

REFINING TOURIST'S PLACE EXPERIENCE THROUGH PLACEMAKING:  
A CASE STUDY ON MIDDLE EAST TOURISTS  
IN KUALA LUMPUR CITY CENTRE

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To My Husband

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.*

Alhamdulillah, with His Blessings I have successfully completed this thesis.

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## ABSTRAK

Pengalaman pelancong merupakan salah satu aspek pelancongan yang penting. Pengalaman pelancong merangkumi pelbagai aspek seperti pengalaman tempat, perkhidmatan, motivasi, interaksi bersama penduduk tempatan, latar belakang budaya, dan sebagainya. Pengalaman pelancong akan menentukan sama ada lawatan memuaskan atau sebaliknya. Justeru, penilaian terhadap pengalaman pelancong adalah penting.

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menilai pengalaman pelancong yang berkait dengan pengalaman tempat (*place experience*). Dalam kajian ini, penilaian pengalaman tempat terhadap pelancong Timur Tengah yang melawat ke Pusat Bandar Kuala Lumpur (KL) telah dijalankan. Karakter-karakter tempat yang mempunyai peranan penting untuk mewujudkan pengalaman yang berkualiti telah dikenalpasti. Kaedah *Model of Attitude Measurement* (MAM) telah digunakan untuk menilai perbezaan antara tahap kepentingan dengan tahap pengalaman berhubung dengan karakter-karakter tempat tadi. Kajian ini juga menganalisis laluan pelancong di KL dan juga segmen dan tipologi pasaran pelancong Timur Tengah.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan Pusat Bandar Kuala Lumpur mempunyai kriteria-kriteria yang lengkap untuk menjana pengalaman tempat yang positif. Kesemua karakter-karakter tempat yang diuji menunjukkan bahawa kesemua karakter adalah penting kepada pelancong Timur Tengah dan karakter-karakter tersebut dapat dialami semasa lawatan mereka di KL. Pengalaman keseluruhan pelancong juga didapati positif. Oleh yang sedemikian, hasil daripada pengalaman tempat yang positif ini, karakter-karakter tempat sedia ada boleh dipertingkatkan lagi bagi menjana pengalaman tempat yang lebih baik untuk pelancong di masa hadapan.

## **ABSTRACT**

Tourist experience is one of the important aspects in tourism. Tourist experience is comprised of several aspects such as place experience, services, travel motivations, interactions among other tourists and locals, cultural backgrounds, and many more. Tourist experience will determine whether a visit is successful or not. Therefore, evaluation towards tourist experience is vital.

This study aims to evaluate tourist experience that relates with place experience. In this study, evaluation of place experience is conducted on Middle East tourists that visit Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KL). Place characters that have significant roles in creating a quality experience are also identified. Model of Attitude Measurement (MAM) is used to assess the differences and gaps between expectations with actual experiences, in relation to the place characters evaluated. The study also analyses tourist routes in KL and the Middle East tourist segments and typologies.

Results of this study suggest that KL possesses all of the criteria that can generate a positive place experience. The entire place characters tested is found to be important to the Middle East tourists, and these characters are indeed experienced by them during their visit to KL. Their overall tourist experiences are also positive. Therefore, from this positive place experience, existing place characters can be enhanced in order to produce a more refined tourist's place experience in the future.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

Designing places, whether it is for public or private uses, is about the interaction of places and people. In tourism, designing tourist attractions or destinations is ultimately about the interaction of places and tourists. It is a matter of harmonizing the needs of the developers with the demands of the users. Designing tourist attractions is not just about designing buildings and physical spaces, but what is also vital is the way the tangible elements of the attraction is designed that will shape the intangible visitor experience (Swarbrooke, 2002). Gunn (1994) suggests that travelers go to any destination because of its special qualities of place, as every destination possesses a varied set of geographical factors, traditions, relationship to markets and host characteristics. Numerous literatures have suggested the importance of *placemaking* or creating *a sense of place* in building an identity for the attraction (Gunn, 1994; Canter, 1977; Bell, 1999; Potteiger *et al.*, 1998).

