



UNDERSTANDING THE DIVE GUIDES ROLES IN MALAYSIA: A MALAYSIAN SCUBA DIVER PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Scuba diving is a growingly popular recreational activity throughout the globe, providing tourists with a more dynamic experience during their holiday. While there is an increasing interest in scuba diving and tourism, which encompass a wide range of topics, there is limited knowledge about the expectations regarding the role of scuba dive guides from the perspective of scuba divers. Thus, this paper aims to explore the expected roles that should be played by scuba dive guides from the perspective of scuba divers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 Malaysian scuba divers. Following thematic analysis, seven roles have been identified: Dive Site Experts, Navigators, Spotters, Underwater Conservationists, Product Informants, Diver Experience Mediators, and Diving Ambassadors. The findings are expected to have substantial implications for researchers, diving business operators, and tourism marketers.

Keywords: *Scuba Dive Guides; Dive Guides Roles; Tour Guides: Scuba Dive Operator; Malaysia Scuba Diving*

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INTRODUCTION

Scuba diving has become a widely popular outdoor recreational activity, experiencing rapid global growth and boasting a large number of participants. It has turned into a multibillion-dollar industry and ranks among the fastest-growing recreational sports within specialized tourism worldwide (Dignan, 1990; Ong & Musa, 2011). With

approximately one million new scuba divers earning certification each year (Bennet, 2003), The Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI, 2010) reports that over 19 million individuals worldwide hold PADI certification, highlighting the industry's significant expansion and the imperative for further research to ensure the sustainable development of scuba diving tourism. Thus, marine destinations have become coveted spots for leisure adventure seekers including scuba divers. Activities in marine environments range from energetic pursuits like shark diving, and underwater historical exploration including World War II shipwrecks to more peaceful experiences like macro dives observation (Higham & Lück, 2008). Often regarded as a form of marine ecotourism, scuba diving offers scuba divers the chance to closely engage with marine life (Cater & Cater, 2007).

Malaysia is one of the diving destinations that offers diving packages to both domestic and international scuba divers. Scuba diving tourism in Malaysia has grown significantly due to its prime location along the equator, boasting a vast coastline of over 4,800 km and diverse marine life (Mazlan et. al, 2005). Similar to neighboring South Asian countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand, Malaysia offers a variety of islands, marine ecosystems, and coral reefs. Initially obscure in the 1970s, scuba diving gained traction as the Malaysian government recognized its tourism potential and began promoting it actively, notably participating in major tourism exhibitions worldwide. Currently, Malaysia offers well-known diving spots like Sipadan, Mabul, Redang, Perhentian, and Tioman islands, accommodating scuba divers of varying expertise levels.

To support sustainable tourism, Malaysia has established marine parks and protected areas, with the Department of Marine Parks overseeing their management (Halim, 2020). These efforts aim to conserve marine resources, particularly coral reefs, and marine biodiversity for future generations. Marine parks not only serve as ecological shelters but also contribute significantly to the local economy, attracting around 800,000 tourists annually (Zainal, 2019). According to a report released by Travel Trade Report Weekly (2020), revenue from dive tourism activities, especially in Sabah, illustrates its economic impact, benefiting local communities and the environment. With calm waters and protected reefs, Malaysia offers diving opportunities year-round, particularly along the eastern coast of Peninsular Malaysia from March to September. Dive sites are accessible by speedboats and offer water temperatures ranging from 28 to 30 degrees Celsius. The Malaysia Scuba Diving Association (MSDA) identifies 19 popular diving spots across the country, with eight in Peninsular Malaysia and eleven in East Malaysia. Most sites face the South China Sea, particularly in Terengganu, Pahang, Johor, and northern Sabah. Distinguished diving sites encompass Payar Island in the Andaman Sea, along with renowned spots in the Celebes Sea like Sipadan, Kapalai, and Mabul islands.

