

Tourist Satisfaction in Malaysia

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Abstract

The tourism industry is among the most important industries capable of stimulating economic growth. In Malaysia, in 2008 alone, tourist arrivals to this country had generated national income of RM49.6 billion. This study was conducted to see whether travelers are satisfied with their visit to the country and also to highlight factors that contribute to tourist satisfaction. The results showed that the overall tourist satisfaction with their visit to the country gave the mean score of 3.74. Among factors that attracted tourist to visit the country are beautiful scenery, customs and culture, hospitality of the service providers, the quality of food and the friendliness of the locals. Continuous efforts are recommended to improve the satisfaction of the tourists because of its impact on their attitudes to revisit this country

Keywords: tourism, satisfaction, Malaysia

Introduction

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2009), the tourism industry has managed to generate a gross income of U.S. \$ 3.5 trillion which is expected to increase to U.S. \$ 7.0 trillion by 2011. With the estimation of one billion tourists will be travelling around the world by the year 2010, the tourism industry is becoming a key driver of socioeconomic progress, thus contributing to the economic growth of developing countries including Malaysia. In Malaysia, tourism is the second largest industry after the manufacturing sector that contributes to economic growth. In 2008, records showed that a total of 22.5 million tourists came to travel in the country, generating a national income of RM49.6 billion (Ministry of Tourism, 2009).

With the impact contributed by the the tourism industry to Malaysia's economy, Tourism Malaysia, which is the primary agency of Malaysia's tourism has aggressively promoted Malaysia as a tourist destination with a number of promotional and marketing strategies. For example, at the international level, the theme 'Malaysia Truly Asia' continues to be the slogan for all types of advertising. To develop the untapped potential and promote tourism in the state, 'Zoom Malaysia' was promoted aggressively across the country from early 2008. The campaign later expanded to Singapore. At the same time, Tourism Malaysia continues to promote the product niche, especially with elements that include eco-tourism and adventure sports to the long-haul travelers. For meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), the establishment of MyCEB aims to raise awareness and give an injection of MICE facilities and services in Malaysia. The sector continues to be given special attention by Tourism Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2009).

Promoting through such events would certainly be meaningless if they do not cater to the taste of tourists or contribute to the fulfillment of their journey. Various studies have shown that tourists who are satisfied with their visit will come back or recommend it to others.

Thus, a detailed study on the satisfaction of their visit to Malaysia should be conducted. Therefore the main objective of this study is to describe the satisfaction of tourists visiting Malaysia with the hope that it can help the parties involved to develop the appropriate tourism promotion strategy.

Literature Review

Satisfaction is the evaluation of the performance of the overall services provided by the firm received by the customer (Skogland and Siguaw, 2001). Satisfaction is an important factor to be taken into account by the customer in deciding whether to continue a purchase or otherwise. Satisfaction results when performance exceeds the requirements (Bitner, 1990). On the other hand, when the requirements exceed the performance, dissatisfaction will result (Parasumaran et al.1990). From a tourism perspective, the same concept applies to tourists because tourists are also subscribers to the services provided. Thus, their decision to visit again also depends on the satisfaction factor. In the discussion of the concept of tourist satisfaction, another term often used is travel satisfaction, which is a result of a tourist's satisfaction after their own experience or the experience of a product or service provided (Gunderson et al., 1996; Heide et al., 1999; Heung, 2000).

Determinants and Impacts of Tourists Satisfaction

Studies show that tourist satisfaction can have a positive result on the company's development and the tourism industry itself. Among other things, the satisfaction of tourists on their trips contributes to the profitability of a firm because it can help to create loyalty to a particular destination (Alexandris, Kouthouris and Meligdis, 2006). For example, studies of visitors staying at the Hotel Lenox, Boston, showed that the higher the satisfaction the greater their level of loyalty (Bowen and Chen, 2001). As a result, those who are satisfied will recommend the hotel to others. On the other hand, decreased customer satisfaction will cause customers to stay away from the destination or the place where the services are received. A study by Tsauro, Chiu and Huang (2002) raises awareness of the high correlation between satisfaction with the hotel services feature and customer loyalty.

There is evidence to indicate that tourist satisfaction is a strong indicator of their intention to visit and recommend relevant destinations to others (Bramwell, 1998; Kozak, 2000; Kozak and Remington, 2000; Ross, 1993; Yau and Chan, 1990; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Moreover, they are willing to share their positive travel experience with their friends and relatives (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). The success of a destination marketing depends on tourist satisfaction because it affects the selection of the destination, the use of products and services and the decision to return (Kozak and Remington, 2000). Thus, destination managers should establish a high level of visitor satisfaction after purchase to create positive behavior among tourists for improving and maintaining competitive destinations (Yoon and Uysal, 2005).

