

Tourism in Malaysia: Problems and Prospects in Context to Socio-Cultural and Environmental Surroundings of the Country

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ABSTRACT: Malaysia is perhaps one of the most unique countries of the world, being strategically situated on the gate-way location of global routes with a wonderful eco-environmental setting. Being a pluralistic society, Malaysia inherits its own traditional culture with harmonious integration of the diverse ethnic groups living in a very peaceful and politically stable situation. With all its economic potentials, Malaysia has recently emerged as a newly-developed nation with a huge infrastructural growth in its industrial and manufacturing sectors. Due to these developments and other eloquent features, people from abroad become largely attracted to this land and thus, they frequently arrive here as visitors and tourists. As recently as in the year 2005, it is reported that at least 16.7 million international tourists from outside visited Malaysia bringing about 30 billion ringgit in terms of foreign currency in this country. It brings civic pride and social prestige for Malaysia by making a kind of international linkages in global context. It takes Malaysian culture abroad and people from outside can get in touch of the unique Muslim heritage in modern Malaysian context. Based on this positive assumption, this proposed research provides information in regard to knowing about the present situation of tourism in Malaysian context. And thus it generates a discourse to conceptualize a 'rational framework for Malaysian tourism'.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is perhaps one of the most unique countries of the world, being strategically situated at the gate-way location of a number of countries passing through international sea routes with a wonderful eco-environmental setting. Being a pluralistic society, it inherited its own traditional culture with harmonious integration of the diverse ethnic groups living in a very peaceful and politically stable situation. Due to such eloquent features, people from abroad become largely attracted to this land and thus they frequently arrive here as visitors and tourists. As recently as in year 2005, it is reported that at least 16.7 million

international tourists from outside had visited Malaysia bringing until then about 30 billion ringgit in terms of foreign currency in the country (see Badruddin *et al.* 2006). For that reason, this is quite likely that tourism-industry with a target of economic expansion has been moving too rapidly in Malaysia. For that reason, this research assesses the prospects of tourism in Malaysia as part of Southeast Asian region, and thus it will show the relevance of this issue in wider global context. From that point of view, the paper is designed to show the importance of tourism in this country and accordingly it conceptualizes a theoretical paradigm for future research on tourism in Malaysia. Based on that thematic viewpoint, the

paper has thus three important issues which are being discussed in different sections of it. First, it makes a review of the relevant literature and makes an annotation of those literatures to justify the suitability of them in regard to Malaysian situation on tourism. Secondly, the paper also will highlight the scope of tourism in Malaysia by identifying various issues

related to it. Based on that discussion, the paper finally conceptualizes an appropriate paradigmatic model suitable as guideline for conducting our own future research and other futuristic studies on tourism in Malaysia. Finally, based on our discussion, the paper also explores the scope of tourism in Malaysia and also to locate the prospects of it in Malaysian context.



Fig. 1: Malaysian map showing some important geo-administrative locations

Source: <http://go2travelmalaysia.com>

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tourism is a recent economic force in global trade; and it has often been regarded as an industry specially involving varieties of people sharing their socio-cultural behavior and economic transaction through their personal interaction. It is estimated that tourism provides direct and indirect employment to at least 200 million people and it was forecasted that tourism related jobs throughout the world would generate 350 million works in this connection by the year 2005 (Smith, '95). There are a few literatures

(e.g., Lea, '88; Smith and Eadington, '92; Hall and Brown, 2006; Hall, 2007) which have exemplified the economic development of some developing nations of the world through the extensive use of tourism and the utilization of its potential role for human well-being has also been well documented in those writings. Despite having such importance, research on tourism has just started; and in this context, the number of empirical researches is, also not many.