The increasing popularity of scuba diving as a recreational activity has not only transformed it into a profitable industry but also highlighted the crucial role played by dive guides in ensuring a safe and enriching experience for scuba divers. Unlike other tourism attractions that utilize the role of tour guides such as city tours or nature expeditions in Malaysia to provide an extensive tourism experience among tourists, certified city guides and nature guides undergo an extensive training program like the City Tour Guide and Nature Guide. The training is developed and recognized by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC). However, scuba diving lacks such formalized frameworks at the national level. In the context of the scuba diving industry, the underwater guiding service of the scuba diving package is performed by certified scuba diving instructors or divemasters (Professional Association of Diving Instructors, 2002) hereafter known as dive guides in this article. Professionally, dive guides have met the requirements for underwater guiding following the World Recreational Scuba Training Council (WRSTC) standards (World Recreational Scuba Training Council, 2007). Dive guides have completed the training focusing on technical aspects related to diving skills and safety protocols.

Recognizing that dive guides are essential stakeholders in the scuba diving industry ecosystems, it is important to explore the expected roles of dive guides among scuba divers. While current studies primarily have explored diving activity on environmental impacts (Masud, 2019), diver satisfaction (Halim, 2020; Lucrezi et al., 2019), and underwater behavior (Ahmad Puad et al., 2019), there remains a significant gap in research concerning the roles of professional divers in scuba diving industry. It is important to understand the expectations of scuba divers towards dive guides to bridge this research gap and enhance the overall diving experience for scuba divers. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring the expectations of scuba divers towards dive guides in the scuba diving industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tour Guides

To understand the role of dive guides, this study explores tour guides' historical roots. Early accounts mention various roles such as "pathfinders," "bear leaders," "proxemos," and "cicerones," which served as precursors to today's tour guides (Powell, 1993). While guiding has existed for thousands of years, it was not until the onset of modern mass tourism that tour guides became integral to the travel industry. Presently, the role of tour guides is essential in organized tourism, supporting both tour managers and tour leaders during travel and welcoming groups to destinations (Rabotic, 2008). As Tosun and Temizkan (2004) point out, tour guides bear significant duties and responsibilities within the tourism sector. Their role extends beyond merely conveying information; it also entails presenting it engagingly and authentically (Ap & Wong, 2001). Furthermore, tour guides play a crucial and evaluative role in ensuring tourists' satisfaction with the organization and overall travel experience (Zengin & Yildirgan, 2004).

Tour guides, who interact closely with visitors at various destinations, hold significant importance as stakeholders. Francis et al. (2019) emphasize their pivotal role in promoting sustainable tourism and mitigating negative impacts. Similarly, Hu and Wall (2012) stress the necessity for further research into the roles of guides, highlighting their crucial contribution to the tourist experience and the pursuit of sustainability objectives. Numerous scholars (Black et al., 2001; Weiler and Ham, 2002; Hu, 2007; Littlefair and Buckley, 2008; Sandaruwani and Gnanapala, 2016; Walker and Weiler, 2017; Kabii, 2017; Alazaizeh et al., 2019) have also underscored the importance of tourist guides in the tourism literature. According to Tatar et al. (2018), the role of tourist guides in fostering and sustaining the local economy is essential, given the dynamic and complex nature of tourism amidst broader societal advancements.

Some other scholars in tourism such as Cohen (1985), Ap and Wong (2001), Dahles (2002), and Yu et al., (2001) have concluded some of the tour guides' roles as follows:

- A leader that has full responsibility towards tourists.
- An information giver and source of information/ knowledge.
- A mentor (acts similar to a teacher, tutor, instructor, or advisor).
- An educator helps tourists familiarize themselves and understand the tourist destination visited.
- An educator helps tourists understand broader aspects including such as society, culture, religion, education, health, economics, and political

- An ambassador fosters hospitality and showcases the destination in a manner that attracts visitors to revisit.
- As a host, they cultivate a welcoming atmosphere for tourists and employ influence over the quality of service and the overall tourist experience, consequently affecting the duration of their stay and the resulting economic advantages for the local community.