Currently, research that deals with landscape architecture and tourism is still at its infancy stage. In his study, Fakri (2004) has found that primary factors that attract tourists to visit gardens are *comfort* and *beauty* of the gardens. Comfort and beauty include cleanliness, comfortable surrounding, ample facilities, nice scenery, architecture, landscape and aesthetic values. Additionally, in a study conducted by Asra (2005), only several landscape elements are found to be most important to the tourists. For example, provision of landscape elements such as gazebo, entrance,

signage, jetty, lighting, walkway, rubbish bin, information board, map and design concept is considered *one-dimension* elements that *must* be present in order to satisfy the needs of the tourists.

These studies have highlighted some of the important findings that share the common ground between the field of landscape architecture and tourism, where physical design meets tourist experience and satisfaction. It is all about creating a place for tourists. *Placemaking* is the retention of the essence of the place while giving it new physical and psychological meaning (Gunn, 1994). In creating places for tourism, it is important to focus on the characteristics of the place that appeal to the tourists, as the environment created will influence the value of experience gained by the tourists. Therefore, a high degree of tourist satisfaction is expected to be generated from a distinct and positive tourist experience.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

In the year 2000, tourists from the Middle East have comprised a market share of 0.52% of tourists in Malaysia, which equates to a number of 53,370 tourists. Up to April of 2006, arrivals of tourists from West Asia are still increasing, and according to Ministry of Tourism (MOTOUR), markets that have tripled in amount is United Arab Emirates with a 156.5% increase. Studies on the Middle East tourist market by both ACNielsen (2002) and Wong (2001) have found that Malaysia has a good potential in attracting the Middle East tourists. Both studies indicate that the strengths of Malaysia are its beautiful surrounding, impressive historical buildings, value for money, shopping facilities and a developed and modern country. It is also noteworthy to acknowledge that Malaysia is probably chosen as a travel destination perhaps because it is a safe Muslim country.

Hence, efforts in attracting tourists from the Middle East have begun since 2002, such as to create a ‘feel at home’ environment, provide Arab entertainment, Middle Eastern food and Arabic speaking staffs. With these strategies in mind, the Ministry of Tourism with Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) have proposed ‘Arab Street’, located within Jalan Berangan and Jalan Beremi, off Jalan Sultan Ismail. The location is also near to hotels and shopping attractions in Bukit Bintang that are commonly visited by the Middle Eastern tourists.



*Images of Arab Street / Ain Arabia*

Undeniably the Middle East market is increasing every year. However, without an evaluation on their experience in Malaysia, there is still a gap in developing the growth of these tourists. Tangible elements alone cannot ensure a positive tourist experience if what is offered does not match with what is demanded. Although the numbers are increasing in terms of arrivals, there is a concern pertaining to the Middle East tourist experience. How can their level of place experience be refined to ensure that they have an interesting visit and a high possibility of future visits? As Kuala Lumpur is a highly visited place in Malaysia by the Middle East tourist, it is a suitable location to initiate this study.

### 1.3 Research Questions

From the problem statement noted above, the following research questions are developed:

- a) What are the elements of place experience?
- b) What are the place characters that give a high quality experience?
- c) With a focus on placemaking,
  - How important are the place characters to the Middle East tourists?
  - How do they evaluate the place characters of Kuala Lumpur City Centre?
  - How do they evaluate their overall tourist experience in Kuala Lumpur?
- d) How can placemaking refine tourist's place experience?

### 1.4 Research Goal and Objectives

The goal of the study is “to determine how placemaking can refine tourist's place experience”.

Thus, the main objectives of the study are:

- a) To determine the place characters that influence place experience
- b) To evaluate Middle East tourist experience in Kuala Lumpur City Centre
- c) To identify the types of Middle East tourist demand in Kuala Lumpur City Centre
- d) To identify places of attractions that they mostly visit in Kuala Lumpur
- e) To recommend possible strategies in refining tourist's place experience through placemaking



## **1.5 Scopes of Research**

The scope of the study is divided into five main areas. The following are the areas covered in the study.

