

Promoting Conservation Management through Volunteerism: The Matang Wildlife Centre Experience

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Abstract

The Convention for Biological Diversity places responsibility on signature countries to protect and conserve their biodiversity. Finding ways to promote, develop and finance conservation management can be a challenge and requires innovative solutions. Ecotourism, which is used to move nature-based tourism towards higher sustainability standards and achieving sustainable development goals, is an innovative solution.

Identified as an upcoming niche in the ecotourism sector, *volunteer tourism*, whereby students or working professionals contribute their money and time to spend on volunteering in conservation projects, helps achieve the promotion of conservation management.

The joint efforts of Matang Wildlife Centre which is managed by Sarawak Forestry Corporation Sdn Bhd and UK based Ecotourism Company, Way Out Experiences Ltd, is a rare breed of effective, creative and sustainable ecotourism ventures. Way Out Experiences works as an ethical travel company achieving positive environmental change through the inclusion of social and economic considerations and assists Matang Wildlife Centre to recruit relevant volunteers from the UK and US. This partnership is designed to work within the scope of the conservation management plan of Sarawak Forestry Corporation towards orangutans and other animals at the Matang Wildlife Centre.

The volunteer programme is currently in its infancy and showing early positive results. There are plans to bring in primate experts and conservation education experts early next year on a long-term basis to further strengthen the outcomes with coordinated internationally-recognized research, and to increase the participation of the local community. This will ultimately provide; increased knowledge transfer between east and west, well founded scientific data on which to base policy, expand the ecotourism potential in the area driving community involvement and creating local economy, and generate positive public relations and international recognition. This will in turn allow the Sarawak Forestry Corporation to enhance its conservation and protection responsibilities in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity.