

# Cyber solution to ecotourism rating

A systematic expert rating system that uses a web-based information-sharing platform is developed to ensure the sustainability of ecotourism sites in Malaysia.



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The past decade has seen the Malaysian ecotourism industry, experiencing a process of reformation in implementation of best practice. This reflects the commitment by the Malaysian ecotourism industry to achieve the highest standards as well as an evolution of environmental management and performance standards required by regulating government agencies, including protected area managers.

The Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism's Orchid Classification Scheme was formulated to accommodate those hotels, which do not meet the requirements or criteria for any star rating. Besides hotels, the scheme also classifies hostels, beds and breakfasts, inns, boarding houses, rest houses and ecolodges. The Orchid rating is awarded to tourist accommodation premises with basic facilities, which include good, safe and clean accommodation and friendly hospitable atmosphere.

In 1996, the Malaysian National Ecotourism Plan was developed by World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), Malaysia. Diagnostic lists of ecotourism sites were compiled. The factors used to classify ecotourism sites are based on the following:

- Current tourism status
- Accessibility and existing facilities
- Flagship potential
- Type of attractions and activities
- Staff manning the site
- Rehabilitation and recovery needs
- Gross carrying capacity
- Current management agency

## ICT in ecotourism

Among the main problems in the current practice in ensuring sustainable development of the ecotourism industry in Malaysia are:

- Lack of effective sustainable management practice of the ecotourism site,

- Lack of enforcement in ensuring the ecosystem is sustained,
- Insufficient environmental cum ecological expertise that incorporates the fundamental of safety and health issues,
- Lack of consistent approaches in implementing a mitigation abatement measure and in satisfying the requirement of national environmental regulatory authorities,
- Large number of small organisation involved in tourism and their related fields make the effort to collect data from them both costly and time-consuming,
- Unreliable and incomplete ecotourism databases.

Thus, there is a need to develop and maintain a certain level of standards based on different levels of categorisation and rating to ensure the sustainability of these ecotourism sites. Accreditation and certification in the form of electronic rating (e-Rating) is one such approach. Using an Internet-based information-sharing platform, guided by the existing legislation on safety, health and environment, the ecotourism sites in Malaysia can be rated. Where no guidelines are available, recommendations based on the knowledge of human experts in this particular field or domain (domain experts), literature and field survey statistics can be incorporated to further enhance the knowledge based rating system. Previous studies like the diagnostic list of ecotourism sites in Malaysia, can be used in enhancing the ecotourism sites rating system.

A knowledge based system is a computer programme that reasons with knowledge of some specialist subject with a view to solving problems or giving advice. It is an intelligent computer programme that uses knowledge and inference procedures to solve problems that are difficult for human to solve.