### **1.5.1 Literature review**

The literature review focuses on the theoretical perspectives of the following elements: place, place experience, placemaking and tourist experience.

### **1.5.2 Evaluation of tourist's place experience through place-character and place-experience**

The above assessment is intended to probe the gaps between expectation and experience gained by the Middle East tourists in Kuala Lumpur City Center. Aspects of experience that is covered are their expectations when visiting Kuala Lumpur, and their actual experiences and evaluation. This is the major part of the evaluation, as it not only examines the tourist's evaluation of the city, but also how they rate their experience based on their evaluation.

### **1.5.3 Evaluation of tourist's profile and trip characteristics to Kuala Lumpur**

The profiling is intended to determine the typology and common traits of the tourists in terms of their:

- age;
- gender;
- place of origin;
- educational attainment;
- employment;
- trip motivation;
- party composition;
- trip organization, etc.

#### **1.5.4 Recommendation of strategies to refine tourist's place experience through placemaking**

Appropriate and suitable strategies are formulated to bridge the gaps between tourist expectation and experience. Strategies are based on elements of place character that can be enhanced to refine tourist's place experience.

### **1.6 Study Approach**

The study approach is divided into four stages. All the stages are described briefly under several headings below (see Figure 1.1):

#### **1.6.1 Stage 1 – Preliminary Stage**

The preliminary stage of the study includes refining of the study objectives and scoping as well as literature review. The literature review is aimed at establishing an underpinning on the research area i.e. place, place experience, placemaking and tourist experience. Sources of information are collected from academic books, journals, conference papers and other research publications. The study design is also developed in this stage.

#### **1.6.2 Stage 2 – Data Collection**

The data collected in this study is a combination of primary data and secondary data. The primary data is acquired through field work conducted in Kuala Lumpur City Centre using self-administered questionnaires on Middle East tourists. Locations that are chosen for the survey are primarily along Bukit Bintang to KLCC areas, where Middle East tourists stay during their visit.

The secondary data will be obtained from relevant studies, reports, statistics and researches published by Tourism Malaysia, MOTOUR, Annals of Tourism Research, etc.

