PERCEPTION OF INBOUND TOURISTS FROM INDIA ABOUT TOURISM SERVICES IN MALAYSIA

Sarat Kumar Lenka
Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management, India.

Sudipta Kiran Sarkar
Hong Kong Polytechnic, Hong Kong.

ABSTRACT

Malaysia's tourism industry has experienced phenomenal growth in the recent times and has become a significant area of its economy. One of the most dynamic inbound markets for Malaysia is India. This study with the help of descriptive analysis probes on during the visit experiences as well as post-visit experiences of Indian tourists in terms of accommodation, tourist services, facilities and amenities etc. Since the perception of tourists from the Indian subcontinent is an under-researched area, this study explores the significance of Malaysia as a tourist destination and examines the behavioural trends and the satisfaction levels of Indian tourists. The results of the study showed tourists from India are in general satisfied with the accommodation and tourist facilities as well as have a positive impression of Malaysia as a destination. The areas of most satisfaction were cleanliness and hygiene, food and beverage quality, weather and climate in Malaysia, destination information services and quality of support services like telecommunications, money exchange facilities etc. The study also revealed that Indian tourists are of the opinion that Malaysia as a destination is a perfect and safe family destination with exciting opportunities for shopping.

Keywords: *Indian tourists, destination Image, inbound tourism, destination attributes, Malaysia, perception.*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia one of the world's most culturally and geographically diverse countries and therefore has a vast potential for tourism. Malaysia is a memorable and a unique tourist destination for is its multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society. The presence of different Asian cultures has led NTA, 'Tourism Malaysia' to come out with a slogan 'Malaysia, Truly Asia' (Virtual Malaysia, 2011) The 'Malaysia, Truly Asia' slogan has been one of the successful campaigns for the nation's tourism industry **(**Tourism Malaysia, 2011**).** A lot of emphasis has been given by the Malaysian Government on the role of tourism in its economic development. Malaysia received 22 million tourists and receipts of RM49, 561.2 million in 2008. Malaysia is a destination which possesses a multicultural / multi-ethnic social

structure that helps in selling it successfully in the international tourist market (PATA, 2008).The major tourist generating markets have largely been from within Asia over the past few years. Singapore consistently and traditionally being the leading market followed by Thailand , Indonesia, Brunei in the South East Asian region and China, Japan from Far East and India from the South Asian region respectively. According to Tourism Malaysia (2011) the top 10 markets for Malaysia in terms of tourist arrivals for the year 2010 were i) Singapore (13,042,004 visitors), ii) Indonesia (2,506,509 visitors), iii) Thailand (1,458,678 visitors),   iv) China (1,130,261visitors), v) Brunei (1,124,406 visitors) vi) India (690,849 visitors), vii) Australia (580,695 visitors) viii) the Philippines (486,790 visitors), ix) United Kingdom (429,965visitors) and x) Japan (415,881visitors). In terms of the growth rate of tourist arrivals between 2009 and 2010, the growth in tourist arrivals from India was 17.1%, highest among not only the top ten markets but also among all markets (Tourism Malaysia, 2010).

One of the most phenomenal growths in terms of tourist arrivals that took place in the last few years is the Indian market. India as a tourist generating market was positioned as 12th in 2001 and in 2007 and successively in 2008 it came up as one of the top 10 markets taking the 6th position (Tourism Malaysia, 2011). Over almost the last one decade the Indian outbound tourism market has grown by every leaps and bounds. Triggered by an economy that is growing at rate between 8% to 10% annually the Indian outbound travel market is one of the fastest growing in the world (Kakkar, 2006). A strong, consumption-driven economy, a large and increasingly affluent middle class, and the on-going liberalisation of air transport will contribute to a 10 per cent annual growth in Indian outbound travellers to Asia Pacific over the next three years (PATA, 2008). In 2007, tourist arrivals from India reached 4, 22,452 and in 2008, the number of Indian tourists that visited were 550,738 resulting in an increase of 30.4% compared to 2007(Tourism Malaysia, 2011).