In the context of dive guides, their routines include briefing scuba divers on the layout and points of interest of a dive site, suggesting routes for a dive at a specific site for autonomous divers, checking scuba divers into and out of the water from a boat or shore entry point, leading a group of scuba divers in the water. Dive guides are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of divers throughout the dive, including managing emergencies and coordinating rescue services if needed. As diving activity is highly related to the equipment's technology, a deep understanding of the special equipment used in diving must be kept up-to-date with the trend. Furthermore, dive guides are anticipated to provide scuba divers with comprehensive information about marine life and their surroundings, including details on various fish species, coral formations, and the historical significance of the dive site. This equips scuba divers with the necessary knowledge for an enriching and unforgettable diving experience. Thus, dive guides hold a few roles in delivering the service to scuba divers. Similar to tour guides but work in a different environment.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection Process

As the goal of this study is to explore the roles of scuba dive guides from a scuba diver perspective, a qualitative approach gave access to participant expectations. Qualitative research prioritizes understanding issues rather than relying on numerical data, emphasizing the depth and quality of information collected. Scholars such as Queirós et al. (2017) and Anyan (2013) underscore the effectiveness of qualitative research in delving into complex topics and offering profound insights. Creswell and Plano (2018) suggests that understanding individual experiences necessitates employing the interviewing method within the framework of phenomenological inquiry. Therefore, to delve deeply into these experiences, the study favored the use of in-depth interviews. A purposive sample comprising 13 scuba divers who met the specified criteria was selected for face-to-face interviews. The first criteria are participants must meet certain prerequisites which they should be actively engaged in diving activities for a minimum of two years to ensure they possess up-to-date knowledge of prevailing trends and demands within the nature of scuba diving. Secondly, they must have accumulated more than two years of overall diving experience. Thirdly, participants are expected to have prior diving experience in locations such as the islands of Terengganu, various diving spots across Malaysia, or international diving destinations.

The researchers made use of their networking in the scuba dive industry to reach out to participants. Subsequently, follow-up contact was established with interested participants via phone and email. The interviews were done utilizing semi-structured questionnaires and conducted from August to September 2023. Open-ended questions were posed during the interviews to elicit participants' perspectives and insights. Hennink and Kaiser (2021) indicate that in-depth interviews in research studies typically achieve saturation, indicating no new information gained, within 25 interviews, typically ranging between 9 and 17 interviews. Considering this, the inclusion of 13 participants was deemed adequate for the study's objectives. Data saturation was achieved following the conducting of 13 interviews.

Participants Profile Description

Demographic characteristics information of the participants are shown in Table 1. A total of thirteen (13) participants were engaged, each given a code from DC-01 to DC-13 to ensure their anonymity. Most were employed in private or government sectors, with a gender distribution of eight (8) males and five (5) females were involved. Diving experience varied among participants. Two (2) participants were novices with less than two years of experience.

Five (5) were intermediate scuba divers with 3 to 8 years of experience. Three (3) had advanced experience (9 to 14 years) while another three (3) participants were experts (15 to 20 years). Their insights provide a range of perspectives on diving activities and information.

Table 1: Profile of participants

ID	Gender	Employment Status	Occupational Field	Diving Experience	Level of Competency
DC-01	Female	Employed	Government	≤ 2 years	Beginner
DC-02	Male	Employed	Private	≥ 10 years	Advanced
DC-03	Male	Employed	Private	≥ 20 years	Expert
DC-04	Male	Employed	Private	≥ 5 years	Intermediate
DC-05	Female	Employed	Government	≥ 18 years	Expert
DC-06	Male	Employed	Government	≥ 5 years	Intermediate
DC-07	Male	Employed	Government	≥ 10 years	Advanced
DC-08	Male	Employed	Private	≥ 15 years	Expert
DC-09	Male	Employed	Private	≤ 2 years	Beginner
DC-10	Female	Employed	Private	≥ 5 years	Intermediate
DC-11	Female	Employed	Government	≥ 5 years	Intermediate
DC-12	Female	Employed	Private	≥ 10 years	Advanced
DC-13	Male	Employed	Private	≥ 5 years	Intermediate

Data Analysis

Following the interview sessions, transcription of the recorded interviews was completed manually while the details were still fresh in the researcher's memory, as suggested by Mcgrath et al. (2019). Transcriptions were performed meticulously to ensure accuracy and preserve the richness of information provided by the participants. Thematic analysis stands out as a systematic and suitable method for analyzing qualitative data. It offers flexibility and effectiveness, accommodating various approaches in qualitative and mixed-method research, including generic qualitative studies, despite not constituting a comprehensive study framework (Crowe et al., 2015).

