EXPLORING TOURISM IN THE CITY OF KUALA LUMPUR

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Abstract

Kuala Lumpur, the capital city and the heartbeat of Malaysia, certainly has enough tourism products to keep tourists occupied while visiting the city. This study explores the hotel managers' perception and opinion on tourism potentials of Kuala Lumpur as a tourism destination and looks at ways to develop the tourism products that are available there. Sixty hotel managers of hotels in the city area were interviewed. The results show that Kuala Lumpur lacks a number of important elements of a successful destination, and faces serious challenges such as lack of security, bad traffic, high cost and lack of cleanliness.

Keyword: tourism product, destination, hotel managers, Kuala Lumpur

Abstrak

Kuala Lumpur, sebagai ibukota Malaysia dikunjungi oleh turis setiap tahunnya. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi persepsi dari manajer, serta opini turis potensial terhadap Kuala Lumpur sebagai tujuan pariwisata. Selain itu penelitian ini akan membantu memberikan gagasan mengenai produk pariwisata yang dimiliki Malaysia. Penelitian mewawancarai 60 manajer hotel di kota Kuala Lumpur untuk mendapatkan gambaran yang memadai mengenai industri pariwisatanya. Hasil penelitian menunjukan bahwa beberapa hal penting membutuhkan perhatian pemerintah kota Kuala Lumpur misalnya mengenai kepadatan lalulintas, biaya yang mahal, dan kebersihan yang kurang.

Kata kunci: *tourism product, destination, hotel managers, Kuala Lumpur*

1. Research Background

Tourism is the world's generator of wealth. It has proved to be an economic vehicle for developing nations. UNWTO's Tourism 2020 Vision forecasts that by 2020 the world international arrival will reach almost 1.6 billion people. It also forecasts that a growth of 5% a year is possible for countries in East Asia and Pacific, Asia, the Middle-east and Africa.

Malaysia is located in the heart of South East Asia and is part of the ASEAN community. Tourism Malaysia (2008b) stated that in Malaysia there were 20.9 million foreign tourists in the year 2007. Malaysia received RM46,070 million from these tourists expenditures.

The capital city, Kuala Lumpur is the largest city in Malaysia with a population of 1.3 million (Jaafar, 2004). In the year 2007, there were 16.5 million domestic and foreign tourists staying in Kuala Lumpur's hotels (Tourism Malaysia, 2008a) making it the most visited destination in Malaysia. Although Kuala Lumpur received the majority of the tourist in Malaysia, it is still far from becoming a successful tourism destination, In order to be a successful tourism destination, tourists must be satisfied with the tourism products and the delivery of those products (Jayawardena, 2002). Therefore, to become a successful tourism destination, Kuala Lumpur must have tourism products that will satisfy its tourists. Therefore the research objectives are as follows:

a) To explore the existing potential of the tourism situation in Kuala Lumpur.
b) To identify the complaints on Kuala Lumpur as a tourism destination.
c) To identify tourism products that needs to be developed in Kuala Lumpur.

2. Review of Literature

Tourism according to World Tourism Organisation (WTO) (1991) comprises: "the activities of a person traveling outside his or her usual environment for the less than a specified period of time and whose main purpose of travel is other than exercise of an activity remunerated from the place visited". (Page et al., 2001). Tourism destinations are an important component of the tourism industry. Destinations are difficult to be categorized because of wide interpretations that include natural and man-made environment or a combination of both (Page et al., 2001). Tourism destination can also be considered as a product, brand or even geographical areas (Hall, 2000; Buhalis, 2000). Destinations could also be defined as the center of services and facilities intended to serve the desires of the tourists (Cooper et al., 1998). According to Buhalis (2000) a destination can be perceived differently by tourists. It shall depend on the tourists' travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, educational level and past experience.

Swarbrooke (2002) stated that destinations can be divided into four main types which are natural environment, man-made but not originally designed primarily to attract visitors, man-made and purpose build to attract tourist, and special events. Goeldner and Ritchie (2006) said that destinations can be distinguished according to 5 elements which were cultural attractions, natural attractions, events, recreational, and entertainment attractions.

Tourism destination could also be a reflection of an individual's opinion about a destination's perceived ability to satisfy that individual's tourism needs (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Van Raaij (1986) looks at destination as a product that could be natural or man-made. Man-made products include accommodation, transportation and its services, architecture and tourism facilities, while natural products may include climate, beaches, mountains, islands and flora/fauna. Leiper (1995) stated that destinations are places that tourist travels to and stay in order to obtain travel experiences. Tourism destination can be concluded as a place providing tourism products and services for tourists.

