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

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 need 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 built 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. (2007) 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** | **Middle East** | **Others in Asia** |
|-----------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| **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 |

| **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 |

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### Perception on Kuala Lumpur

| Perception of Kuala Lumpur                                                                 | Freq. | Percent |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Developing city, developing and popular, focus on business, symbol for Malaysia, metropolitan, latest, has been properly developed | 15    | 25.0    |
| 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 | 11    | 18.3    |
| Big city, big number of tourist yearly, good, main city                                   | 5     | 8.3     |
| Dirty, KL Central is dirty in the morning, pollution, very dirty                           | 5     | 8.3     |
| Busy city                                                                                 | 4     | 6.7     |
| congested, very congested                                                                 | 3     | 5.0     |
| Multi culture, everything is okay except for illegal races on the city roads, *Malaysia Truly Asia* | 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 | 3     | 5.0     |
| Good shopping venue, shopping paradise                                                    | 3     | 5.0     |
| Satisfactory services but taxi drivers must use the meter, lack of transportation and expensive taxi rates. | 2     | 3.3     |
| High crime rate, higher security level needed                                              | 2     | 3.3     |
| Good weather, hot                                                                          | 2     | 3.3     |
| Traffic jam                                                                               | 1     | 1.7     |
| Expensive food and not tasty                                                               | 1     | 1.7     |

### Important Tourism Issues in Kuala Lumpur

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

| Complaints | 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

| Complaints | 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 |
| 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, Imore transportation                                                       |
| Culinary               | 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                                                                                       |