Yet, there are a few important literatures which provide us with a right direction in developing our

TABLE 1
Arrival of tourists in Malaysia with a total earning assessment (1998-2013)

Year	Arrival of total tourists (in million)	Total money received (in Ringgit)* (in billion)
1998	5.56	8.60
1999	7.93	12.30
2000	10.22	17.30
2001	12.78	24.20
2002	13.29	25.80
2003	10.58	21.30
2004	15.70	29.70
2005	16.43	32.00
2006	17.55	36.30
2007	20.97	46.10
2008	22.05	49.60
2009	23.65	53.40
2010	24.58	56.50
2011	24.71	58.30
2012	25.03	60.60
2013	25.72	65.44

Source: Rearranged and modified from *Experience Malaysia, Tourism Malaysia 2014*. *One dollar equals to approximately 3 ringgit or a little more at present time.

academic horizon in regard to the ‘epistemology of tourism’ in the field of environment and social sciences (e.g., Hohl and Tisdell, ’95; Bryden, ’73). Among the literatures available in the field of tourism, we may specifically cite here below in our proposal which seems to be very valuable in this regard. These will help us to conceptualize our proposed research in the field of tourism in regard to Malaysian situation.

At the very beginning, we may begin with the issue of tourism most from a theoretical viewpoint.

Smith (’95) has written a book on tourism which included a total of eleven chapters covering all aspects of its demand-side as an emergent industry. In this book, geographical aspects of tourism have been specially focused through descriptive and partial statistics. At the very beginning of the book, it provided us with an overview of tourism-research, and thus has given us with all theoretical definitions of it, based on historical update.

Muller and Jansson (2007) edited a book entitled *Tourism in Peripheries: Perspectives from the Far North and South*. A total of fourteen papers from diversified disciplines focusing the contributions of a number of scholars from different countries have been incorporated in the proceedings which were earlier presented in a conference on tourism. Taking regionalism as the main focus of interest, the papers highlighted tourism from the perspective of space, place and environment and the presenters mostly correlated the issue of tourism with regional development. One of the papers on, *Organizing Tourism Development in Peripheral Areas*, was written by Zillinger *et al.* (2007). It indicatively focused on tourism in the sub-arctic network in Northern Sweden to attract foreign tourists in the region having a possible economic gain for the people of that locality (*see Zillinger et al., 2007, for details*).

Name of author and title of book	Principal theme and main contents of the study
Franklin (2003). <i>Tourism: An Introduction</i>	This book is designed to understand the theory, practice, development and effects of tourism in general. It also deals with tourism as a social and cultural phenomena providing variety of theoretical perspectives
Telfer & Sharpley (2007). <i>Tourism and Development in Developing World</i>	The purpose of this book is to explore the nature of tourism-development by investigating the challenges and opportunities facing by the developing countries.
Fennell (2004). <i>Ecotourism: An Introduction</i>	This book demonstrated the tourism fact with a pose of question saying that there are enormous literature which in fact, do not cover the eco-tourism perspective
Müller & Jansson (2007). <i>Tourism in Peripheries: Perspectives from the Far North and South</i> .	Perspective from the North and South. A total of fourteen papers from diversified disciplines took regionalism as the main focus of interest
Tisdell (2001). <i>Tourism Economics, the Environment and Development: Analysis and Policy</i> .	A total of 27 articles have been included in this book where Clem Tisdell’s contribution is quiet prominent. The content of the book has four parts having various dimensions of tourism development.
Bird (1989). <i>Langkawi—from Mahsuri to Mahathir: Tourism for Whom?</i>	The Institute of Social Analysis is the name of INSAN published this book specifically to focus on Langkawi, an island in Malaysia. The book raised some important issues relating to the tourism in Malaysia with some drawbacks of destroying resources having social impacts, and cross-cultural influence

Hall (ed.) (2007). *Pro-poor Tourism: Who benefits?: Perspectives on Tourism and Poverty Reduction* (Vol. 3). Channel View Publications.

Richards & Wilson (eds.) (2007). *Tourism, Creativity and Development*

Phillips & Roberts (eds.) (2013). *Tourism Planning Community Development-Phillips SOCIETY*

Mohamed, Som, Puad, Jusoh, & Kong (2006). *Island Tourism in Malaysia : The not so good news.*

Hall & Richards (eds.) (2002). *Tourism and Sustainable Community Development*. Routledge.

Mathieson & Wall (1982). *Tourism, Economic, Physical and Social Impacts*. Longman.

Ti (ed.) (1994). *Issues and Challenges in Developing Nature Tourism in Sabah*.