Many reasons cause tourists to be satisfied with their trip or journey, including the quality of the services provided, such as infrastructure, security, cleanliness, natural situation, consumer protection and easily obtained (Handszuh (1995). According to Corrin and Taylor (1992), and Ekinici and Riley (1998) quality of service is part of the process which leads to the formation of the overall satisfaction. In addition, physical factors, such as the destination product performance and psychological equipment products, such as meaningful destination are also factors that translate to satisfaction and loyalty of travel destination (Uysal and Noe, 2003). In relation to tourist satisfaction in Malaysia, Kearney (2002) viewed that some travel satisfaction initiatives should be developed to increase the number of stay in Malaysia for each arrival. Among the key factors that support this initiative are connecting domestic flights and ground transportation comfort.

Tourist satisfaction should be understood by those involved in tourist activities and should serve as a basis for assessing the performance of products and service destination (Noe and Uysal, 1997; Schofield, 2000). Furthermore, an understanding of the different needs of tour groups can help provide appropriate services to enhance their satisfaction at all levels of service. For example, the price factor is not a major factor in shaping the overall satisfaction level for all the tourists. Accommodation and food factors are significant to the entire satisfaction of North America, while the "pull" factor are significant for the European and Asian tourist visitors. Moreover, culture is significant for tourists from Oceania (Hui et al. 2007). Thus service providers such as tour guides should pay attention to the relevant characteristics that might be very important to certain tourist groups managed by them. Based on the existence of such differences, Hui et al. (2007) suggested that Singapore should adopt a balanced approach to satisfy the differing tourists' needs and requirements.

Methodology

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted on 30 tourists visiting Malaysia and arriving at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport and Stolport Redang. A total of 30 travelers voluntarily participated in the pilot study, produced a participation rate of 100 percent. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient value (α) was high at 0.878.

Population and Sample Size

In the context of this study, the sampling type used was convenience sampling. The convenience sampling technique was chosen because it is the most appropriate method for obtaining the exact source of the sample ordinance population willing to provide the desired information in the study. The sample in this study is international travelers who have paid a visit to Malaysia.

Measurement Methods

The questionnaire on respondents' satisfaction with their visit to Malaysia was modified based on the study of Qu and Li (1997) concerning the nature and visitor satisfaction of mainland China to Hong Kong. The characteristics in the category of visitor satisfaction included shopping, restaurants, hotels, transportation, attractions, environment and people's behavior. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement based on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (from very dissatisfied to very satisfied).

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The majority of respondents were male. There were 250 male respondents (60.8%) and 161 female respondents (39.2%). Most respondents were aged between 40-49 years (26.2%). 23.3% of respondents were aged between 30-39 years and 23.3% were aged between 50 and 59 years. The majority of respondents were married (68.2%). For the status of the country of origin, the majority of respondents came from neighboring countries, namely, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia (25.1%), India (23.2%), Europe (18.0%) and respondents from Hong Kong/China/Japan (8.3%). There were also respondents from Australia (1.5%) and other countries (23.9%).

In terms of occupation, the respondents were from various types of service category, such as, administration, (14.2%), sales division (12.9%), clerical (2.7%), labor (1.0%), animation houses (2.7%), teacher/lecturer (5.7%), and armed forces (0.2%). Others included pensioners (6.2%) and other jobs. As for the educational background, most respondents were university graduates (48%) or had advanced diploma (36.2%), completed upper secondary school/high school (15.1%) and elementary/secondary school (0.8%).

Analysis

Descriptive analysis was carried out with the aims of explaining satisfaction of respondents with their trips. The statistical tests used were frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Other methods including t-test and analysis of variance (one way ANOVA) were conducted in order to see a significant difference in relation to travel satisfaction based on the demographic profile of respondents.

Travel Satisfaction Analysis

Table 1 below describes the respondents' views on travel satisfaction. The findings showed that most respondents were satisfied with the tourist attractions in the country (mean = 3.72, SD = 0.716). In addition, the study also showed that respondents are satisfied with the landscape (mean = 3.97, SD = 0.697), customs and the culture (mean = 3.96, SD = 1.549), entertainment and night life (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.689) and shopping centers (mean = 3.78, SD = 0.806). Most respondents were satisfied with the purchase price of good (mean = 3.53, SD = 0.788), the type of products purchased (mean = 3.72, SD = 0.779) and also the quality of the products purchased (min = 3.59, SD = 0.718).

In terms of food, most of the respondents were satisfied with the number of restaurants in the country (mean = 3.85, SD = 0.775), the variety of food available (mean = 3.99, SD = 0.814) and also in terms of the price of food sold (mean = 3.94, SD = 0.783). Tourism facilities (mean = 3.71, SD = 0.712), services in hotels and rest houses (mean = 3.85, SD = 0.780) as well as reasonable hotel and rest house rents (mean = 3.70, SD = 0.745) also gave satisfaction to the respondents under study.