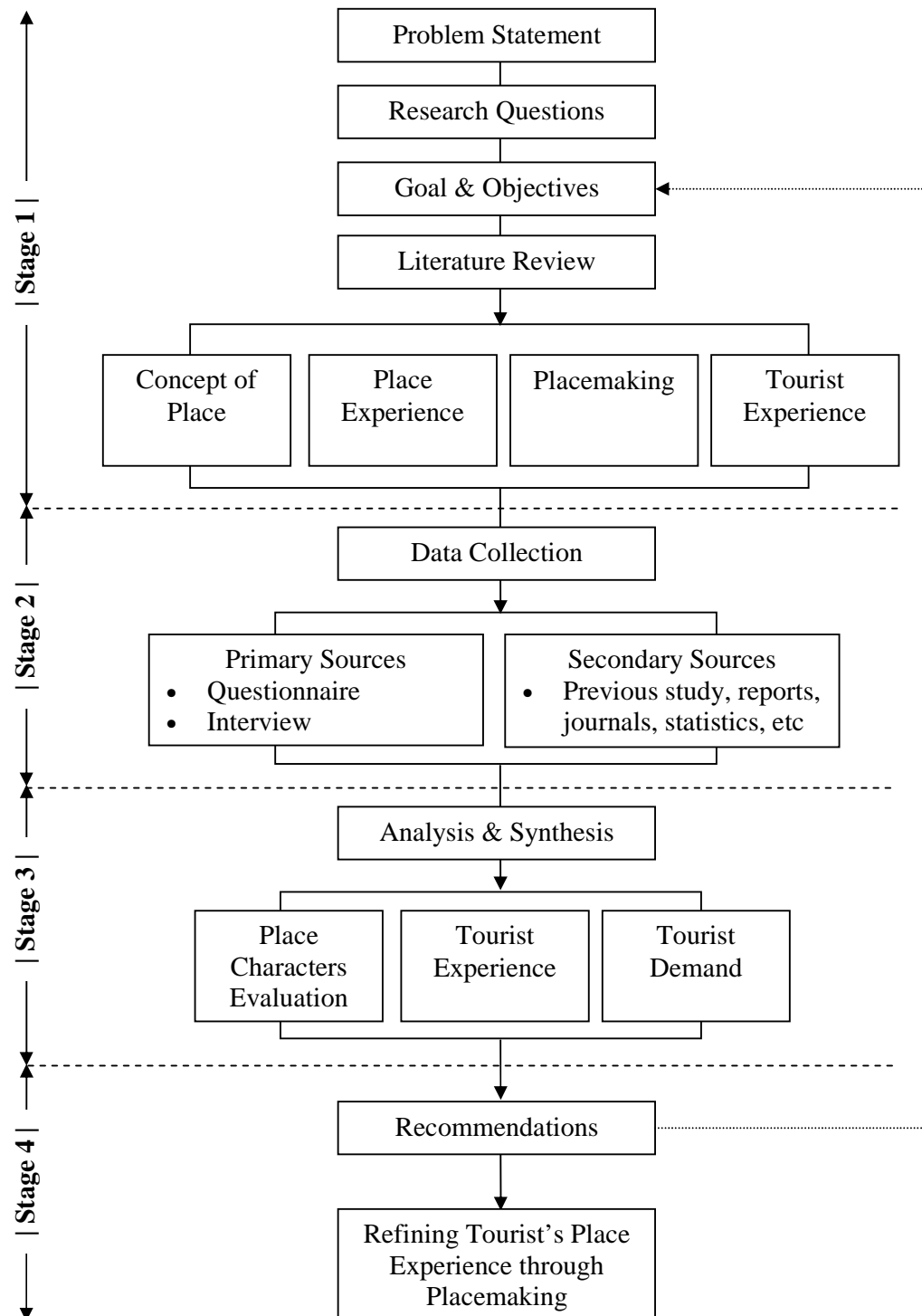
### **1.6.3 Stage 3 – Analysis and Synthesis**

The analysis of the data collected is deliberated using simple statistical tool such as Microsoft Excel. Descriptive analysis is used to examine tourist's profile, trip characteristics, tourist route and experience evaluation.

Fishbein's Model of Attitude Measurement (Ryan, 1995) is applied to identify two important components of attitude: the evaluative component and the importance of that belief. Experience is also made up of expectation (belief) and actual experience (evaluation of that belief on site).

### **1.6.4 Stage 4 – Recommendations**

The final stage of the study is the formulation of recommendations to refine the Middle East tourist experience in Kuala Lumpur.



**Figure 1.1: Study Flow Chart**

## **1.7 Techniques of Analysis**

### **1.7.1 Research Method**

This research undertakes an approach that considers the relative importance of itemised attitudinal components listed upon a questionnaire. Model of Attitude Measurement in this research uses the basis of the Personal Construct Theory which permits the construction of Likert scales that utilise variables that reflect attributes considered important by actual or potential users of a tourist zone (Ryan, 1995). There are two components of attitude, the evaluative component, and the importance of that belief. On this basis, it is possible to devise a two-part questionnaire.

The first part represents the belief or expectation components, which consists of a set of questions asking respondents to indicate the degree of importance they attach to specific variables pertaining to the place characters of their chosen holiday destination. A five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'very important' to 'very unimportant' is used. The second part represents the evaluative components of that belief, that relates to the specific destination, which is Kuala Lumpur City Centre, where the respondents are asked to indicate the degree which this destination possesses the same attributes used in the first part, and again, a five-point scale is used.

