

CULTURAL TOURISM IN MALAYSIA IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF INDIAN TOURISTS: A STUDY

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Abstract

Malaysia is one of the economic superpowers in South East Asia, prospering at a fast pace as tourism is becoming one of the most important sectors of its economy. Areas like entertainment, beach and island tourism has become some of the major determinants of Malaysia's phenomenal progress in tourism in the last few years. Yet one area that seems to get less attention is its cultural resources. Recently, Malaysia has turned out as one of the major destinations for the Indian Outbound Tourism market. This study looks into the situation that prevails in the area of cultural tourism in Malaysia and how are cultural as well as historical attractions of Malaysia viewed from the perspective of international tourists from India. With the help of descriptive analysis the study probes into the significance of Malaysia's historical tourism and the awareness and perception about it among Indian visitors. Based on the study it is revealed that Malaysia's cultural tourism resources are not promoted to the extent to which it becomes a significant part of the nation's destination image. Lack of promotion and information available makes international visitors unaware about the potential of Malaysia as a cultural tourism destination. However, most of the tourists were satisfied with the cultural sites/attractions and think Malaysia is a reasonably good cultural destination.

Key words: *Historical Tourism, Malaysia, Heritage and archeology, Archaeological and historical sites.*

JEL Classification: *Z10.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a nation in South East Asia emerging as a major player in Global Travel and Tourism (Hassan, 2008). With its uniquely successful tagline "Malaysia, Truly Asia" the nation's National Tourism organization, Tourism Malaysia, has taken the country's performance in tourism to a commendable height in the last 5-7 years. The UNWTO conference in 2007 held in Kuala Lumpur, the nation's capital, commemorated the success of country's tourism performance mainly in terms of tourist arrivals and receipts.

Malaysia's main areas for activities in leisure and recreation tourism which includes entertainment, beach & island tourism, adventure & sports and rural tourism in the form of homestays programmes that it offers extensively throughout the country (Eliot and Bickersteth, 2002). Destinations like the Genting Highlands and the integrated resorts in and around Kuala Lumpur like Sunway Lagoon Resort, Mines Wonderland & Resort and Mid-valley Megamall have provided an array of opportunities for urban tourism activities like shopping and entertainment. Beach & Island destinations like Langkawi and Pangkor Islands on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia and the Emerald Islands off the coast of Terengganu as well as Pulau Tioman on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia are examples of coastal tourism in Malaysia. Adventure activities like caving, rafting, snorkeling

and scuba diving etc. as well as sports activities like the Formula 1 and events like Monsoon Cup and Tour de Langkawi have attracted increasing number of tourists from across the world.

In the past decade, Tourism Malaysia has taken lot of efforts to promote Malaysia to the world (Mohamed, 2008). Some of the leading tourist generating markets for Malaysia in the recent times has been Singapore, China, Japan, India, Australia and UK. Overall Tourist arrivals in 2007 into Malaysia were 20.98 million and tourists receipts in 2006 was MYR 36,271.7 million. One of the most phenomenal growths in terms of tourist arrivals that took place in the last few years is the Indian market. India as a tourist generating market was positioned as 12th in 2001 and last year in 2007 it came up as one of the top 10 markets taking the 6th position (See Table 1).

Table 1 - Tourist Arrivals and Receipts into Malaysia, 2002-2008

Year	Tourist Arrivals	Receipts (Rm)
2002	13.29 million	25,781.1 million
2003	10.58 million	21,291.1 million
2004	15.70 million	29,651.4 million
2005	16.43 million	31,954.1 million
2006	17.55 million	36,271.7 million
2007	20.98 Million	46,070.0 million
2008	22.0 Million	49,561.2 million

Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2009

Apart from the main areas of tourism practiced in Malaysia, cultural attractions are equally significant in creating the destination image of Malaysia (Green and George, 2009). The multi-ethnic society of Malaysia comprising of ethnic Malays, Chinese and Indians as well as numerous tribes with their unique cultural identities have made Malaysia a melting pot of some prominent Asian cultures. As a result, the tagline “Malaysia, Truly Asia” appears justified and has also rendered positive results for Tourism Malaysia, the main promotional body of the country. Besides, the performing arts and festivals of the ethnic Malays as well as that of the Chinese and Indians have enabled Malaysia to be a versatile cultural tourism destination. Apparently the destination image of the country has been reflecting culture as the main/core tourism product.