The findings related to public transport factors revealed that they were generally satisfied with the public transport system available in this country (mean = 3.34, SD = 0.999) and with the price of public transportation (mean = 3.55, SD = 0.783). Analysis also showed respondents' satisfaction in terms of having a safe place to travel (mean = 3.78, SD = 0.815), environment (mean = 3.64, SD = 0.818), hygiene and health (mean = 3.39, SD = 0.921), the attitude of the local towards tourists (mean = 3.91, SD = 0.788) and also hospitality service providers such as tour guides, hotel and restaurant staff (mean = 4.09, SD = 0.783). Overall, respondents travel satisfaction is at a good level (mean = 3.74, SD = 0.458).

Table 1: Perception of Travel Satisfaction

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation (SP)
Tourist attractions	3.72	0.716
Views	3.97	0.697
Customs and the culture	3.96	1.549
Entertainment and nightlife	3.35	0.689
Shopping centers	3.78	0.806
Purchase price of goods	3.53	0.788
The type of product purchase	3.72	0.779
Quality products purchase	3.59	0.718
Restaurants	3.85	0.775
Types of food	3.99	0.814
Food prices	3.94	0.783
Tourism facilities	3.71	0.712
Services in hotels and rest houses	3.85	0.780
Rental rates hotels and rest houses	3.70	0.745
Public transport systems	3.34	0.999
Public transport prices	3.55	0.784
A safe place to travel	3.78	0.815
Atmosphere	3.64	0.818
Hygiene and health	3.39	0.922
The attitudes of people towards tourists	3.91	0.788
Hospitality service providers (tour guides, hotel, restaurant staff)	4.09	0.783
Overall Satisfaction	3.74	0.458

In referring to Table 2 below, the majority of respondents (399 respondents or 96.6%) was satisfied with their visit to Malaysia while the remaining 14 respondents (3.4%) were not.

Table 2 : Perception of Overall Satisfaction Journey

Item		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Overall, how satisfied are you with your trip to Malaysia?	Yes	399	96.6
	No	14	3.4

Differences by Demographic Profile of Selected Variables

Table 3 below describes the findings of a t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA one way) on travel satisfaction variables according to the demographic profile of respondents. As shown in the table, the data showed no significant difference in gender, marital status and educational level of travel satisfaction ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3 : T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on Travel Satisfaction

Variables	T-Test / ANOVA	Results
Gender	$t = 0.510$, $p = 0.610$	Not significant
Marriage status	$t = -1.816$, $p = 0.070$	Not significant
Educational level	$F = 0.287$, $p = 0.835$	Not significant

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

The results showed in Table 4 indicated that there was a significant difference between age groups with travel satisfaction ($p < 0.01$) (Figure 4). The age group, it was found respondents from the age group 50 years and over recorded higher travel satisfaction (mean = 3.84, SD = 0.476), followed by respondents from the age group 40 to 49 years (mean = 3.75, SD = 0.444), respondents from the age group 30 to 39 years (mean = 3.70, SD = 0.410) and respondents from the age group 29 years and below (mean = 3.61, SD = 0.474).

The study also found that there was a significant difference between the home country factors with traveler satisfaction ($p < 0.01$). Data showed that respondents from India registered a higher traveling satisfaction (mean = 4.29, SD = 0.381) than respondents from Europe (mean = 3.81, SD = 0.395), China/Hong Kong/Japan (mean = 3.77, SD = 0.417), Australia (mean = 3.72, SD = 0.474) and other countries (mean = 3.75, SD = 0.464).

In addition to age group and country of origin, occupation factors were also found to have a significant difference in traveling satisfaction ($p < 0.05$). As for the job, retired /unemployed shows higher travel satisfaction (mean = 3.90, SD = 0.476), followed by sales (mean = 3.84, SD = 0.381), management (mean = 3.78, SD = 0.366), professional (mean = 3.75, SD = 0.471), others (mean = 3.71, SD = 0.566), teachers / instructors / professors (mean = 3.70, SD = 0.459), housewives (mean = 3.60, SD = 0.493), students (mean = 3.54, SD = 0.457), clerical (mean = 3.53, SD = 0.422) and labor/production operators (mean = 3.30, SD = 0.607).

Test 4: T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Travel Satisfaction

Variables	T-Test / ANOVA	Results
Age group	F = 4.079 , p = 0.007 **	Significant
Country of Origin	F = 3.369 , p = 0.005 **	Significant
Occupation	F = 2.171 , p = 0.023 *	Significant

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Summary and Recommendations

There are many factors were identified that contribute to the satisfaction of tourists travel including tourist attractions in the country, beautiful scenery, customs and culture, hospitality service providers including tour guides, hotel and restaurant staff, the quality of food and the friendliness of local people toward foreign tourists visiting Malaysia. The services provided as well as the experience felt by tourists have been found to achieve and fulfill the tourist needs while visiting this country. In fact, what is felt by tourists during or after participation in a travel activity (comparison between the requirements of the experience gained earlier) gives them satisfaction.

However, as other Asian countries are also competing to provide the best quality service, Malaysia should always evaluate the service provided and investigate tourist satisfaction to ensure that they are on par with other Asian countries. It is very important to note that tourist who are satisfied with their visit would not only repeat their visits, but would also share positive experience with others.

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