Additionally, a third part is added to the questionnaire to measure the satisfaction levels of their tourist experience. High-quality place experience factors (Steele, 1981) are presented in the questionnaire to be evaluated by the respondents. As noted by Ryan (1991), 'the degree of satisfaction gained from the experience relates to the expectations of the tourist, the degree of reality which those expectations were based, the ability of the tourist to adapt to perceived realities and the nature of the critical encounter that shaped that reality'.

### **1.7.2 Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument that is utilised in this study is a tourist survey, through questionnaires and researcher's observation.

#### **a) Questionnaire**

A close-ended and self-administered questionnaire for the tourists is designed. The questionnaire is divided into four sections.

The first section consists of statements on the importance of specific place characters to the respondents when visiting any place or destination. The place characters act as variables that represents major elements in place experience, which influence placemaking. The respondents are asked to rate the importance of the place characters mentioned, as to which would ensure that they have the best experience when visiting any place, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'very important' to 'very unimportant'.

The second section consists of the same statements on place characters, but in this section, respondents are asked to evaluate the place characters that they experience in Kuala Lumpur City Centre. This section also uses a five-point rating scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

The third section of the questionnaire enquires an evaluation on the respondent's overall experience in Kuala Lumpur City Centre. This part is measured through a five-point rating scale on place experience factors that represents a high-quality experience.

Finally, the fourth section consists of information pertaining the respondent's trip characteristics and tourist routes in Kuala Lumpur City Centre.

**b) Observation**

An observation on tourist activities and behaviours on site is also conducted to support the data collected. Informal activities engaged by the tourists can be used to further elaborate the rationale of their evaluations.

The tourist questionnaire is prepared in English using simple words that is straight forward and can be understood easily. A pilot test has also been conducted prior to the actual survey to refine the wording of the instructions and questions so that the respondents have better understanding in completing the questionnaire.

**1.7.3 Population and Sampling**

Respondents are specifically targeted on tourists from the Middle East countries, aged 18 and above, and only limited to specific perimeters of area in Kuala Lumpur City Center, which is primarily along Jalan Bukit Bintang, Jalan Sultan Ismail and Jalan Ampang areas. These areas are chosen as they have been observed and identified as areas highly accommodated by Middle East tourists during their stay in Kuala Lumpur. Additionally, it is also within these areas that most shopping and entertainment venues are located. A total of 100 questionnaires are distributed randomly using method of 'next to pass' to the Middle East tourists at shopping malls, hotel lobby and dining outlets within the mentioned areas.

a) **The Middle East Countries**

In reference to Table 1.1 and Figure 1.2, the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Region includes:

**Table 1.1: Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region**

|             |               |              |          |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|----------|
| Afghanistan | Algeria       | Bahrain      | Cyprus   |
| Djibouti    | Egypt         | Iran         | Iraq     |
| Jordan      | Kuwait        | Lebanon      | Libya    |
| Mauritania  | Morocco       | Oman         | Pakistan |
| Qatar       | Turkey        | Saudi Arabia | Somalia  |
| Sudan       | Syria         | Tunisia      | UAE      |
| Yemen       | The West Bank | Gaza         |          |

(Source: AC Nielsen, 2002)



**Figure 1.2: The Middle East Region**

b) **Middle East Tourist Perceptions of Malaysia**

These findings are based on studies on Middle East tourist market conducted by AC Nielsen (2002) and Wong (2001).