1.1. Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is one of the main facets in a country’s tourism industry. Cultural tourism brings pride to local communities and at the same time creates cultural bondages and understanding between host and guest communities. “Cultural tourism” (or culture tourism) is the subset of tourism concerned with a country or region’s culture, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those peoples, their art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that helped shape their way of life. Cultural tourism includes tourism in urban areas, particularly historic or large cities and their cultural facilities such as museums and theatres. It can also include tourism in rural areas showcasing the traditions of indigenous cultural communities (i.e. festivals, rituals), and their values and lifestyle. World Tourism Organization (1985) defines cultural tourism as the movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours; travel to festivals and other related events. Essentially, cultural tourism is based on the mosaic of places, traditions, art forms, celebrations and experiences that portray one’s nation and its people. Cultural tourism is an important way to celebrate, preserve and promote a state’s unique heritage, increase opportunities for artists, promote public arts participation and boost economic development.

Heritage tourism can be classified as a subclass of cultural tourism. Both cultural and heritage tourism have become a growing segment of the tourism marketplace. Cultural tourists appear to be motivated for different reasons than do traditional tourists.

1.2. Cultural Tourism in Malaysia

Malaysia’s cultural tourism resources are quite varied (Mohamed and Ahmad, 2001). Starting from performing arts, handicrafts to archaeological / historical sites, the country has lots to offer. In Malaysia, heritage and culture has also been identified as new niche products to be developed extensively in tourism development. Cultural vibrancy is clearly manifested in the successful “Malaysia: Truly Asia” promotional drive by the country’s promotion arm, Tourism Malaysia. In this promotion, Malaysia boasts to host a wide variety of Asian ethnic groups that making it into a little Asia. Malaysia also has distinctive multicultural architectural heritage with strong Islamic, Chinese and Western influences; all of which have been portrayed in the heritage buildings. Tourism Malaysia has also carried out a number of culture-related promotional programmes like the Citrawarna, the Rainforest Music Festival and the Sarawak Cultural Tourism Village shows.

However areas like historical and archaeological attractions have not found enough attention as evident in the promotional campaigns of Tourism Malaysia and the current trends. Malaysia’s historical attractions in terms of architecture and archaeology may not be that significant when compared with other destinations in the region like Indonesia or Cambodia yet what exists as historical resources is sufficient for the country to be tagged as a historical tourism destination (Barker, 2000). Except for Malacca, other historical destinations have not been promoted to the extent to which Malaysia can also be considered as a destination for historical and heritage attractions. Penang though an important historical site rich in architectural heritage, is better known as an urban -cultural as well as beach tourism destination.

Spread over a period of more than 2000 years, the history of Malaysia unfolds the remains of different human settlements and civilizations (Arokiaswamy and Celin, 2000). Historical resources of the country should therefore be given due importance alongside all the other attractions that has made Malaysia a tourism paradise in South East Asia. While the country has a myriad of historical sites that could potentially become major tourist attractions, access to funds for maintenance and conservation has not been sufficient in previous years leading to neglect and poor visitor volume. Many of the lesser-known sites are difficult to access without proper signboards and they have not been promoted properly, hence most of the visitors to these sites are domestic tourists with lower spending power (Ling, 2007).

Table 2 reveals the extent of Malaysia’s historical/cultural attractions which suffices that Malaysia is indeed a unique and potential destination for cultural tourism.

Table 2 - List of Cultural and Historical / Archeological Sites and Attractions in Malaysia

Sl. no.	Name of the Cultural Destination	Location	Main Event/ Aspect	Features/attractions
1.	Niah Caves	Sarawak, East Malaysia	Pre-historic archaeological site	Cave paintings and wooden coffin "death ships". Human skull dating back to 35000 years ago. "Gunung Subis Limestone Complex".
2.	Lenggong	Perak, West Malaysia	Pre-historic archaeological site	Skeleton of male and female dating back to 11000 years and 8000 years respectively called as Perak Man and Perak Women. Famous for Lenggong Archaeological Museum, Kota Tampan archaeological site.
3.	Bujang Valley (Lembah Bujang) also called as "Dragon Valley"	Kedah, West Malaysia	Hindu-Buddhist Civilization (3 th -14 th Century AD)	A sprawling historical complex with an area of approximately 224 square km. The area consists of ruins that may date more than 1,500 years old. More than 50 ruined ancient Hindu temples locally called Candis exist in the complex. Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum.
4.	Malacca (UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site)	Malacca, West Malaysia	Malacca Sultanate, Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule (15 th Century onwards)	Sultan's Palace, Afamosa Fort of the Portuguese, Studhuys Museum and Church belonging to the Dutch, St. John's Fort etc, Maritime museum, Baba Nyonya Heritage Museum and other important museums and memorials.
5.	Pulau Penang and Georgetown (UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site)	Penang, West Malaysia	British Colonial Heritage (17 th century onwards)	British colonial monuments and Chinese temples. Kek Lok Si, largest Chinese Buddhist temple in South East Asia.
6.	Kuala Kangsar	Perak, West Malaysia	Islamic monuments and royal Palaces	Ubudiah Mosque, Istana Kenangan (Old Palace), Istana Ishkandaria (Royal Palace), one of the first Rubber trees planted more than 100 years old, Istana Hulu (Hulu Palace).
7.	Ipoh	Perak, West Malaysia	Chinese cave temples and colonial heritage, centre of Tin Mining industry	Kellie's Castle (British Monument), Limestone Caves and Chinese Cave Temples etc.
8.	Dataran Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur	Kuala Lumpur, West Malaysia	Point where Malaysian independence was declared in 1957	Independence square and Sultan Abdul Samad Palace Museum.
9.	Sabah and Sarawak states	East Malaysia		Tribal cultural heritage of the Ibans, the Kadazans / Kadazandusun and the Kenya tribes, performing arts, Sarawak Cultural Village etc.

Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2009

1.3. India as a Major Inbound Tourism Market

With an objective to put Malaysia on top of the mind of every Indian traveler Tourism Malaysia entered India in 2000-2001. Over the years, from 2002 to 2006, the inflow of tourists from India to Malaysia has experienced manifold increase (See Table 3). The *Malaysia, Truly Asia* campaign emerged as successful as it happened for other markets. The campaign appeared as a powerful phrase relatable to the Indian tourist. Prior to this, the TAFI annual convention in 1999 held in Malaysia changed the perception of the Indian travel trade of Malaysia as a tourist destination.

Table 3 highlights the trend of tourist arrival patterns from India over the past 6 years. Since 2002, India has been consistently among the top 10 countries contributing to the inbound tourism market of Malaysia.

Table 3 - Tourist Arrivals from India

Year	Arrivals	Position	% Change
2001	143,513	12	
2002	183,360	10	+ 27.8
2003	145,143	7	- 20.8
2004	172,966	10	+19.2
2005	225,789	9	+30.5
2006	279,046	7	+23.6
2007	422,452	6	+58.3
2008	550786	6	30.4

Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2009

In a short span of just 5 years the Indian market moved into a significant position in terms of tourist arrivals. With the exception of 2002-2003, where the tourist arrivals fell by 20.8% primarily due to the SARS disease outbreak, growth in tourist arrivals

from India has been more or less steady. This trend is expected to continue with the Indian economy projected to perform better in the years to come in spite of the ongoing global economic recession. India accounts for a large section of the tourist arrivals in Malaysia. During January to July 2006, global tourist influx in Malaysia shot up by around 5.5% (over 10 Million tourists) while the share of Indian tourists alone jacked up by over 19% (over 0.15 Million). The year, 2007 termed as the "Visit Malaysia Year", Tourism Malaysia set a target of 4, 00,000 tourists from India. In 2007, tourist arrivals from India reached 4, 22,452 making it clear that the target was successfully achieved. In 2008, the number of Indian tourists that visited were 550,738 resulting in an increase of 30.4% compared to 2007. India with its diverse demographic features has provided opportunities for destinations in Asia - Pacific for further explorations in identifying new target markets.

Indian tourists alone over the last few years have generated substantially to Malaysian Tourism in terms of revenue. For the years 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 Indians tourists generated RM65.6, RM 71.5, RM 323.3 and RM 557.5 million (over Rs 700 crore) respectively in revenue for Malaysian tourism (Tourism Malaysia, 2009). Malaysia has unleashed a 500-million-ringgit (around Rs 650-crore) mega tourism blitz across the globe. Around Rs 25 crore of that is in India. According to Tourism Malaysia, average spending of Indian tourists per day was about US\$400 – US\$ 500 while their stay was about for four days and nights.

1.4. Objectives of the study

This study was conducted with the following objectives:

- To understand how Malaysia's historical resources generate inbound tourist demand from India;
- To evaluate the image of Malaysia as a potential cultural tourism destination based on the opinion of international tourists from India.

2. METHODOLOGY

Survey method was used to gather data required for this study. Respondents were international visitors to Malaysia and had experiences of visiting different destinations in Malaysia including historical / archaeological sites. Respondents were identified from among Indian tourists visiting different attraction spots in Kuala Lumpur, generally based on convenience sampling technique: in total, 144 tourists responded to the survey.

As Kuala Lumpur is the most frequented entry and exit point to and from Malaysia, most tourists would have to pass through this city before proceeding to other destinations or returning from other parts in

the country and this factor influenced out decision to choose Kuala Lumpur. Other relevant data were collected from secondary sources like Tourism Malaysia website and brochures.

