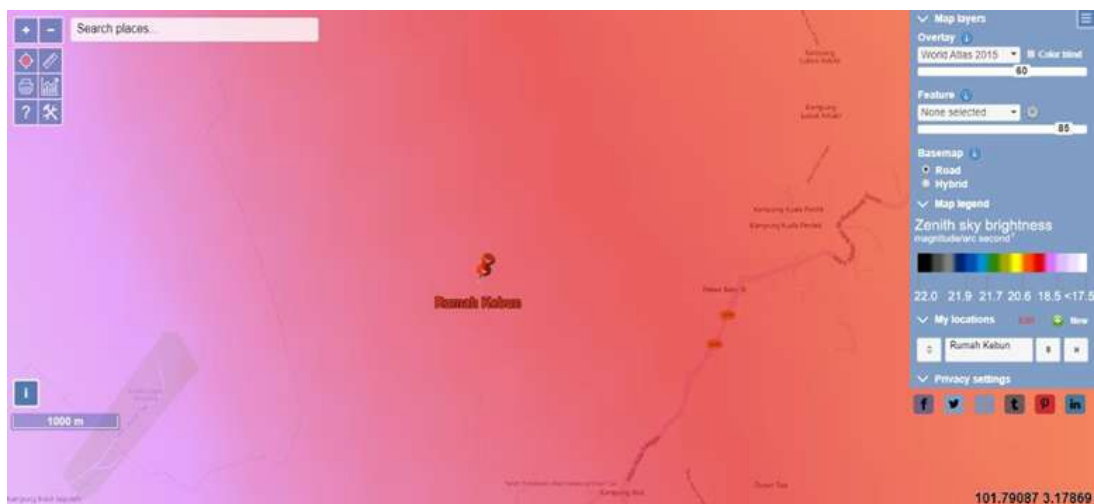


Figure 5:-RumahKebun Hulu Langat, Selangor.

Light pollution data at any location can be measured by various ways, one of them is by using an SQM tool. In order to measure darkness in an area, a researcher will normally use the Bortle scale to gauge the brightness of light in the area. The darker the scale, the darker the area is and the better it is to see celestial objects in the sky. Meanwhile, the brighter the scale, the brighter the area is, disabling observation of celestial objects in the sky. Based on observation of Figures 1-5, the findings are summarised in Table 3 as follows:

Table 3:- Sky brightness comparison at the area of glamping site.

	Scale	Performance	Colour	Description
Boulder Valley	20.6	Moderate	Red	The Milky Way is seen faintly when reaching the zenith point.
Glamping @ Kongkoi	20.9	Good	Yellow	Heavenly objects are still visible, the Milky Way is still clear at the horizon.
Buana Kita Rembau	20.6	Moderate	Red	The Milky Way is seen faintly when reaching the zenith point.
Glamping Wetlands Putrajaya	18.5	Weak	Purple	Only the brightest stars can be seen clearly.
RumahKebun, Hulu Langat	19.0	Satisfactory	Red	The Milky Way is invisible, Messier objects can be faintly seen.

Therefore, venue selection of glamping activity sites is very important to ensure astronomy characteristics and light pollution levels are manageable under astronomical tourism activities. Astronomy-based glamping activities are special features created in astro glamping activities. The basis of its construction follows the characteristics of Islamic art. Movement of celestial objects in the sky is systematic and orderly (Hanafiah 2021). Occurrence of night and day, sea tides, monsoon changes and the change of four seasons in countries which lie on the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn are among the examples of natural phenomena which repeatedly take place every year without experiencing any change. The phenomena of lunar and solar eclipses can be observed each year throughout the country according to specific locations. The frequency is either two or four times a year depending on the path of the sun and the moon during the day or night when the event occurs (Shahrin 2023).

Table 4:- Date and type of lunar eclipse in 2022 in Malaysia.

	Lunar eclipse	Lunar eclipse
Year	2022	2022
Date	May 16	November 8
Type	Full	Full (Umbra)
Description	Not observable in Malaysia	Observable in Malaysia

Table 5:- Date and type of lunar eclipse in 2023 in Malaysia.