According to Clarke and Braun (2013), thematic analysis serves as a means to identify and dissect patterns within qualitative research, making it beneficial for studies seeking simultaneous interpretations. Moreover, thematic analysis, as highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a versatile and valuable research tool capable of generating detailed and intricate records of information. In this study, data derived from interview audio recordings and transcripts are subjected to analysis using the ATLAS.ti 23 software program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews with all participants revealed seven key roles of dive guides in scuba diving, outlined in Figure 1.

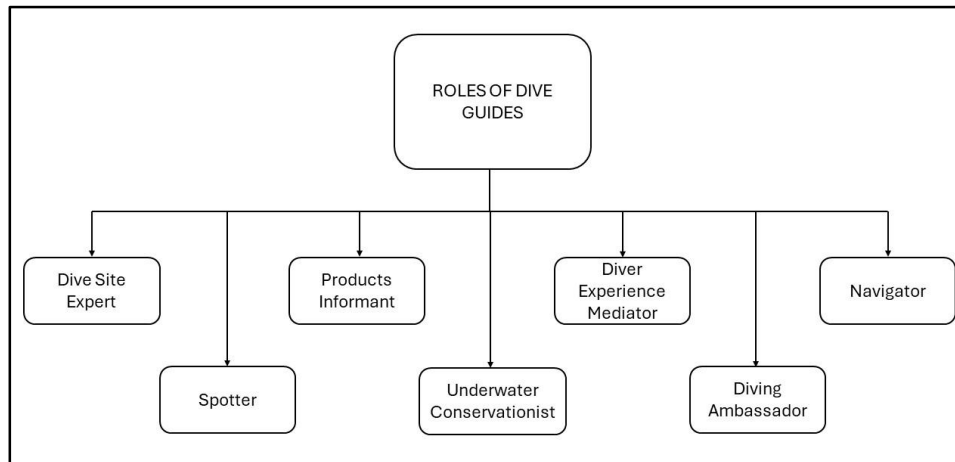


Figure 1: Roles of dive guides

Dive Site Expert

Participants emphasized the pivotal role of dive guides in facilitating connections between scuba divers and specific dive sites. They stressed the significance of dive guides possessing not only extensive knowledge but also a profound familiarity with the area. Dive site experts are expected to possess a comprehensive understanding of various aspects, including the geographical layout, marine life diversity, and environmental conditions prevalent in the region. Scuba diving sites exhibit diverse characteristics, ranging from the depths of the ocean floor to the visibility of underwater landscapes and the abundance of marine species. These sites encompass a variety of environments, such as sunken ships, coral reefs, artificial reefs, caves, and more technically challenging locations tailored for experienced scuba divers. The choice of a dive site is influenced by multiple factors, including visibility, current stability, and the richness of marine biodiversity. Each scuba diver's preference and objectives in underwater exploration contribute to the selection process, intending to ensure a fulfilling and rewarding diving experience. Thus, with their various specializations, dive guides are seen as the channel for relaying this information to scuba divers, serving as dive site expert references for scuba divers.

Given the complexity and diversity of dive sites, scuba divers prioritize the guidance of knowledgeable dive guides who possess a deep understanding of the area's intricacies. These guides provide valuable insights and assistance tailored to the scuba divers' preferences and objectives, enhancing the overall quality and safety of the diving expedition. Interviews conducted with scuba divers revealed varying perspectives based on their levels of experience. Beginners and intermediate scuba divers expressed concerns regarding the guide's competence and familiarity with diving sites. Conversely, expert scuba divers placed greater emphasis on receiving detailed information about dive site characteristics, including topography, water conditions, and marine life diversity.

