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## Miri city as a festival destination image in the context of Miri Country Music Festival

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### Abstract

The primary objective of the study is to ascertain the festival destination image of Miri. More specifically the study objectives are to determine Miri as a festival destination image among the tourists in the context of Miri Country Music Festival (MCMF) and to assess tourist's satisfaction level of MCMF. The findings show that the participants have positive impression about Miri being a festival destination image. This paper provides some insights to relevant authorities for further improvements to meet the expectation of the tourists. The limitations of the study and future research are also discussed in this paper.

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*Keywords:* Miri; Miri Country Music Festival; expectation; festival destination image; tourist's satisfaction

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### 1. Introduction

Miri is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in Sarawak with a population of about 350,000 people. Miri is also home to a large number of Sarawak's native communities like Ibans, Bidayus, Kayan, Penans, Kenyahs, Punans, Lun Bawang, Berawans and Kelabits. Since the declaration of Miri as a city on 20 May 2005, many local newspapers such as Eastern Times Sarawak, The Borneo Post, United Daily News have constantly reporting on increasing efforts to promote tourism in Miri – in line with the objectives set by Miri city council and the Ministry of Tourism, Sarawak. News reports related to tourism often dealt with issues of environmental and cultural preservation, tourism marketing efforts,

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issues on increasing the numbers of direct flights.

To promote Miri as a resort city and festival destination image, various international events have been held to lure tourists to come to Miri. Among the events are the Borneo International Yachting Challenge, Miri Deep Sea Fishing Tournament, Borneo Jazz Festival, Miri May Fest, Miri International Triathlon, Baram Regatta and the recent event Asia Music Festival.

However, the success of these efforts to promote Miri as festival destination image is still unknown. In addition, no study has been carried out to measure the success rate of these efforts. Thus, there is a need to engage in continuous research to understand visiting tourists' festival destination image of Miri. The MCMF which was held at Park City Everly Hotel on 15 February 2014 provided a good opportunity for a research to gauge a more holistic impression among tourists of Miri as festival destination image.

The primary objective of the study is to ascertain the festival destination image of Miri. More specifically the study objectives are as follows:

1. To determine Miri as a festival destination image among the tourists in the context of MCMF.
2. To assess tourists' satisfaction level of Miri Country Music Festival.

## 2. Literature review

Special events and festivals are beneficial to both communities that host them and visitors they attract. Despite the popularity of festivals in tourism studies, there has been a little research focusing on visitors' perception of community based and local festivals such as the MCMF (Huang, Li, & Cai, 2010; Kim, Kim, Ruetzler, & Taylor, 2010).

Most studies on tourists' perception focuses on the concept of 'destination image' which is defined as "the perceptions of individual destination attributes and the holistic impression made by the destination... consisting of functional characteristics, concerning the more tangible aspects of the destination, and psychological characteristics, concerning the more intangible aspects" (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). The concept of 'destination image' has been widely acknowledged to affect the tourist's subjective perception, his/her buying behaviour and destination choice (Chen & Hsu, 2000; Kozak, 2002; Seddighi & Theocharous, 2002).

Specifically, destination image should include people's perceptions of the destination's attributes, as well as more holistic impressions. Distinctions should also be made between those image characteristics that are directly observable or measurable (functional) and those that are less tangible or difficult to observe (psychological). Moreover, images of destinations can range from those perceptions based on common functional and psychological traits to those based on more unique features or feelings. The intangible and experiential nature of tourism activities means that tourists use both holistic impressions and psychological factors to select the destination of their choice.

In order to boost or fully realize Miri Resort City's tourism potential - as part of the unique Borneo experience - there is a need to engage in continuous research to understand visiting tourists' destination image of Miri and in relation to this, explore the tourists' perception of Miri as a festival tourist destination.

Tourist satisfaction refers to the emotional state of tourists after exposure to the opportunity or experience (Baker & Crompton, 2000). The literature on customer satisfaction focuses primarily on the disconfirmation model of expectations, whereby tourists, like other customers usually have initial expectations of the type and quality of services to be offered in a particular destination. These expectations are formed through information provided via tourism advertisement, brochures, past experience and also via word-of-mouth from friends and relatives. The extent to which their expectations are met by the respective destinations will determine the level of tourist satisfaction. Besides, perceptions of a destination are also influenced by their country of origin (Kozak, 2002).

However, tourists' satisfaction is influenced by 'attribute satisfaction' which is the degree to which the tourist destination's tourism products is perceived to have met or exceeded the tourist's desires and expectations (Spreng, Mackenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996).

Thus, a tourist destination must design its tourism products that meet the demand of its targeted tourists and the assessment of tourist satisfaction on festivals can play a significant role in identifying the favourable destination images of Miri that can contribute towards the success of projecting Miri as a major tourist destination in Sarawak, Malaysia.

### 3. Research methods

For the purpose of this study, the tourists are defined as those who come to Miri to participate in an international event such as MCMF. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been adopted to ascertain Miri as a festival destination image among tourists. For quantitative method, questionnaires were distributed to the international participants attending the MCMF. The researchers administered the distribution of hard copy questionnaires. It was also facilitated by five well trained Curtin University students. In total, 126 responses were collected. The researchers then analysed the data collected and the findings are presented in this report.

For qualitative approach, face-to-face interviews were carried out. The participants were randomly selected among those participated in the MCMF. Before collecting data from the participants, all the participants will be informed of the objectives of the study.

### 4. Research findings

The following section presents the findings in accordance to the research objectives stated earlier.

