

PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE OF MIDDLE EAST  
TOURISTS TOWARDS TRAVEL IN KUALA LUMPUR

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I cordially dedicate this thesis to the biggest treasures of my life, my parents, who gave me their love, and also for their endless support and encouragement.

To my beloved mother and father  
I love you for every second of my life

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## ABSTRACT

International tourism has become one of the largest and most vital economic sectors of the global economy driving huge flows of people, commodities, and capital. Tourism has been and continues to be an important foreign exchange earner to many countries in South East Asia and Malaysia is no exception. This study was undertaken to identify factors that are central to tourists from the Middle East when choosing Malaysia as a vacation destination. The study used factor analysis as an appropriate way to identify underlying motivations factors. And also evaluate perception of Middle East Tourists before coming to Malaysia and after visiting Malaysia. The findings of the research reveal that push and pull factors were more important than other factors among Middle East tourists. For instance, 'Novelty and Prestige' ranked highest among the push factors and also the pull factors, 'Natural, Historical and Environment'. The purpose of this thesis is to provide fact and figures based on the opinion of Middle East tourists who visited Malaysia. This study used the survey research for obtaining data randomly from 64 outbound Middle East tourists coming and leaving Kuala Lumpur, International airport (KLIA), selected Iranian and Arabian Restaurant in Kuala Lumpur. And also to identify factors for visiting Malaysia, image of Malaysia as a tourism destination. From the results, for most of the Middle East tourists, hospitality, safety and security is extremely important for choosing Malaysia as a foreign country for long-haul travel. Malaysia is at the top of the list of top five countries for long-haul travel, followed by natural environment.

## ABSTRAK

Pelancongan antarabangsa telah menjadi salah satu sektor ekonomi global yang terbesar dan terpenting, memacu pengaliran sebahagian besar manusia, komoditi, dan modal. Pelancongan telah dan terus menjadi penyumbang pertukaran asing yang penting kepada banyak negara di Asia Tenggara dan Malaysia turut tidak terkecuali. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang berpusat kepada pelancong dari Timur Tengah dalam memilih Malaysia sebagai destinasi percutian. Kajian ini menggunakan analisis faktor sebagai kaedah yang bersesuaian dalam mengenal pasti faktor-faktor motivasi yang menjadi dasar. Kajian ini juga menilai persepsi pelancong Timur Tengah sebelum dan selepas melawat Malaysia. Dapatan kajian mendedahkan bahawa faktor tolakan dan tarikan adalah lebih penting daripada faktor-faktor lain di kalangan pelancong Timur Tengah. Sebagai contoh, 'Novelti dan Prestij' adalah peringkat tertinggi antara faktor tolakan dan juga faktor tarikan, 'Keaslian, Sejarah dan Persekitaran Semula Jadi'. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyediakan fakta dan angka berdasarkan pendapat-pendapat pelancong Timur Tengah yang melawat Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah soal selidik untuk mendapatkan data secara rawak daripada 64 pelancong Timur Tengah yang datang dan pergi meninggalkan Kuala Lumpur. Lapangan Terbang Antarabangsa (KLIA), Restoran Iran dan Arab di Kuala Lumpur menjadi lokasi kajian. Kajian ini juga bertujuan mengenal pasti faktor-faktor lawatan ke Malaysia, imej Malaysia sebagai destinasi pelancongan. Daripada hasil kajian, bagi kebanyakan pelancong Timur Tengah, hospitaliti, keselamatan dan kesejahteraan adalah sangat penting dalam memilih Malaysia sebagai negara asing untuk perjalanan jarak jauh. Malaysia adalah di bahagian teratas senarai lima negara terbaik untuk perjalanan jarak jauh, diikuti oleh persekitaran semula jadi.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of Study**

Since 2001 the Asia Pacific region became a rapidly growing tourism destination in the world. That during the period 1990–2006, worldwide tourism arrivals grew on average by 3.5% and also over the period 2005–2006, statistics show a 4.7% increase to hit a record high of 845 million (UNWTO, 2008). Furthermore, international tourists in the region grew to a total of 578 million in the first eight months of 2006, up 4.5% from 553 million in those of 2005, a year which shows an all-time record of 806 million people travelling internationally. Increase was estimated to continue in 2007 at a rate of approximately 4% worldwide (UNWTO Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific, 2008). As the world's second fastest-growing region the Asia Pacific region remains strong by receiving 167.8 million tourists arrival (UNWTO, 2008).