For beginner scuba divers, they stress the importance of dive guides understanding dive sites well as part of their job responsibilities. Research suggests that when employees comprehend their roles and find satisfaction in their tasks, they exhibit increased productivity and commitment. When employees find fulfillment in their work and understand their assignments clearly, they exhibit enhanced performance and a greater commitment to their

duties. (Zeeshan et al., 2021). One participant expressed this sentiment, stating:

"Dive guides need to be familiar, understand their dive sites, and do their homework to perform effectively."
(Participant DC-09).

Intermediate scuba divers emphasized their reliance on dive guides for guidance, noting that guides' regular diving experience in the area should equip them with extensive knowledge of the sites. Another participant stated:

"Divers depend on dive guides as they are familiar with the area."
(Participant DC-10).

Expert scuba divers added that dive guides should not only be familiar with the dive sites but also have a deep understanding of underwater seafloor topography. This includes knowledge of seafloor composition and underwater features like reefs and caves, which are crucial for planning dives safely according to scuba divers' capabilities and experience levels. Dive planning is essential to minimize the risk of incidents or accidents. One participant remarked:

"Dive guides should understand the underwater seafloor and depth of dive sites for effective dive planning, considering factors like experience level and air consumption."
(Participant DC-08).

Products Informant

Dive guides play a pivotal role in shaping the overall scuba diving experience by providing scuba divers with valuable information about the unique features and attractions of dive sites. Their knowledge and expertise contribute significantly to ensuring that scuba divers have a memorable and enjoyable experience underwater. Holloway (1981) stated that tour guides generally view their primary role as providing information and consider building a substantial knowledge base essential for establishing their professional status.

For beginner scuba divers, dive guides serve as essential sources of information about what makes each diving destination special and worth exploring. Beginners often seek guidance on what makes a particular destination stand out from others, looking for compelling and exciting aspects that will enhance their diving experience. This could include information about the marine environment, coral reefs, marine species, terrain, and water visibility, all of which contribute to the uniqueness of each dive site. Conversely, experienced scuba divers, who may have visited numerous dive sites, focus more on the differences in marine life and product enrichment. They seek dive guides who possess in-depth knowledge of the marine ecosystem, including macro and micro marine creatures, types of corals, and various fish species. Experienced scuba divers value dive guides who can provide detailed insights into the underwater world, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of the marine environment.

For instance, dive sites like Tenggol Island in Terengganu are known for their abundance of whale sharks and diverse macro marine life, making them popular destinations for underwater photographers and enthusiasts. Similarly, Sipadan Island is famous for its breathtaking "drop-off" walls, where coral reefs plunge into the deep blue, offering scuba divers dramatic underwater scenery and diverse coral formations. Participant DC-01 emphasized the importance of dive guides introducing scuba divers to protected species and unique products in the area, highlighting the distinctiveness of Terengganu compared to other diving destinations:

"Dive guides are able to inform and introduce divers about protected species or significant products in the surrounding area. Dive guides should be the ones to introduce and expose the uniqueness of the area, particularly Terengganu, compared to other destinations such as Tioman Island, Pahang."

For experienced scuba divers at various expertise levels, the necessity for dive guides to possess an extensive understanding of the marine life and creatures specific to the diving destination was emphasized:

“Dive guides should be expert and knowledgeable about dive sites, marine products, and what could be found at that dive site. Dive guides also should understand diver's preference diver such as their interest in macro or micro creatures, types of corals, and school of fish. The dive guide should have sufficient knowledge of all information mentioned above.”

Participant DC-02

Diver Experience Mediator

Scuba diving is a complex activity that attracts enthusiasts for a variety of reasons, from seeking adventure to exploring marine ecosystems or contributing to environmental conservation efforts (Lucrezi et al., 2013). Dive guides play a pivotal role in mediating scuba divers' objectives and ensuring they have a fulfilling diving experience.

Moscardo (1998) emphasizes the crucial role of tour guides in enhancing tourists' experiences by empowering them to actively engage in specific activities, ultimately leading to increased tourist satisfaction. Participant DC-04 highlighted the crucial responsibility of dive guides in assisting scuba divers in locating and observing specific marine creatures, which are often the focal point of their diving excursions. This underscores the importance of dive guides possessing in-depth knowledge of the dive site and its inhabitants to facilitate successful dives. Participant quoted as:

“Dive guides are also responsible for ensuring divers achieve their diving objectives such as finding and spotting the marine creatures that are wanted by the divers.”