Product according to Kotler et al. (2003) is "anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a

want or need. It includes physical objects, services, places, organizations and ideas". Tourism products could be regarded as tourism attractions or resources (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Buhalis (2000) said that destinations offer a combination of products and services to the tourist. He further listed a number of elements of tourism attractions that is quite similar with many other literature (Weaver and Lawton, 2006; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2006). The elements are amenities (accommodations, retailing, culinary facilities); accessibility (transportation and transportation system); attractions (man-made, natural, special events); available packages, activities and supplementary services (communications, bureau de change). Murphy et al. (2000) on the other hand looks at tourism products as the tourism destination overall environment (political, cultural, social and physical) and its infrastructure.

3. Research Methodology

This study is part of a bigger study which looks at developing tourism products by different tourism stakeholders in Kuala Lumpur. This study employs two types of methodologies. First, quantitative research was conducted, followed by qualitative research. As the initial stage of the study was to identify the stakeholders that will be interviewed and to gather information, 100 respondents were chosen based on a convenient sampling to answer questionnaires.

Hotel managers are one of the stakeholders of tourism in Kuala Lumpur and they were chosen as respondents of this study. Sixty (60) hotel managers were interviewed based on a purposive sampling. The internet was used to acquire the list of non-budget and budget hotels in Kuala Lumpur. They were contacted and interview dates were set before interviews were carried out.

4. Result and Discussions
4.1. Respondent Background

60 hotel managers were interviewed and the percentage breakdown is as follows. 55.5% from budget hotel managers, 29.5% from 3-stars properties, 9.8% from 4-stars properties and 3.3% from 5-stars properties.

21-80% of the hotels were patronized by domestic tourist (82%). 1-60% of the hotels were patronized by 83.6% foreign tourist. (refer to Table 1) Most of the hotel managers that were interviewed have domestic tourists as their guests.

Table 1. Percentage of Hotel Guest

	Domestic		International	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1-20%	1	1.6	15	24.6
21-40%	14	23.0	18	29.5
41-60%	18	29.5	18	29.5
61-80%	18	29.5	7	11.5
81-100%	7	11.5	0	0

The foreign tourists were from the ASEAN countries, East Asia, Australia, Europe, America, Middle East and other Asian countries (refer to

Table Percentage of Hotel Guests' Origin Region on appendixes). 21–80% of the hotels received 65.5% of ASEAN tourist, while 1-20% of the hotels received 72.1% of tourist from East Asia, tourist from Australia (68.9%), 77% tourist from Europe, 68.9% of tourist from America, 78.7% tourist from Middle East and 70.5% tourist from other countries in Asia. It can be concluded that the majority of foreign tourist staying in Kuala Lumpur are from the ASEAN countries.

4.2. Perceptions on Kuala Lumpur

Kuala Lumpur is perceived as a developing city by majority (25%) of the respondents. 18.3% of the respondents perceived it as beautiful. Other perceptions of Kuala Lumpur are big (8.3%), dirty (8.3%), busy (6.7%), congested (5%), melting pot (5%), unsatisfactory facilities (5%) and shopping venue (5%). Table Perception on Kuala Lumpur (appendixes) shows detail of the perceptions on Kuala Lumpur by hotel managers. Perceiving Kuala Lumpur as a developing city shows that this city has the potential to grow in terms of its tourism products and as a tourism destination as a whole.

4.3. Important Tourism Issues

According to the respondents, important tourism issues in Kuala Lumpur are the taxi drivers (20%), cleanliness (15%), security and safety (15%) and, promotion and good information (10%). Other important issues include public transportation, maintenance of tourist attractions and traffic. Table Important tourism issues in Kuala Lumpur (appendixes) for the details on important tourism issues.

4.4. Tourist Complaints

Based on Table Complaints by Domestic Tourist on appendixes, respondents said that complaints by domestic tourists on Kuala Lumpur are on its taxi (33.3%), bad traffic (21.7%), lack of cleanliness (11.7%) and expensive (8.3%). Meanwhile, the foreign tourist complaints are on its taxi (31.7%), lack of cleanliness (28.3%), safety and security (10%), bad traffic (6.7%) and problem with transportation (6.7%) (Table Complaints by Foreign Tourist on appendixes). It is clear that the foreign tourist felt that there are more problems with the lack of cleanliness, unsafe surrounding and transportation in Kuala Lumpur. On the other hand, the domestic tourists have more complaints on the traffic jam and the high cost of living of Kuala Lumpur.