The number of international arrivals to Malaysia showed a significant growth before reaching its first peak in 1990. Malaysia in 1990 also recorded a 54% increase in tourist arrivals from the previous year due to the intense 'Visit Malaysia Year' promotional blitz throughout the world. This industry has been growing rapidly in Malaysia over the past few years. Malaysia tourism had enjoyed quite an impressive average growth of 9.26% between 1981 and 2000. After taking a dip in 1997 and 1998, the Malaysian tourism sector recovered with a 53% increase in international tourist arrivals if the projection by the Economic Intelligence Unit is still relevant (Tourism Malaysia, 2010).

The Malaysian Ministry of Tourism also announced that the cumulative tourist arrival figures from January until March 2005 stood at 4,159,857 visitors, which was a 4.6% increase from last year's figure of 3,978,214 visitors for the same period. Malaysia registered 20.9 million tourists in 2007 and 22.1 million in 2008. It is an overall increase of 5.1% compare to 2007. As reported by Tourism Malaysia the average occupancy rate of Malaysia hotels in 2008 was 66.3% as on 17 February 2009. This illustrates the substantial number of visitor arrivals and tourist receipts in Malaysia. The Ministry has indicated that it will continue to work hard to improve tourism performance for the coming years and all indicators are positive in favour of a better performance. Table 1.1 presents major information about tourism industry in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2010).

**Table 1.1:** Tourist arrival and receipts to Malaysia

<i>Year</i>	<i>Arrivals (million)</i>	<i>Receipts (RM)</i>
2009	23.6	53,367.7 million
2008	22.0	49,561.2 million
2007	20.9	46,070.0 million
2006	17.45	36, 271.1 million
2005	16.4	31,954.1 million
2004	15.7	29, 651. 4 million
2003	10.5	21, 291. 1 million

*Source:* Tourism Malaysia (2010)

Over the past several decades, the tourism industry in Malaysia has become one of the fastest-growing industries within the services sector especially as the financial system transits into a post-industrial society. This growth is being backed by a steady rise in the number of tourists flocking into the country, especially travellers from countries like Singapore, Thailand, China and India and a significant number of tourists who come to Malaysia from Middle East. Nonetheless, variety of products and facilities by Malaysian tourism organisations have offered a to Middle East tourists, but from 2007 to 2008, Malaysian tourism saw a downhill trend in the number of tourists arriving from the Middle Eastern countries (Tourism Malaysia, 2008), as shows in Table 1.2.

**Table1.2:** Tourist arrivals from Middle East countries

<i>Country of residence</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>
Bahrain	9228	11,905	6874	7822
Iran	4189	5526	27,215	63,165
Kuwait	11,506	13,369	17,650	17,812
Lebanon	12,309	18,753	8523	5532
Oman	9228	11,905	19,525	16,712
Qatar	8522	6885	11,782	7437
Saudi Arabia	53,682	67,679	78,298	74,632
Syrian Arab Republic	0	0	7481	4066
United Arab Emirates	29,606	35,118	38,170	33,347
<i>Total</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>215,518</i>	<i>205,065</i>

*Source:* Tourism Malaysia (2008)

Tourist motivations can be defined as the combination of biological and cultural factors which gives value and direction to travel choices, characteristics and experience (Perner, 2008). Motivation for travel has been an important area of study in the tourism literature for decades. Understanding why people travel and what factors influence their behavioral intent of choosing a travel destination is beneficial to tourism planning and marketing. Consequently, the objectives of this research are to identify perception of Malaysia by Middle East tourist which drives Middle East tourists to travel to Malaysia.