Participant DC-04

Moreover, another participant emphasized the significance of dive guides being well-versed in the dive site's characteristics and understanding the preferences of the diving group. By possessing a thorough understanding of the area and the scuba divers' expectations, dive guides can effectively tailor the diving experience to meet their specific interests and goals. Participants stated:

“Dive guides should know the area very well and understand the group of the divers. Especially when dealing with a group of divers that looking for certain marine creatures or had their specific diving objective.”

Participant DC-06

Additionally, Participant DC-07 emphasized the role of dive guides in satisfying scuba divers' needs and expectations, highlighting the importance of providing a personalized and enjoyable diving experience. The quote is as follows:

“Dive guides should try to satisfy divers needs and demands.”

Participant DC-07

Drawing parallels with tour guides in other contexts (Ap & Wong, 2001), dive guides possess the knowledge and communication skills necessary to enhance scuba divers' experiences. By understanding scuba divers' goals and preferences, dive guides can effectively guide them through the underwater environment, ensuring that they have a fulfilling experience. This underscores the integral role that dive guides play in mediating divers' goals and expectations, ultimately contributing to a positive and enjoyable diving experience for all participants.

Navigator

Dive guides serve a vital function similar to other tour guides, enhancing the overall diving experience through their guidance. Acting as navigators underwater, dive guides meticulously plan routes and lead diving groups, ensuring safety and cohesion throughout the dive. The role of a navigator remains vital in enabling tourists to thoroughly explore unfamiliar environments (McDonnell, 2001). Participants emphasized this role, highlighting the guide's function as a navigator, knowledgeable about the dive site:

"One of the dive guides' roles is to be a path guide or navigator to the divers since dive guides are knowledgeable of that dive site."

Participant DC-05

Meanwhile, another participant mentioned the combination roles of both navigators and spotters for marine life for the dive guides is crucial in providing their services. The participant quoted as:

"Dive guide functioned as path guider/ direction expert or spotter for the marine creatures as well."

Participant DC-06

As tour guides direct journeys and ensure everyone stays on track, dive guides utilize strong navigational skills to choose safe paths and prevent scuba divers from straying into hazards. Their familiarity with the dive site is crucial for keeping scuba divers safe and ensuring an enjoyable experience. By guiding scuba divers along designated routes, dive guides play a pivotal role in maintaining safety and consistency, enhancing the overall scuba diving experience.

Spotter

Participants also identified another role for dive guides as spotters. Dive guides assist scuba divers in locating and identifying marine life, artifacts, or other points of interest underwater. They are trained professionals familiar with the local environment, guiding scuba divers to specific sites where interesting items can be found. With their expertise in navigation, dive guides ensure safe exploration while providing insights into marine ecosystems and creature behavior. Participants highlighted the guide's role in spotting special creatures at different dive sites as follows:

"Dive guides are also very helpful in assisting divers to find and locate special creatures because every dive site offers different uniqueness and attractions."

Participant DC-03

"Then, dive guides functioned as path guider/ direction experts or spotters for the marine creatures as well."

Participant DC-06

In a study by Egresi and Prakash (2021), the importance of skilled guides was emphasized for a satisfying destination experience. These guides, acting as spotters or naturalists, helped tourists spot marine life effectively. This underscores the need for dive guides with specific spotting skills to enhance the diving experience by identifying and locating underwater attractions accurately.

Underwater Conservationist

During interviews, all participants emphasized the crucial role of dive guides in educating scuba divers and raising environmental awareness, aligning with the role of underwater conservationists. This role involves protecting and educating scuba divers about the environment, wildlife, and ecosystems. Riniwati et al. (2019) underscored the importance of tour guides in environmental education. Scuba divers gain firsthand insights into marine ecosystems, fostering a deeper appreciation for environmental conservation. Responsible diving practices, like preserving corals

and maintaining neutral buoyancy, help minimize environmental impact. Participants highlighted the dive guide's role in educating scuba divers about the underwater environment and marine life.