4.5. Tourism Product

55.7% of the respondents have the opinion that Kuala Lumpur has enough tourism products and 41% stated otherwise. This shows that Kuala Lumpur may have enough tourism products but the products were not well developed, and therefore were not visible to some respondents.

In this study, the tourism products that need development according to the respondents are ecotourism (10%), cultural attractions (10%), other types of attractions (10%), entertainment (8.3%) and good services (5%). Development on other tourism products such as facilities, transportation, culinary venues,

shopping centres, recreational activities and medical tourism are also important for Kuala Lumpur to be a successful tourism destination. From this study we can conclude that tourism products can be divided into two, firstly the core tourism products such as shopping centres, city forest, and other tourist attractions, and secondly the supporting tourism products such as transportation system, security, public facilities and others. As Kuala Lumpur has enough core tourism products, no new product needs to be introduced but these core products must be developed and maintained properly. Improvement and development of supporting tourism products are very important to ensure that the core products will stay attractive to tourists. Table Travel Products that Need Development (appendixes) for the detail breakdown of the tourism products that needs to be developed for Kuala Lumpur.

5. Conclusion

Kuala Lumpur has the potential to be a successful tourism destination if the tourism authorities look into the development of certain core and supporting tourism products. In this study we can conclude that the core tourism products that definitely need to be developed are cultural attractions, culinary, shopping and ecotourism. As a multicultural city, Kuala Lumpur should take this opportunity to showcase the different cultural ethnicity that can be found easily within the city. Although there are a number of cultural activities that tourist can experience but the study showed that this is not enough.

Tourism authorities of Kuala Lumpur need to act on the complaints of both domestic and foreign tourists. Taxi services seem to be the source of the most displeasure of the tourists. The high fare and the rudeness of the taxi drivers are to be the main concern of the authorities. Beside this, the cleanliness, and the security and safety of the city also leave much to be desired. Fast reaction and effort should also be made by the relevant authorities to clean up the city. Effort should also be made to upgrade the standard of security and safety features in Kuala Lumpur. These show that the developments of supporting tourism products are vital for Kuala Lumpur to be a successful tourist destination.

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Appendixes

Percentage of Hotel Guests' Origin Region

	ASEAN		East Asia		Australia	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1-20%	8	13.1	44	72.1	42	68.9
21-40%	11	18.0	2	3.3	2	3.3
41-60%	18	29.5	2	3.3	0	0
61-80%	11	18.0	1	1.6	0	0
81-100%	6	9.8	0	0	0	0

	Europe		America	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1-20%	47	77.0	42	68.9
21-40%	3	4.9	0	0
41-60%	1	1.6	0	0
61-80%	1	1.6	0	0
81-100%	0	0	0	0

	Middle East		Others in Asia	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1-20%	48	78.7	43	70.5
21-40%	3	4.9	0	0
41-60%	0	0	1	1.6
61-80%	0	0	0	0
81-100%	0	0	0	0

Perception on Kuala Lumpur

	Freq.	Percent	Perception of Kuala Lumpur
Developing city	15	25.0	Sleepless city, developing and popular, focus on business, symbol for Malaysia, metropolitan, latest, has been properly developed
Beautiful	11	18.3	Beautiful, beautiful Twin Towers, good city, interesting city, okay overall, good, moving in the right direction, interesting to look at but not lack of activities, peaceful
Big	5	8.3	Big city, big number of tourist yearly, good, main city
Dirty	5	8.3	Dirty, KL Central is dirty in the morning, pollution, very dirty
Busy	4	6.7	Busy city
Congested	3	5.0	congested, very congested
Multi race	3	5.0	Multi culture, everything is okay except for illegal races on the city roads, *Malaysia Truly Asia*
Unsatisfactory facilities	3	5.0	There are more that can be done to be a good city, lack of facilities, not enough tourism attractions and language problem
Shopping venue	3	5.0	Good shopping venue, shopping paradise
Unsatisfactory services	2	3.3	Satisfactory services but taxi drivers must use the meter, lack of transportation and expensive taxi rates.
High crime rate	2	3.3	High crime rate, higher security level needed
Hot weather	2	3.3	Good weather, hot
Traffic	1	1.7	Traffic jam
Expensive	1	1.7	Expensive food and not tasty