## **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 are United Arab Emirates with a 156.5% increase. Studies on the Middle East tourist market by both Nielsen, (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,



and 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) has 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. 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:

- 1- What is the image of Malaysia as a tourism destination?
- 2- What are factors for visiting Malaysia?
- 3- What is the perception of Middle East tourist from destination?

## **1.4 Research Goal and Objectives**

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

Thus, the main objectives of the study are:

- To identify Middle East tourists expect from KL before arrival
- To identify Middle East tourists demand from KL
- To identify Kuala Lumpur attractions: places to visit by Middle East tourism
- To identify the motivation for choosing Malaysia (KL)

## **1.5 scop of study**

The scope of the study is international air port (KLIA) and selected Iranian restaurant in KL, Arabian restaurant that 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:

Tourism, tourism in Malaysia, Profiles of Middle East Tourists, Malaysian Tourism Market Efforts, Motivation theory, Middle East tourist behavior and motivations.

### **1.5.2 Evaluation of tourist's motivations**

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 profile is proposed to establish the typology and common character of the tourists in terms of their: Gender, age group, marital status, educational level, nationality, place of stay, number of visit, journey motivation.

### **1.5.4 Recommendation of strategies to refine tourist's motivations to the destination**

Suitable strategies are formulated that can to identify tourist expectation and experience. Strategies are based on elements of place character that can be enhanced to refine tourist's motivations.

## **1.6 Study approach**

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 – First Round Stage**

The first round 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 place, motivation, perception of tourists. Sources of information are collected from academic books, journals 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.

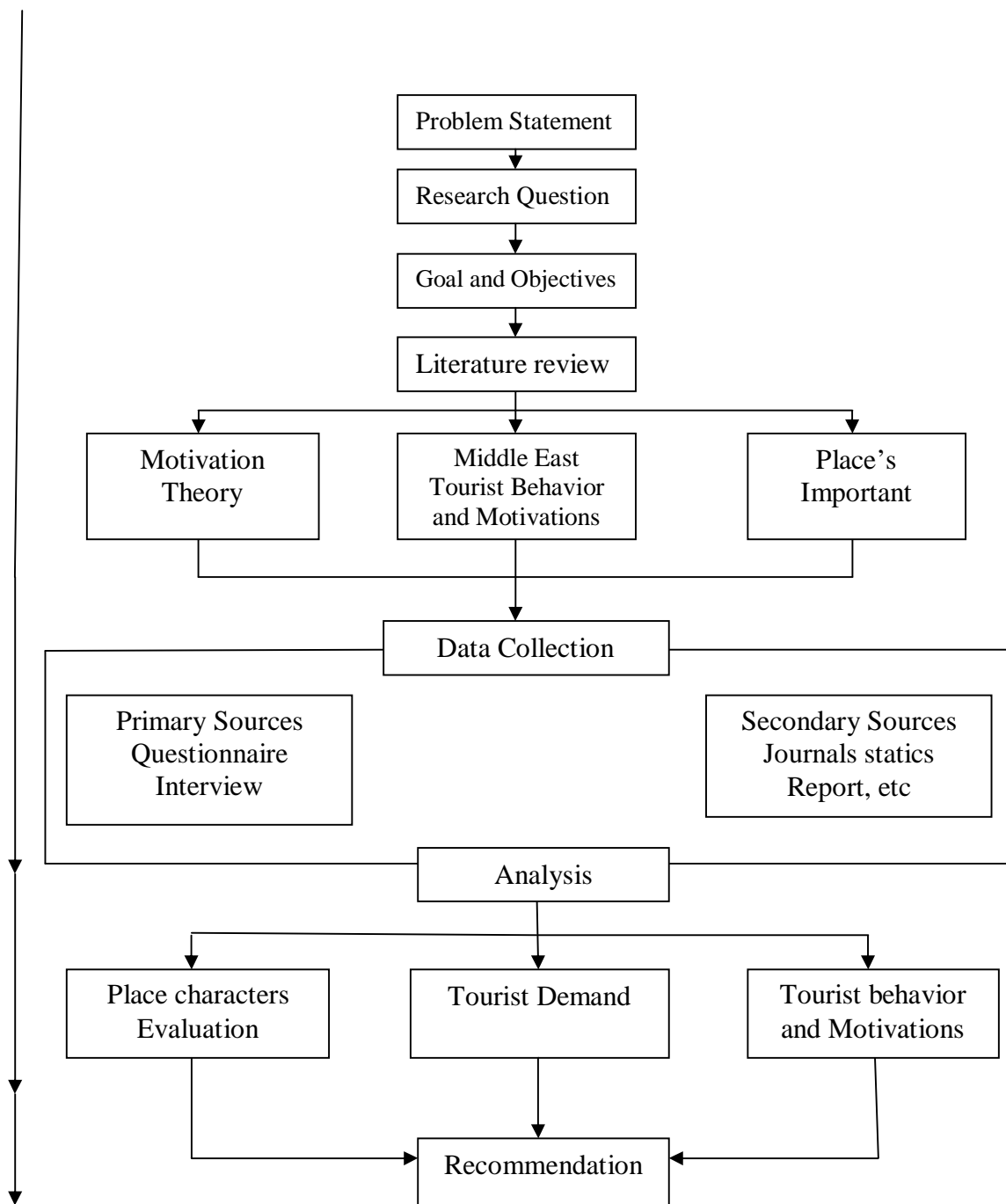
The secondary data will be obtained from relevant studies, reports, statistics and researches published by Tourism Malaysia.