"Dive guides are responsible for educating divers and raising awareness, especially about coral and marine life."

Participant DC-01

Additionally, participants also stressed the importance of performing scuba diving sustainably, highlighting the need for dive guides to emphasize good practices and habits among scuba divers. Respecting the marine environment is crucial, emphasizing the importance of not touching or disturbing marine life. By educating scuba divers about rules and regulations, dive guides play a significant role in preserving underwater ecosystems. One participant remarked:

"Dive guides should inform and educate divers about the rules and regulations and the reason behind that. Some divers when they go diving and are too excited, tend to forget and sometimes even do inappropriate things such as touching the marine life or damaging the reefs."

Participant DC-01

Diving Ambassador

Participants highlighted another role of dive guides as the diving ambassadors. In the scuba diving industry, diving ambassadors play a vital role for several reasons. They engage in activities aimed at attracting scuba divers, enhancing their experience, and promoting the unique attractions of diving destinations. Moteka (2014) suggests that tour guides act as promoters, positively impacting local businesses by generating interest in the area and its products. Consequently, dive guides function as diving ambassadors who promote and broaden the scuba diving industry by bringing scuba divers to various sites. This benefits not only local businesses but also stimulates the economy through increased tourism in areas such as accommodations, dining, and shopping. Participant expressed:

"Additionally, dive guides serve as selling points for diving destinations. They promote the area, making it appealing for scuba diving. Our destination needs more divers to ensure all businesses thrive."

Participant DC-11

Thus, the role of dive guides as diving ambassadors in the scuba diving industry is deemed crucial and essential, not only guiding scuba divers but also actively promoting diving destinations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insight into the roles of dive guides in the scuba diving industry. This study has explored the expected roles of dive guides among scuba divers. The interviews revealed that dive guides share similarities with tour guides in their roles, with the main distinction residing in their respective work environments. This distinction is reflected in and contributes to the satisfaction of the scuba divers. The study highlights the multiple roles of dive guides in facilitating scuba diving experiences. Participants underscored the importance of dive guides as dive site experts, navigators, spotters, and underwater conservationists. Dive guides serve as vital mediators between scuba divers and dive sites, ensuring safety, providing valuable insights, and enhancing the overall diving experience. Moreover, they play a crucial role in educating scuba divers about environmental conservation and promoting sustainable diving practices.

Overall, the study underscores the indispensable contributions of dive guides to the scuba diving industry. Their roles extend beyond mere guidance, encompassing education, conservation, and promotion. As diving

enthusiasts continue to seek enriching and sustainable experiences, the importance of well-trained and knowledgeable dive guides remains paramount in ensuring enjoyable and memorable diving adventures for all participants. Thus, the findings of this study meet the study objective of exploring the actual roles of dive guides in Malaysia.

The findings of this study have several theoretical implications that could contribute to the understanding of competency skills among professional dive guides. First, the research has shed light on an area of the scuba diving industry on the role of professional divers as dive guides. Second, stemming from the seven roles of dive guides in scuba diving from the perspective of recreational divers, this study signifies the importance of element knowledge among dive guides. Information on underwater tourism products particularly underwater marine life is crucial for dive guides to be equipped with under a training program. On the other hand, this study reveals several managerial implications that can guide scuba diving operators and dive guides in enhancing scuba divers's experiences and maximizing the value delivered. The results emphasized the pivotal role of dive guides's knowledge of underwater marine attractions in bridging the guiding services. This requires continuous training programs among dive guides on information related to the local underwater attraction for a more immersive diving experience. This potentially suggests additional courses to be developed and certified by MOTAC for local dive guides to ensure dive guides are well-trained with Malaysia underwater tourism products and equipped with accurate information about the underwater local species and habitats.

While the study provides valuable insight into the roles of dive guides, some limitations create opportunities for future research to expand our understanding in this domain. One limitation is the generalizability of the findings. The study generalized the roles of dive guides based on recreational scuba divers' experience on their random scuba diving packages. This may limit the extent to which the findings can be applied to other settings. Future studies could examine the impact of dive guides in a particular setting such as the type of diving packages or diving destinations.

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