	Lunar eclipse	Lunar eclipse
Year	2023	2023
Date	May 6	October 29
Type	Penumbra	Partial (Umbra)
Description	Observable in Malaysia	Observable in Malaysia

In 2022, the first full lunar eclipse was not observable in Malaysia because while the eclipse occurred, the moon had already set below the horizon and the sun had already risen. By that, only the Americas, Europe and Africa can see a lunar eclipse. In the second lunar eclipse which occurred, people in Malaysia had a chance to witness the eclipse in full in Sabah and Sarawak while only partially in Peninsular Malaysia. This is due to the fact that the moon had already entered the path of umbra shadow when the moon rose. In 2023, both lunar eclipses can be seen in Malaysia but only penumbra and partial eclipses are observable. The distinction of lunar eclipse phenomenon is that there is a special worship that is dedicated when the eclipse occurs, which is the eclipse prayer and sermon held in conjunction with the eclipse.

Table 6:- Date and type of solar eclipse in 2022 in Malaysia

	Solar eclipse	Solar eclipse
Year	2022	2022

Date	May 1 st	October 25th
Type	Partial	Partial
Description	Not observable in Malaysia	Not observable in Malaysia

Table 7:- Date and type of solar eclipse in 2023 in Malaysia.

	Solar eclipse	Solar eclipse
Year	2023	2023
Date	April 20	October 15th
Type	Partial	Ring
Description	Observable in Malaysia	Not observable in Malaysia

A solar eclipse is one of the annual phenomena looked forward to by falak and astronomy enthusiasts. When such a phenomenon occurs, amateur astronomy community members always look for attractive places to do their observation. Similarly, Malaysia is also no stranger to being visited by tourists and amateur astronomers. However, since the past two years, Malaysia has not been in the path of eclipse when the phenomenon occurs as the sun already set below western horizon. Such opportunity should be seized by glamping activity site entrepreneurs in Malaysia at the moment. Those astronomy tourism values can be better applied to the built glamping activity sites.

The importance of glamping activities in astronomical tourism borrows its significance from its ability to elevate the dignity of astronomical science in a more comprehensive manner while at the same time adding to the nation's economy to a higher level. Apart from light pollution, there are other types of pollution involving the astrotourism industry such as damage to forests, rivers and so on. With cooperations among glamping activities in astronomy tourism, cleanliness of astronomy-friendly environment will be well maintained. The current trend is that local as well as foreign tourists prefer vacations which are challenging, away from the city, rugged but at the same time comfort and safety are taken care of. This is the cause of glamping sites being built in the post-pandemic era which grow like mushrooms after the rain as recreational venue operators race to provide unique and interesting places to stay. Indirectly, job opportunities can also be given to the local community.

The government's role in promoting and recognizing glamping activity sites is seen as a progressive step to improve the quality of service and the quality of any built site. Preparatory courses and training as well as continuous site supervision will have a positive impact on glamping activity site operators. The recognition by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture of glamping activity sites is seen as one of governmental aids which can contribute to increase in the number of visitors to glamping activity site locations. Looking at other competing countries, glamping activities in Malaysia can be said to be a little slow due to factors such as public health problems, political instability, a shrinking economy, and various other factors. However, the right measures can turn glamping into one of the main sources of the nation's economy.

Conclusion:-

Based on comprehensive observation, tourism activities will always have a high demand from the public. The tourism industry also continues to make a significant contribution to and impact on Malaysia's annual GDP. Hence, the opportunity to highlight astro glamping activities as an astronomical tourism product is an opportunity that must be fully utilized since the post-pandemic era began. The increase in post-pandemic emergence of glamping activity venues is an indication of the wishes and desires of the community towards tourism recreational activities. The application of astronomy in astronomical tourism features and controlled light pollution maintenance are the main pillars in ensuring the continuity of astro glamping activities to remain relevant as the major tour destination choice for local and foreign tourists.

The results of this study found that astronomical tourism activities in Malaysia are still new and less well-received. There is a gap between the public and amateur astronomers causing them to have a lesser interest. Efforts to educate and spread falak knowledge and astronomy can be acted upon through empowerment of glamping activities as one of astronomical tourism products in line with good astronomical tourism products. Therefore, future studies must look at the impact and importance of glamping activities which are characteristically astronomy and free from light pollution and give benefit to falak science and national economic values.

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