### **1.6.3 Stage 3 – Analysis**

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

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

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



**Figure 1.1:** Perception and Attitude of Middle East tourists towards travel in Kuala Lumpur

## **1.7 Techniques of Analysis**

The techniques of analysis are following below steps:

### **1.7.1 Research Method**

This research undertakes an approach that considers the relative importance of itemized attitudinal components listed upon a questionnaire. 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, (1995), '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'.

Some of the questions that should be asked through questionnaire that can be used for this project are:

- What are tourist main purposes of travel?
- How do you define tourist experience while travelling?
- What was tourist perception before and after visit Malaysia?
- Rate tourist satisfaction with the service that have received/ the purchase that has been made?

The result of answering these questions and some other questions with more details will help the researcher to find about perception of Malaysia by Middle East tourist before and after visiting Malaysia.

### **1.7.2 Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument that is utilized 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 represent major elements in place experience, which influence tourist attitude. 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 behaviors 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 passes to the Middle East tourists at shopping malls, hotel lobby and dining outlets within the mentioned areas. Table 1.3 shows identify as areas highly accommodation by Middle East tourist.

**Table 1.3:** Identify as areas highly accommodated by Middle East tourist

Area	Sampling
Jalan Bukit Bintang	Shopping malls, Iranian and Arabian Restaurant, Hotels, Entertainment
Jalan Ampang	Iranian Restaurant, Ampang shopping centre
Jalan Sultan Ismail	Hotels

a) The Middle East Countries

In reference to Table 1.4 and Figure 1.2, the Middle East Region includes:

**Table 1.4:** Middle East region

List of Middle East region				
Bahrain	Cyprus	Egypt	Iran	Iraq
Israel	Jordan	Jordan	Kuwait	Libya
Lebanon	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	Syria
Sudan	Turkey	Tunisia	United Arab emirates	Yemen



**Figure 1.2:** The Middle East Region

b) Perception of Malaysia by Middle East tourist

These findings are based on studies on Middle East tourist market conducted by 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.

c) Middle East Tourist Travel Behavior

- 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.

## 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.

### **1.9 Significance of the Study**

Research shows that places for tourism are also designed to give tourists the experience that they get. However, current research on perception of tourist tend to focus more on the wider aspects attract to destination, such as services, accommodation, life style and motivations.

This study is also conduct that can help to 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 conduct this research, the following limitations are identified. First, there is limited time, work and money. Second, the questionnaire used as survey instrument is limited to self-administered measures. Respondents may understand or take to mean the items asked in the questionnaire differently, as respondents have different academic background.

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