Table 1: Tourist Arrivals from India

YEAR	ARRIVALS	POSITION	% CHANGE
2001	143,513	12	
2002	183,360	10	+ 27.8
2003	145,143	7	- 20.8
2004	172,966	10	+19.2
2005	225,789	9	+30.5
2006	279,046	7	+23.6
2007	422,452	6	+58.3
2008	550,738	6	+30.4
2009	589,838	6	+7.1
2010	690,849	6	+17.1

(*Source: Research Division of Tourism Malaysia with cooperation of Immigration Dept., Malaysia*)

In the light of this discussion, the image of Malaysia as tourist destination for tourists from India is an aspect of prime importance. Destination image for tourists from India is an aspect of international tourism marketing as well. The level of tourism development that has occurred in Malaysia over the years has set an example for many emerging destinations across the world. As a result it is vital to see how Indian tourists

would perceive tourism services in Malaysia in comparison to India as well as many highly developed tourism destinations across the world. This study will look into the perception of Indian tourists in Malaysia in terms of accommodation, tourist services, facilities and amenities etc. Based on the perception study on the tourists, their satisfaction levels and behavioural patterns will be analysed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Zhang et al., (2009) in their study have taken an overall view of the different theories and literatures on perception study and found that quantitative studies in the area are much less attempted compared to qualitative studies. Hui and Wan (2003) takes a mixed approach involving qualitative and quantitative approach to study the tourist destination image of Singapore based on the perception of tourists. They referred to the three continuums (i) functional–psychological, (ii) unique–common and (iii) attribute–holistic by Echtner and Ritchie (2009) as well as Choi et al., (1999) study on Hong Kong tourist destination image. Wang and Davidson (2008) have also done a review of a number of international literatures on perception/destination image and referred to the destination attributes of 'natural resources', 'general infrastructure', 'tourism infrastructure', 'tourism leisure and recreation', 'cultural, history and art', 'political and economic factors', 'natural environment', 'social environment', and 'atmosphere of the place'. Henkel et al.(2006) suggests that mental image formation of destination for the tourist plays a crucial role in decision-making and its match with the tourists view of the destination can further their influence their behaviour. Xiao and Mair (2006) also refer to the image formation of destinations having an impact on the decision-making processes as well as determining the 'word-of-mouth' information. The perceptive/cognitive evaluation of destination image by tourists is considered a vital aspect (Xiao and Mair, 2006; Prebensen, 2005). Destination image and perceptions are interlaced as the latter affects the former (Volo, 2004). Reisinger at al., (2009) refers to destination attributes "attractions ", "accommodation and transportation", "entertainment, service", "social factors", "activities", "safety and security", "information", "cost", and "image" that can influence the perception of tourists. Reisinger et al. (2009) in their study also found that cultural traits of tourists have a significant impact on choice of destinations and destination image. Prayag (2008) through a comprehensive review of literatures draws a view that destination image is directly and indirectly effective in terms of satisfaction levels of tourists in general. Kim et al., (2008) in their study on Hong Kong perception's on Korea as a destination in the light of Korean Pop culture found that the influence of media had a major positive impact on an individual's perception of Korea as a tourist destination. Wang and Davidson (2008) made an investigation on the pre-arrival and post-arrival destination perception of Chinese students on Australia and found that different attractions in destination had a significant impact on tourist perception and the variations in the perceived image had implications on promotional aspects. Son and Pearce (2005) in their study on international students perception of Australia found natural attractions had positive impact on their perception and lesser positive impact came from cultural sites and food. They also found that international students from South America favoured Australia more as a destination than Asian students. Prebensen (2005) in a study on the perception of Norwegian tourists' on tourism destinations found that respondents identified destinations on the basis of regions or cities/towns and not on the basis of a country. Volo (2004) made an investigation on the perception of Central Florida University students about Sicily, Italy and found that the respondents especially with Italian ancestors had a positive image about Sicily. Murphy et al. (2007) in their study focusing on possible links between destination

brand personality, tourist self-image and travel motivation found that when tourists are able to identify a relationship between a destination and its brand image which is constant with their expectations from a destination, a high level of agreement exists between the tourist self-image and their destination perception.

Therefore the literatures above enable to establish a view that perception of tourists helps in developing destination image which in turn helps facilitates future tourists' decision-making. Moreover, destination attributes mentioned by Wang and Davidson (2008) and Reisinger at al., (2009) act as parameters and determine the level of perception of tourists about a destination. Destination image developing from tourist perception can enable to measure the satisfaction levels of the tourists.