C. Michael. Hall's book has dealt with tourism as part of reducing poverty of the local people. Among various aspects, using as a tool for economic development has been an important direction for many developing nations.

This book has shown an relationship between tourism, culture creativity and development supported by ongoing empirical research in many different countries of the world

Community development and tourism planning is a fascinating discursive at the present time. The complexities of tourism planning and community development can be daunting challenge to revitalize tourism

The study indicated that although the tourists are bringing along lot money in the form earning for the people and the government. But there have been some unforeseen impact of tourism where the localities are losing their natural setting and originality.

Tourism and Community Development has been the main theme of this book which identified tourism as the primary resource-base of it. A total of 20 articles focusing on diversified aspects of community were incorporated to relate them to tourism.

The unprecedented expansion of tourism has given rise to increasingly pronounced economic, physical and social impacts. This book highlighted as to how these impacts affect the society and culture.

As part of nature-tourism, this book is the compilation of a number of articles presented in an international seminar organized in Sabah, Malaysia which mostly focused on ecotourism in Malaysian context basing Sabah as an important spot it.

One of the articles written by Lovelock (2007) presented data on 'Visitors' Perspectives on Naturalness and their Consequences' which had brought useful information relating to the attitudes of the tourists having taken their views in regard to making it attracted to the outsiders. This aspect of seeking opinions from the tourists' point of view for preserving the natural habitat seems to be quite relevant for our research. In our proposed study, we may also seek suggestions and views of the local people in regard to preserving the natural eco-environmental habitat without destroying them at large. We may also seek suggestions of the foreign tourists to make the tourists' spot attracting to the outsiders.

Pro-poor tourism as a perspective of reducing poverty of the local people has been highlighted in a book edited by Hall (2007). By employing tourism as a tool of economic improvement of the developing countries and the book included a number of articles (e.g., DeKadt, '79; Lea, '88; Smith and Eadington, '92) to focus on such particular aspect. In this context, Hall's contribution is academically very much significant and pragmatically relevant as it had

appended a number of papers which were taken from different regional settings.

Ashild Kolas (2008) has published a book entitled '*Tourism and Tibetan Culture in Transition*' to explain the processual reconstruction of the Tibetan culture, since it was found commercially beneficial and economically useful. In fact, the stakeholders have their targets to construct Shangrila for promoting tourism in that region and from spatial point of view; we have much to learn from that research as to how a particular place gets contested for reinvention.

The importance of tourism has been highlighted in a compilation by Clem Tisdell (2001) where the author has incorporated a wide range of documentation showing tourism as highly dependent on environmental conservation. A total of 27 articles from different ecological settings have been included in this volume where Clem Tisdell and David L.McKee (2001) have written a paper entitled "Tourism as an industry for the economic expansion of archipelagoes and small island states". Interestingly, the paper identified tourism as a tempting force to decentralize population. Based on this assumption, it may be hypothesized that the marginal-poor people from

highly dense areas could often be diverted to the tourists' spots locating their small petty-business for subsistence.

One of the articles written by Rajasundaram Sathiendra Kumar and Clem Tisdell (2001) focused tourism as economic development of Maldives in the Asia-Pacific region. In that research, it was found that the economic development of viewing opinions from the tourists' point of view seem to be quite significant for our proposed study where we may seek suggestions and views of a few people from outside enabling us to make future planning. Furthermore the paper sought opinions of the local people seeking their suggestions in regard to the preservation of their eco-environment, without destroying the natural habitat.

In the south-east Asian context, during the early part of 1990s, an international conference on tourism was held in Kuala Lumpur under the sponsorship of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning of University Technology Malaysia to know about tourism-contexts of this region. Among a number of contributors, Badri Bin Haji Masri ('91) has provided us with a valuable documentation on the growth and prospects of domestic tourism in the Southeast Asia region. Yeo Nai Meng ('91) highlighted the trends and prospects of tourism in the 1990s in Singapore and Malaysia and identified Asia Pacific region as the fastest growing tourist region of the world.