- Majority of respondents perceive that Malaysia has beautiful nature and landscapes which are appealing as tourist attractions.
- 39.5% of respondents come to Malaysia because of nature or scenery.
- 30.25% are attracted by the best places for shopping.
- 85.32% of the Middle East tourists come to Malaysia for vacation.
- 84% of the visitors conducted in Wong's study are first timers.
- 52.8% choose to come to Malaysia to escape their summer season.
- The concept of evaluation used in Wong's study found that:

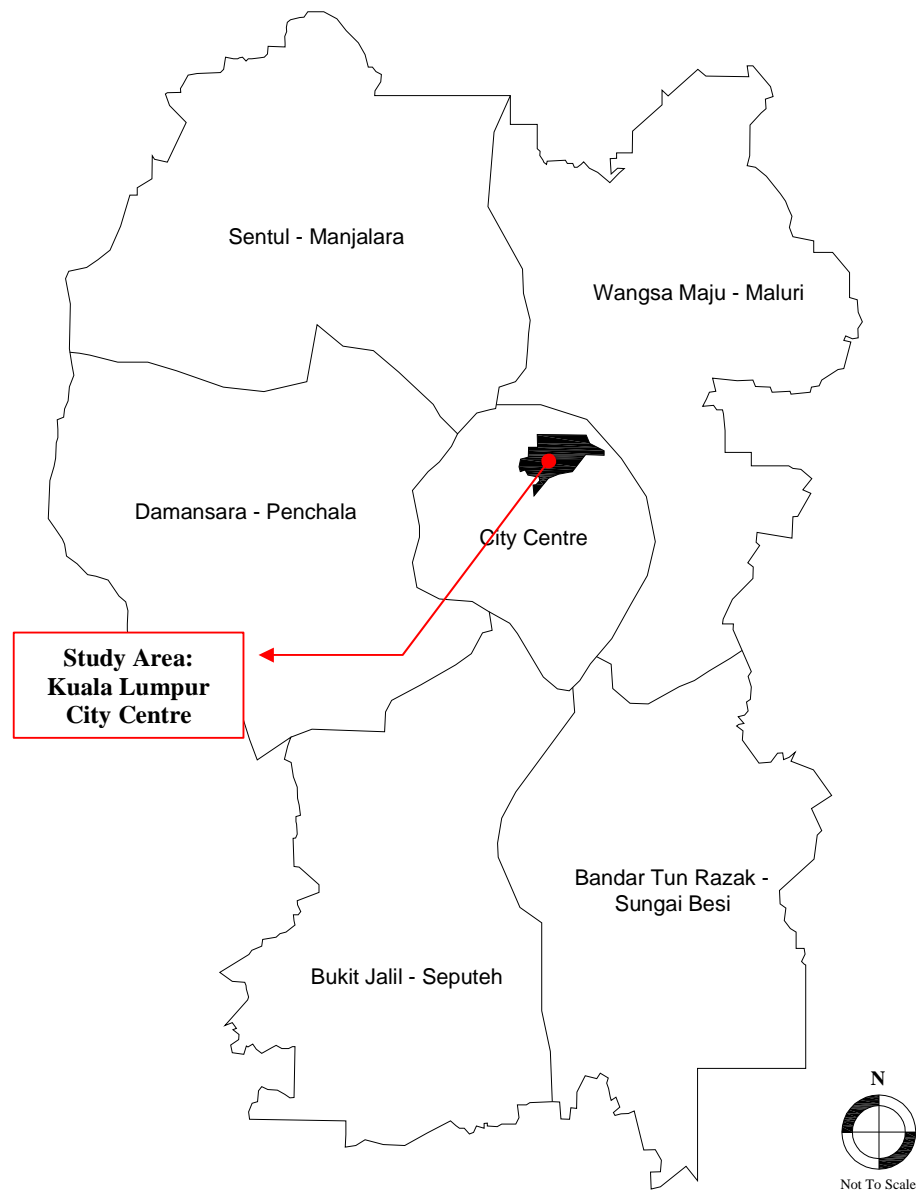
|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Highest Evaluation        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beautiful beaches and unspoilt islands</li> </ul>   |
| Second Highest Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cool high lands</li> <li>• Rich heritage</li> </ul> |
| Lowest Evaluation         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theme parks</li> <li>• Food and shopping</li> </ul> |

**c) Middle East Tourist Travel Behaviour**

- 78% of respondents stayed in five-star city hotel.
- Popular items purchased are clothes and textiles (39.11%).
- 53.85% evaluated that Malaysia has poor transportation.
- Major activities engaged were sightseeing in cities, shopping and visiting beaches.
- According to the Departing Visitors Survey (DVS) from MTPB (1998), the main ranked activities were:
  1. Sightseeing in cities
  2. Shopping
  3. Visiting beaches
  4. Sightseeing in countryside
- 79.21% organised their trip via travel agencies, using the 'free and easy' package.