Primary data was collected through field survey with the help of a structured questionnaire as the tool. The areas covered in the questionnaire were the demographic aspects like age, sex and income as well as issues like purposes of visit, cultural destinations visited, tourist satisfaction levels and rating of cultural destinations in terms of the degree of attractiveness of the cultural sites.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The primary data was analysed in SPSS. The results were as follows:

3.1. Age and Sex

About 65.3% of the respondents were between the age-group of 18-25, the single largest group and about 56.0% were found to be males. About 67.0 % of the respondents have visited Malaysia before and for 33.3% it was the first visit. About 70.0% of the respondents had an income between Rs 400,000-600,000 per annum.

3.2. Purpose of Visit

As regards to purpose of visit to Malaysia, about 22.2% of the respondents visited the country for cultural tourism. Entertainment, beach & island Tourism and shopping together constitute almost 42.0% of the respondents, 16.7% for shopping, 5.6% for MICE, 4.2% for VFR and 9.7% of the respondents visited Malaysia for other reasons.

Table 4 - Purpose of Visit

<i>Valid</i>	Frequency	Percent
Entertainment	32	22.2
Beach and Island tourism	28	19.4
Cultural	32	22.2
Shopping	24	16.7
MICE/ Business	8	5.6
VFR	6	4.2
Others	14	9.7
Total	144	100.0

3.3. Cultural Destination

As far as historical destinations are concerned, about 30% of the respondents have visited Malacca and Penang, 43.1% visited Kuala Lumpur and the rest 23% have visited other destinations in Malaysia. None of the respondents were found to have visited

archaeological sites like Niah Caves, Lengong or the rich heritage of Bujang Valley or Lembah Bujang, the largest archaeological site in Malaysia.

Table 5 - Destinations Visited

Destinations	Frequency	Percent
Malacca	16	11.1
Penang	28	19.4
Kuala Lumpur	62	43.1
Kelantan	4	2.8
Terengganu	8	5.6
Ipoh	6	4.2
Kuala Kangsar	2	1.4
Sabah and Sarawak	14	9.7
Others	4	2.8
Total	144	100.0

3.4. Rating Malaysia as a cultural Tourism Destination

In terms of rating Malaysia as a cultural tourism destination, 40.3% of the respondents opined that the country is somewhat cultural and 36.1 % say Malaysia is an average destination for cultural tourism.

Table 6 - Malaysia as a Cultural Product

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Very cultural	32	22.2
Reasonably cultural	58	40.3
Average	52	36.1
Very poor in cultural resources	2	1.4
Total	144	100.0

3.5. Satisfaction level of tourists in response to the cultural sites in Malaysia

As regards to the level of satisfaction of tourists in respect of the cultural sites in Malaysia, about 78 % of the respondents are quite satisfied with the cultural sites.

Table 7 - Satisfaction Levels

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	10	6.9
Very good	42	29.2
Good	70	48.6
Average	20	13.9
Below Average	2	1.4
Total	144	100.0

3.6. Information, Promotion and advertisement on Malaysian Historical destinations

65% of the respondents opine that they did not/do not have enough information on cultural/historical attractions of Malaysia. In terms of promotion and advertisements on cultural attractions in Malaysia, 64% of the respondents think there is not enough promotion done by tourism authorities in Malaysia.

3.7. Potential of Malaysia as a cultural tourism destination

Looking at the extent of cultural sites in Malaysia, 43% of the respondents believe that Malaysia has the potential to be a well known cultural tourism destination in the future if the various historical and cultural sites inventoried in the study are promoted well.

4. CONCLUSION

This study implies that cultural attractions are not the main drivers of Indian tourist visits into Malaysia. The awareness for Malaysia's cultural resources is invisible and the image of the country as a cultural tourism destination has not appeared up to its potential. Non-cultural attractions and sites have appealed to Indian tourists mostly as it appears from this study. Important cultural sites like Malacca, Penang and many others heritage towns do not form an important part in the itineraries of Indian tourists visiting Malaysia.

Moreover, in spite of having a wide range of historical resources encompassing pre-historic, Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic and Colonial heritage, the historical sites have not emerged as an important contributor to cultural tourism in Malaysia. Most Indian tourists as revealed by the study visit Malaysia for reasons other than cultural tourism and that may be due to the dearth of information on Malaysian historical attractions and insufficient promotion/advertising. Nevertheless, most respondents rated Malaysia as a reasonably good cultural tourism destination and the satisfaction levels of the respondents in relation to the cultural sites were quite satisfactory. These opinions of the respondents were based largely on their experiences they got while visiting some of the historical sites.

Promotion is needed at the adequate level. Word-of-mouth information that comes out as an outcome of personal experiences of the tourists at cultural attractions in Malaysia can play a vital role in promotion. A favourable destination image should be created through appropriate promotional efforts so that cultural and historical or archaeological attractions of Malaysia are given special emphasis like any other area of tourism. More in-depth study in this area may be done based on this study to get a better view of the issue.

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