A more relevant research has been conducted by Mohamed *et al.* (2006) which specifically mentioned about the significance of tourism in the Malaysian economy. The paper revised tourism development in a few islands of Malaysia, namely, Langkawi, Pangkor, Tioman and Redang providing us with valuable information on the topic which identified the impact of tourism in development context. The paper assessed the positive and negative impacts of tourism in these islands which have been pressurized tremendously totally overlooking the carrying capacity of these areas. Based on such directions, this proposed research of us is intended to focus on Klang Valley as a study region to know all aspects of socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in Malaysia.

A list of some relevant books, articles and other publications on tourism focusing multifarious dimensions in global and national contexts are given as follows:

Bird, 1989; Buckley (ed.), 2004; Buhalis & Costa (eds.), 2006; Buhalis & Laws (eds.), 2001; Burns & Novelli, 2013; Butcher, 2007; Butler, Hall & Jenkins, 1997; Coccossis & Nijkamp, 1995; Coles & Timothy, 2002; Eagles, McCool, & Haynes, 2002; Edgell *et al.*, 2000; Ghosh, Siddique, & Gabbay (eds.), 2003; Goodwin, 1998; Gössling & Hall (eds.), 2006;

Hall & Lew, 1998; Hall, 2008; King, 2009; Liaw & Majungki (eds.), 2001; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Nor' Ain Othman, 2007; Orbasli, 2002; Pye & Lin, 1983; Telfar & Sharpley, 2008; Theobald, 1994; Thomson, 2011; Ti (ed.), 1994; Timothy & Nyaupane (eds.), 2009; Tisdell, 2001; and Wahab & Pigram, 1997.

SOME IDEAS AND RELEVANT ISSUES ON MALAYSIAN TOURISM: FUTURISTIC STATEMENT

At present, tourism may be regarded as the largest service-oriented industry in Malaysia contributing at least 10 per cent of the national GDP; and it is expected that it will provide employment to 100000 million people, which certainly seems to be very much positive in this respect. As part of requirement, it obviously becomes essential to build up infrastructural development, new accommodations and also making improvements of the hotels and catering services. Side by side, it will have to facilitate transport and communications for the visitors to find the better atmosphere for making it more comfortable and enjoyable from eco-environmental perspective. The overall physical development with infrastructural improvements of the roads and highways thus will allow the visitors with an easy access to their desired destinations with better expectations. And such development may eventually benefit the local inhabitants who have been living in those areas permanently. From sociological point of view, it is also useful to preserve the architectural heritages; and accordingly, they require fruitful reconstruction architectural renovation of the buildings and monuments of the historically significant places. From that perspective, if we consider tourism positively, it can be said that it is a good source of income; creating job opportunities for a huge number of floating population of Malaysia. Alongside of this, there occurs a kind of business investment by opening many

markets, shopping-town, hotels and restaurants relating to tourism.

In the preceding pages, we have reviewed in detail the most important theoretical writings, articles and empirical research which were carried out at the national and international levels. Based on that worldview and conceptualization, we go for identifying a few important issues on Malaysian tourism. From economic point of view, Malaysia has been regarded as an emerging nation having all potentials to increase their annual GDP showing a considerable improvement every year. It has been included as one of the five tigers in Southeast Asian region having glorious success in terms of economic and infrastructural development. Tourism in Malaysia has also been regarded as a good source of its economic earnings; in that context, it has a special significance. Until now, there has not been any sort of demographic pressure, nor does it have any shortage of land resources. Upholding its carrying capacity, Malaysia should not allow the ruthless destruction of its natural resources abruptly in the name of tourism. As a matter of fact, tourists from abroad often come to this land to the natural beauty and also to observe their culture and heritage. For that reason, we would say that instead of modernizing tourism, Malaysia should emphasize more on ecotourism. This will allow the nation to protect their environment and ecology.

A few writers (e.g., Mohamed *et al.*, 2006) have given special importance to island tourism in Malaysia and we believe that due to some special geographical location, the country may go for popularizing ecotourism making them linked with the countryside. In fact it may allow generating good income for the people living in the coastal areas and eventually it may be a good strategy to reduce poverty among the surrounding islanders. In this context, Hall's (2007) edited book titled "*Pro-poor Tourism: Who Benefits*" is worth mentioning here which compiled a number of articles indicating the points that tourism should be directed towards economic benefits of the poor residents. The book added that the most important target of tourism and the direct benefit of it should be designed for them.