Important Tourism Issues in Kuala Lumpur

	Freq.	Percent	Important Issues
Taxi drivers	12	20.0	Taxi drivers' bad behavior, English language proficiency, dress style, transportation services especially taxi is very expensive, taxi fare were not charged accordingly, taxi drives must use the meter, expensive taxi fare and inappropriate amount charged, taxi services
Cleanliness	9	15.0	Cleanliness, cleanliness at KL Central, city cleanliness, pollution, dirty city
Security and safety	9	15.0	Security, drug addicts spoilt the city's image
Better promotion and information	6	10.0	Better promotion and information
Public transportation	5	8.3	Public transportation
Care and maintenance of attractions	3	5.0	Care and maintenance of attractions
Traffic	2	3.3	Traffic jam
Unsatisfactory facilities	2	3.3	Unsatisfactory facilities
More attractions	2	3.3	More attractions
Price	1	1.7	Special price for tourist
Unsatisfactory services	1	1.7	Unsatisfactory services
More activities	1	1.7	More activities

Complaints by Domestic Tourist

	Domestic tourist		Complaints
	Freq.	Percent	
Taxi	20	33.3	Taxi fare, bad taxi services, taxi drivers dishonest, high cost, rude taxi drivers, domestic taxi fare, inappropriate taxi fare, taxi drivers not charging the correct amount, very expensive taxi fare, taxi drivers not using the meter, expensive taxi fare due to traffic jam, taxi drivers not proficient in the English language
Traffic jam	13	21.7	Traffic jam, road diversion
Dirty	7	11.7	Air pollution, hotel room cleanliness, dirty Chinatown, dirty roads, dirty public toilets, pollutions
Expensive	5	8.3	Expensive, expensive accommodation, expensive to travel in KL, very costly room rates
Security and safety	2	3.3	Security, unsafe, theft
Host Community	2	3.3	Attention only given to foreign tourist, rude host community
Congested	2	3.3	Noisy, not enough room during long holiday periods
Services	2	3.3	No new services, inefficient services
Transportation problem	1	1.7	Transportation
Unsatisfactory facilities	1	1.7	Bad sign boards

Complaints by Foreign Tourist

	Foreign tourist		Complaints
	Freq.	%	
Taxi	19	31.7	Cheated by taxi drivers, dishonest taxi drivers , expensive fare and taxi cleanliness, taxi services, inappropriate fare and rude taxi drivers, not using the meter
Dirty	17	28.3	Cleanliness, food cleanliness, hotel room cleanliness, public facilities cleanliness, dirty, Chinatown is dirty, dirty roads, dirty food stalls, pollution, dirty toilets
Security and safety	6	10.0	Need more overpass, traffic lights and zebra crossings: pick pockets, security, crime, unsafe
Traffic congestion	4	6.7	Traffic congestion
Transportation problem	4	6.7	Transportation, transportation problem, transportation system, unsafe public transportation and inconvenience
Host community	3	5.0	Language, behavior of Malaysian, unfriendly people
Weather	3	5.0	Hot weather
Unsatisfactory facilities	2	3.3	Inadequate signboards, substandard hotel rooms
Congested	1	1.7	Noisy, busy
Services	1	1.7	Not enough information

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Travel Products that Need Development

Tourism products	Freq.	Percent	Ways of developing tourism products
Ecotourism	6	10.0	To clean the environment, ecotourism, natural attractions, natural gardens, river taxis or cruises
Cultural attractions	6	10.0	Cultural activities, history and culture, more cultural activities, more cultural shows, there must be more local culture and heritage, inadequate culture
Better attractions	6	10.0	City tour with new destination, developing attractions that is different from other countries, more tourism products, more tourism venues, need safari and zoo, enough attractions with the right price
Entertainment	5	8.3	Entertainment, more entertainment venues, theme parks, theme parks in the city
Better services	3	5.0	Cheap admission fee, extended operational hours for skybridge, longer operational hours
Better facilities	2	3.3	Facilities
Better transportation	2	3.3	Inadequate transportation, lmore transportation
Culunary	2	3.3	Local culinary promotion, special food venues
Good shopping experience	1	1.7	More quality handicraft, need better packaging
Outside activity	1	1.7	Outside activity
Health tourism	1	1.7	Health tourism