#### 4.1 Demographic background of the respondents

Table 1: Demographics background of the participants.

Characteristics	Sub-profile	Percentage
Gender	Male	41
	Female	59
Age	15-19	11.9
	20-29	33.1
	30-39	21.2
	40-49	18.6
	50-59	11.9
	60 & above	3.4
Marital status	Single	56.6
	Married	42.5
	Other	0.9
Nationality	Malaysian	83.2
	Non-Malaysian	16.8
Occupation	Senior management	1.7
	Professionals/Consultants	30.4
	Sales and marketing	7.8
	Housewife/homemaker	4.3
	Self-employed	18.3
	Student	16.5
	Retired	0.9
	Other	20.0
Highest education level	Elementary school	3.4
	High school	37.1
	Undergraduate	27.6



Table 2 shows that the participants have positive impression about Miri being a festival destination image in the context of MCMF. They like the unique country music experience, entertainment opportunity and unique atmosphere at the festival. The participants also agreed that the festival was an ideal fun day trip for family and friends of which they thought the people at the festival were warm, friendly and safe. Nevertheless, the participants have a neutral feeling with regard to “things to see and do at the festival” and “festival is a world-class festival”.

#### 4.3 Research Objective 2 – To assess tourists’ satisfaction level of Miri Country Music Festival

Overall, table 3 shows that tourists are generally satisfied with MCMF.

Table 3: Percentage agreement of festival satisfaction, mean, SD and reliability

Festival satisfaction	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean	SD	Reliability
Sound quality	4.8	15.1	18.3	32.5	29.4	3.66	1.18	
Artistes selection	1.6	4.8	31.7	42.1	19.8	3.73	0.88	
Festival program	0.8	5.6	38.1	36.5	19.0	3.67	0.87	
Satisfied with the festival	0	6.4	25.6	45.6	22.4	3.84	0.84	
Worth the money that I spent	0.8	16.8	28.8	34.4	19.2	3.54	1.01	
								0.861

Table 3 shows that 32.5% and 29.4% of the visitors agreed and strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the festival’s sound quality. In addition to the quantitative findings above, qualitative data from interviews with participants also affirmed that they were satisfied with the sound quality of the live music. Few participants commented on good audio and PA system available to ensure the quality sound of live music is reachable both inside and outside the pavilion.

Table 3 also shows that 42.1% and 19.8% of the visitors respectively agreed and strongly agreed that they were satisfied with selection of artistes. In addition to the quantitative findings above, qualitative data from interviews with participants also affirmed that they were satisfied with the selection of artistes. Few participants commented on good combination of local and international artistes which provide a unique experience to enjoy the country music. It was a good attempt by the organiser to provide the platform especially for country music lovers in exchanging culture of country music.

In addition, table 3 shows that 36.5% and 19% of the visitors agreed and strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the festival’s program. In addition to the quantitative findings above, qualitative data from interviews with participants also affirmed that they were satisfied with the festival’s program. Some participants commented on good selection of country music workshops available for them. The program was flexible as such that the participants were able to have beers and meeting people and exchange ideas about country music. One participant also commented highly on an interesting interactive session on line dance where anyone could just get involved and experienced the country dance.

Beside, table 3 also shows that 45.2% and 22.2% of the visitors agreed and strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the festival. In addition to the quantitative findings above, qualitative data from interviews with participants also affirmed that they were satisfied with the festival because of the unique atmospheres of MCMF.

Lastly, table 3 shows that 34.1% and 19% of the visitors agreed and strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the festival because it worth the money that they spent. In addition to the quantitative findings above, qualitative data from interviews with participants also affirmed that they were satisfied with the festival because it worth the money they spent.

Contrary to the above comments, there were small percentage of participants commented on the price of ticket was slightly higher than what they have expected. A few participants tend to compare the price of MCMF with Borneo

Jazz festival.

## 5. Limitations and future research

It was challenging to get the visitors to respond to the survey during the event as they were enjoying the performances. The researchers could only collect data when the visitors were drinking, eating or chatting. Hence, the total respondents with valid responses for further analysis were 126. The study could only capture 14% of international tourists to the event.

Future research should explore the relationship between festival images, festival satisfaction and destination images to ascertain whether tourists' satisfaction of festivals influences their perception of the destination.

## 6. Conclusion

The research is to find out the impression among tourists of Miri as a festival destination image such as MCMF. The purposes are: 1) to determine Miri as a festival destination image among the tourists in the context of MCMF and 2) to assess tourists' satisfaction level of MCMF. The questionnaire survey instrument is the primary mode used to collect data. Moreover, in-depth interviews were conducted to enrich the data collected via questionnaire.

The findings show that the participants have positive impression about Miri being a festival destination image in the context of MCMF. They like the unique country music experience, entertainment opportunity and unique atmosphere at the festival. The participants also agreed that the festival was an ideal fun day trip for family and friends of which they thought the people at the festival were warm, friendly and safe. Nevertheless, the participants have a neutral feeling with regard to "things to see and do at the festival" and "festival is a world-class festival". Furthermore, findings also suggest the participants are generally satisfied with MCMF in terms of sound quality, selection of artistes and the program. However, more activities to enhance the country music theme such as variety of programs can be introduced in the coming years.

In sum, MCMF could be another festival icon to further enhance Miri City's image as a festival destination. To ensure the sustainability of MCMF, it requires the effort of various stakeholders such as Miri City Council, the Ministry of Tourism Sarawak, the organiser, private sectors and the community in general.

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