In this research, the perception of tourists based on the destination attributes as referred to by Wang and Davidson (2008) and Reisinger at al., (2009) focusing on 'tourism infrastructure', 'tourism leisure and recreation', 'cultural, history and art', "accommodation and transportation", "entertainment, service", and 'social factors' with respect of Malaysia will be studied. The outcome of this study will determine the image of Malaysia as a destination as well as the satisfaction levels of the tourists and the impact of this image on the decision-making processes of future tourists from India. Based on the above literature, the following hypotheses are conceptualized:

H_1 *Post- visit and during the visit experiences of tourists are based on destination features 'tourism infrastructure', 'tourism leisure and recreation', 'cultural, history and art', "accommodation and transportation", "entertainment, service", and 'social factors'*

H_2 *Post- visit and during the visit experiences of tourists will lead to the establishment of destination image.*

H_3 *Experiences of tourists on the destination with respect to the features and attributes will help in analyzing their satisfaction levels and behavioural patterns.*

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this study involves a quantitative approach. The quantitative study involved data collection through field survey on Indian tourists in key tourism attraction points in Malaysia with the help of a structured questionnaire as the data collecting tool. The selection of tourists is based on a random sampling method involving 1 in every 10 tourists from India. The questionnaire was based on the destination attributes 'tourism infrastructure', 'tourism leisure and recreation', 'cultural, history and art', "accommodation and transportation", "entertainment, service", and 'social factors' (Wang and Davidson 2008; Reisinger at al., 2009) and will introspect into tourists from different geographical zones of India as tastes and culture may vary as per different geographical zones which affect their perceptions. Some of the questions in the questionnaire that probed the quality of experience and satisfaction of the respondents in the area accommodation/hotel quality, destination attractions, amenities/facilities and other-related issues and destination attributes leading to destination image were based on the Likert's 1-5 scale. 1 referred to below average, 2 as average, 3 as good, 4 as very good and 5 as excellent. The tourists were surveyed at commercial areas like shopping malls, tourist streets

and attractions spots in cities like Kuala Lumpur and Penang as well as tourist destinations like Genting Highlands, Langkawi and Malacca. Besides, airports like KLIA, LCCT and airports and bus terminals in other cities and destinations in Malaysia were also places where the tourists were surveyed. Around 900 questionnaires were distributed and 400 questionnaires were collected and used for analysis. The survey was conducted between September, 2009 and April, 2010 and between May, 2010 and October, 2010.

The analysis of data was done using descriptive analysis as the statistical tool to investigate on the behavioral patterns of tourists. In the descriptive analysis, frequencies were considered and mean as the central tendency was considered inside the frequencies analysis.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The respondents were from different parts of India especially from the North India (24.8%) and South India (24.3%). 55% of the respondents were males and 45% females. About 46% of the respondents visited Malaysia with their friends and relatives followed by 36% visited as part of group tour. Majority of the respondents, about 69%, belong to the age range of 26 years to 45 years. In terms of visits to Malaysia, more than 63% of the respondents have visited Malaysia more than once and for 36.5 % of the respondents, it was their first visit. With regards to purpose of visit to Malaysia, 68% of the respondents visited Malaysia for leisure, recreation/entertainment and holidays. About 58% of the respondents' visits to Kuala Lumpur were for 3-5 days. About 68% of the respondents choose 3 stars to 5 star hotels as the type of accommodation they stayed in their trip to Malaysia. For about 46% of the respondents, their mode of selection of accommodation was through travel agents and tour operators and about 20% of the respondents selected their accommodation based on recommendations by friends and relatives.

Hotel /Accommodation Services and Facilities

With regards to the experiences and satisfaction of tourists in the area of hotel/accommodation services and facilities, the aspects that brought maximum satisfaction to the respondents were cleanliness and hygiene issues in the hotels, MICE facilities and the quality of food and beverage services offered by the hotels. The aspect that brought minimum satisfaction to the respondents was travel services and sightseeing from hotels. Many of the sightseeing services are organized by the ground operator in association with the hotel's travel services. Besides sightseeing travel services, aspects like attending and addressing guest complaints and environmental practices brought average satisfaction to the respondents.