## 1.8 Study Area

Kuala Lumpur City Centre is selected as the study site to conduct this study, as it is one of the destinations in Malaysia that is highly visited by the Middle East tourists.



**Figure 1.3: Kuala Lumpur Map – Distribution of Tourism Products**

*Source: Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020*

**a) Kuala Lumpur as a tourist destination**

As a major city, Kuala Lumpur has a developed infrastructure and service sector. The City offers a wide range of tourist attractions, shopping, entertainment, hotel and conference facilities. Kuala Lumpur also builds its distinctive image and identity on its multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural society. Being the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur is home to a population of over 1.3 million, and is by far the largest city in Malaysia. The history of Kuala Lumpur dates back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when a group of tin prospectors came to settle around the convergence of the Klang and Gombak Rivers. This event marks the foundation of Kuala Lumpur and it has seen its share of growth and setbacks to become metropolitan centre of today (KLCH, 2004). In *Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020*, the City is aimed to be developed as an attractive international destination while creating a distinctive city identity and image. Further details on Kuala Lumpur as a tourist destination is discussed in Chapter 3.

**b) Tourism products in Kuala Lumpur**

Kuala Lumpur has a wide diversity of resources that are suitable for tourism, each at varying degrees of development or attractiveness. Tourism products in the City range from cultural heritage attractions, urban visitor resources and recreational and health resources. In terms of its architecture, Kuala Lumpur has retained a number of historic buildings and areas that represents its past, such as Dataran Merdeka and the Railway Station. Modern additions to the city of buildings like the KL Tower and the Petronas Twin Towers at the KLCC also provide images of a modern city that is firmly in touch with its cultural roots.



*Images of tourism products in Kuala Lumpur*

Shopping, dining and entertainment in Kuala Lumpur are also emerging to become a price competitive shopping destination with international quality. The City has developed many shopping centres including new retail formats such as hypermarkets, mega malls, duty-free shopping outlets and discount stores. The night markets in particular are of great interest to tourists as they give an insight into the traditional Malaysia way of life (KLSP 2020).



*Images of street markets, street cafes and shopping outlets in Kuala Lumpur*

Parks and recreational facilities have also been promoted to attract tourists from the recreational and leisure segments. There are a number of parks in Kuala Lumpur containing attractions of interest to tourists such as Butterfly Park, Bird Park and Orchid Garden at Taman Tasik Perdana.



*Images of Bird Park, Butterfly Park and Deer Park in Kuala Lumpur*

## **1.9 Significance of the Study**

Research on landscape architecture for tourism is still at its infancy stage. Design of outdoor space, especially in public or civic places, deals with subjective and wide ranging of experiences. Similarly, places for tourism is also designed to give tourists the experience that they seek. However, current research on experience tend to focus more on the wider aspects of experience, such as services, life styles and motivations without very much emphasis on place design and placemaking.

This research is embarked to form early groundworks towards refining tourist's place experience by enhancing place character through placemaking. This study is necessary to assist landscape architects, designers and tourism planners in determining the most suitable and viable design or enhancement strategies for public or private place that is also a tourist attraction.

## **1.10 Limitation of the Study**

In conducting this research, the following limitations are identified. First, there is limited time, labour and funding. The survey is constrained to be conducted only during the holiday period of Middle East tourists, which is between the months of May and September. Data results may only reflect or represent a period in a year, and not all throughout a one year period. Second, the questionnaire used as survey instrument is limited to self-administered measures. Respondents may understand or interpret the items asked in the questionnaire differently, as respondents have different academic background.

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