Due to rapid economic development and infrastructural improvement of the Southeast Asian

region, a huge amount of tourism market has expanded in this region especially among the countries like Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines and few more countries of this area. Tourism in Thailand and Singapore has become quite attractive in these areas. People from western world feel better in adjusting to these regions due to easy interaction of the people with cordiality. From religious and cultural point of view, the situation of Malaysia is fully different from their neighboring countries. Thailand and Singapore have been able to preserve their older heritage, architectural designs.

Apart from these infrastructural development and business facilitations, tourism has also other socio-cultural benefits in this regard. It brings civic pride and social prestige for Malaysia by making a kind of international linkages in global context. It takes Malaysian culture abroad and people from outside can get in touch with this unique Muslim heritage in Malaysian context.

It must not be thought that tourism always has some adverse effect on the environment. Rather to make the environment attractive and natural, the conservationists often will emphasize on point of ecological preservation. From that perspective, it plays a strategic role for preservation of the environment. Another negative aspect of tourism in Malaysia is that it may often have some impacts on the traditional culture and values of the local people. Many people at the local origin often want to imitate foreign culture wearing western dresses leaving behind their traditional normative way of living. In some of the areas, people suspect the presence of some kind of socially-prohibited illegal activities which may have some negative impacts on the society and culture (INSAN, '89).

Apart from this, there are some ecological effects and environmental impacts which are innumerable in number. Due to tremendous infrastructural development, there has been the making of a huge construction of buildings, opening of new shops and super-markets, making additional roads and highways, which eventually make a total transformation of the traditional settlement. Due to urbanization, many crisis and urban-related social problems emerge in the surrounding areas at the community level creating social nuisance.

From ecological perspective, the expansion of urban settlement causes damages to the natural eco-environment by replacing the natural habitats with pavement, buildings and urban settlement. The loss of trees and green space due to deforestation affects the flora and fauna which are turned into urban settlement making space for hotels and restaurants. These are undoubtedly the negative consequences having impact on the environments directly.

Apart from all these positive and negative aspects, we must make an assessment about the carrying capacity that a particular society will allow for an optimal tourism. In this context, we will have an assessment of the Klang valley and to know about the present situation of it, as to how far Klang areas will be able to support our Malaysian tourism. This information will be procured from the administrative record-keeping documents of different Government and non-Government sources responsible for designing tourism in Malaysia. Based on the above, the more specific objectives of the research are as follows.

We have already given an indication in our previous discussion that, like many other East Asian countries, Malaysia has a similar potential prospect for tourism. While the major activities of tourism are based on international visitors coming to this country, the main components of tourist's expenditure and economic interaction has a great influence on Malaysian economy. It will gather detailed information as to how tourism benefits the local people from commercial perspective. And also at the same time, the research will make an estimation of the GDP contribution of tourism in regard to Malaysia's economic welfare.

1. It is learned that due to day-to-day interaction with the tourist and visitors, there occurs a tremendous socio-cultural impact on local values and social structures which contextually requires to be redefined. From that perspective, the research is designed to know the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on traditional Malay cultures.
2. More specifically, the research will learn about local people's perception on tourism. Whether the local people are accepting the tourism from socio-cultural and religious

point of view or they are treating it as a threat to Malaysian community.

3. Also at the same time, the research will generate a comparative line of data to learn about the differences in perceptions between the professionals and the local community about the impact of tourism on their socio-cultural and environmental lives.
4. The research will assess the positive aspect of tourism by locating socio-cultural status that Malaysia derives from its internationalism at the global situation. It will take Malaysian heritage at the global level and international community will be able to see about the living of diverse groups of people in a harmonious co-existence.
5. The research will know about the negative effects of tourism on natural, man-made and socio-cultural environment. The negative effects can be seen in the unwelcome socio-cultural effects, increased vandalism, and loss of the normative and ideological Muslim heritage.
6. It is well recognized that tourism in Malaysia often damages the eco-environments of this particular region of Klang Valley which is over-used by the tourists. The natural habitat is dislocated due to over-making of the roads, highways, buildings and supermarkets. The demand for new land results in deforestation and loss of agricultural and vacant land which eventually is responsible for air pollution and greenhouse effect. The expansions of urban and peri-urban areas are also responsible for the displacement and depletion of wild varieties of rare animals.