Table 2: Hotel /Accommodation Services and Facilities

Hotel /Accommodation services and Facilities	Score	Rank
Room Quality	3.79	5
Food and Beverage Quality	3.82	3
Housekeeping	3.70	6
Attitudes, behaviour, efficiency level and quality staff	3.64	8
Travel service, and sightseeing from hotel	3.57	11
Meeting guest complaints in Hotels	3.58	10
Public Relations of Hotels	3.65	7
Meeting, conference facilities in Hotels	3.83	2
Public areas in Hotels	3.80	4
Cleanliness and hygiene in Hotels	3.88	1
Environmental practices in Hotel	3.59	9
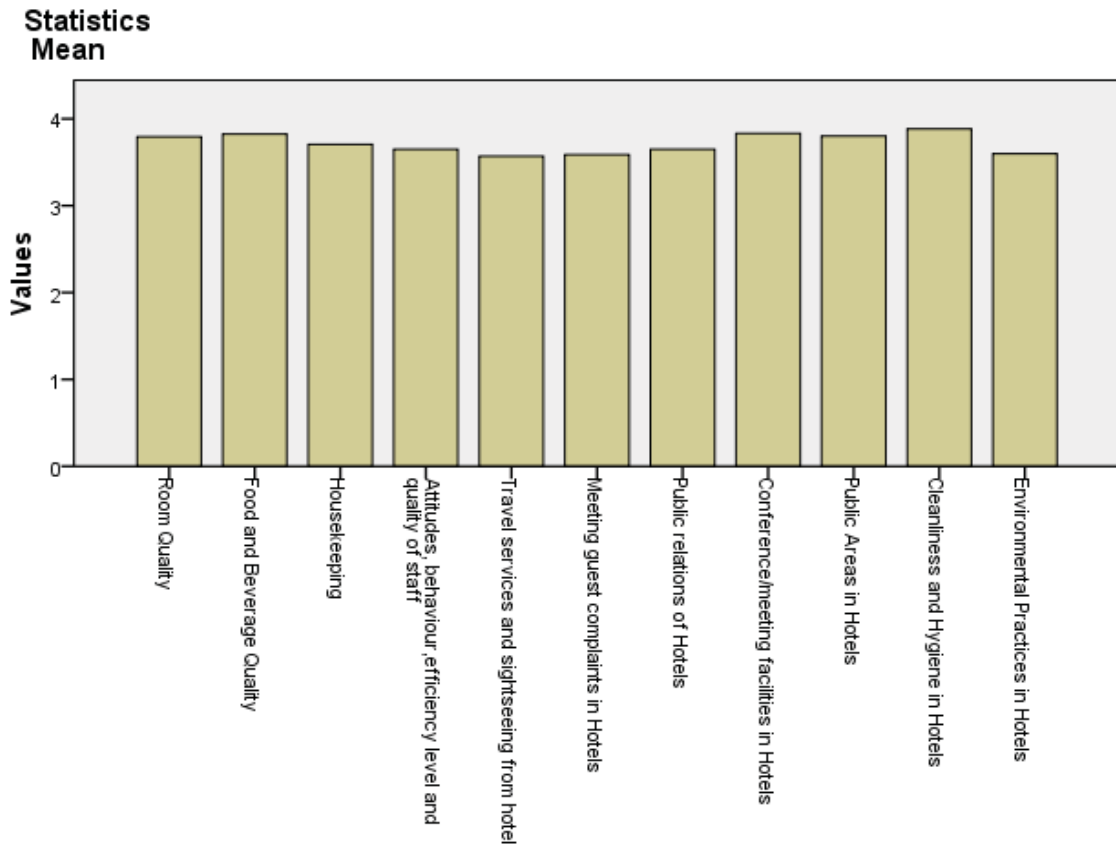
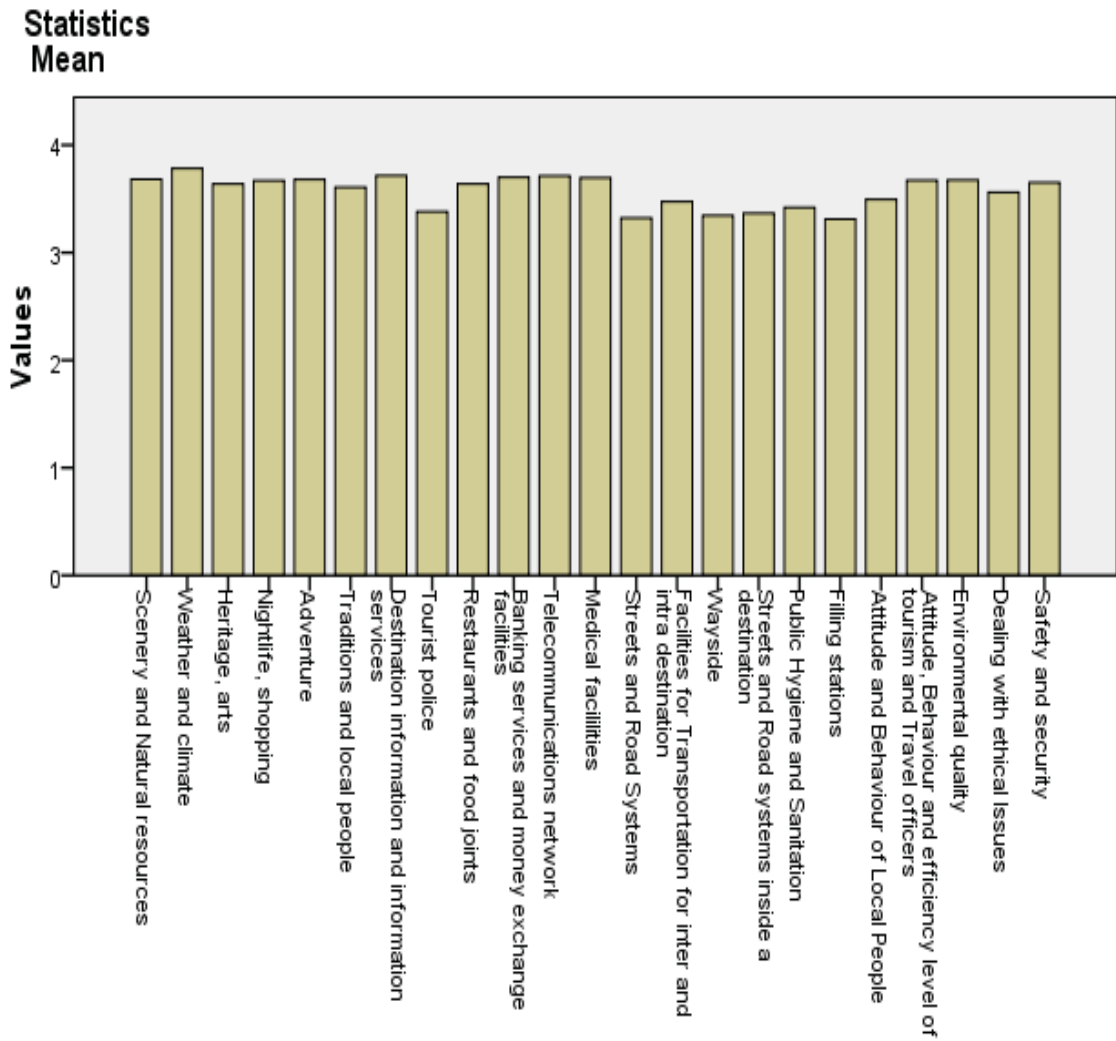**Figure 1: Mean Score of Hotel /Accommodation Services and Facilities**