RESEARCH METHOD AND STRATEGIES ADOPTED

This paper on tourism is mostly based on secondary information collected through reviewing different literature, reports, and articles at the national and international levels. The paper here is not designed with the purpose of generating any empirical data at this stage, but the paper will relate to our approved project on tourism which is undergoing at

Klang Valley of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In this context, this theoretical framework allows us to develop a worldview of tourism research in Malaysia acting as a guideline for our future research.

Klang is the oldest Royal Town of the State of Selangor and it is one of the main gateways to enter Malaysia through sea. Klang valley on which we are now collecting extensive data is geographically located in the north and south zones of it marking Klang river in both sides of it. Both these zones are clearly separated from each other by river since long past. Because of having some administrative locations, Klang South becomes quite busy during the week-days; and in the week-ends, the area simply turns into a center for social and recreational activities especially after office hours and holidays. It may be noted here that the biggest port of Malaysia named Port Klang is also located at Klang South. The etymology of Klang further suggests that its nomenclature has been taken from Klang river that runs through the town itself. The entire geographical area thus is surrounded by the river which begins at Kuala Lumpur and runs towards west all the way to Port Klang. The whole region is now known as Klang Valley and this study thus is based on Klang Valley focusing most intensively to its surrounding areas located within Kuala Lumpur.

Kuala Lumpur is the capital city of Malaysia and is identified as the part of Klang Valley; it comprises 1.4 million people of whom, 45.9% are the Malays, 43.2% are the Chinese, 10.3% are the Indians and the remaining 0.6% are coming from other different categories of people. Circumscribed by the Titiwangsa Mountains in the east, and Sumatra island of Indonesia on the west, Kuala Lumpur belongs to a tropical rainforest climatic zone (see Map in Wikipedia 2012).

This final product of this research will be guided by an exploratory study based on empirical data collected to be collected at the field level. It is designed to generate socio-anthropological and first-hand information at the primary sources from a micro-level investigation. The research will have multiple aspects of field studies seeking views from a cross-section of people. The principal investigator along with two of his research assistants will employ their participatory approach to make it more meaningful. Among the various other steps, the research will

formulate an interview of 30 professional persons from cross-section of people. This will enable us to know the opinions in regard to socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in this regard. Additionally, a sample survey based on convenience-availability will be conducted among a total of sixty persons taking from cross section of people.

To make an in-depth exploration at the field-level, the research will generate a questionnaire for interviewing all the heads of the families living in that region with a target of making a total enumeration of two closely located peri-urban villages in Klang Valley. This type of survey data will allow us to generate survey-based information about various aspects of tourism in Malaysian context. Apart from these interviews, the research will additionally conduct two FGDs (Focus Group Discussions), taking one each from every village at the community level. This will provide us with all spontaneous data relating to tourism. The FGDs will be conducted by the principal investigator himself and one doctoral student directly involved with the project will assist him as facilitator.

More specifically, we will have some additional information about Klang Valley and its surrounding regions by making an assessment of the areas in regard to its capability to bear the load of a tourist spot in terms of its carrying capacity. This will allow us to know as to how far Klang areas will be able to support our Malaysian tourism. We will procure all these information from the administrative record-keeping from different Government and non-Government sources designed for tourism in Malaysia. It may be noted here that two doctoral students with profound knowledge and background of environmental sociology will be employed as key-investigators who will supervise the data collection at the field level. They themselves also will collect some important data on their own. The reason for using several methods based on triangulation in this research is simply to gain confidence and reliability, in terms of its methodological strength.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper on tourism is based on secondary information collected through reviewing different literature, reports, and articles at the national and

international levels from critical point of view. These review materials have directed us to conceptualize the scope of tourism research in Malaysia and also has suggested us to develop a worldview and guidelines for tourism research in the country. Since tourism has been expanding nationally and internationally, we have provided in this paper a worldview on tourism which will eventually help us to conceptualize a broad paradigm and guideline for our ongoing project on tourism sponsored by the Government of Malaysia through the university.

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