Destination Attractions, Amenities/Facilities and Other-Related Issues

With regards to the destination attractions, amenities/facilities and other-related issues, the respondents were satisfied mostly with weather and climate of Malaysia, telecommunication services as well as destination information services and Banking services and money exchange facilities. The aspects the respondents were less satisfied with were street and road systems, wayside amenities and filling stations. The reasons for such levels of satisfaction could be attributed to linguistic and communication barriers and unfamiliarity of Indian tourists with the infrastructural levels in Malaysia. Some respondents opined that many locals do not understand or speak English or Indian languages like Hindi. Secondly, the signage, instructions on the road systems are sometimes given in local language Bahasa Melayu, which causes communication and linguistic problems. Moreover, many respondents belong to small and medium-sized Indian towns which do not possess the same levels and patterns of infrastructural development as in Malaysia. This, as opined by many respondents, makes it unfamiliar and difficult for them to come to terms with the systems of infrastructure in Malaysia.

Table 3: Destination Attractions, Amenities/Facilities and Other-Related Issues

Destination Attractions, Amenities/Facilities and Other-Related Issues	Score	Rank
Scenery and nature-based attractions	3.68	6
Weather and Climate	3.78	1
Heritage and arts	3.63	9
Nightlife and shopping	3.67	7
Adventure	3.68	5
Traditions of local people	3.60	10
Destination information services	3.71	2
Tourist Police	3.38	15
Restaurants and food joints	3.63	9
Banking services and money exchange facilities	3.70	3
Telecommunications	3.71	2
Medical Facilities	3.69	4
Streets and Road systems	3.32	18
Facilities for transportation for intra and inter destination	3.47	13
Wayside amenities	3.34	17
Hygiene and sanitation, public shower and toilets	3.42	14
Filling stations	3.31	19
Attitude and behaviour of local people	3.49	12
Attitudes, behaviour and efficiency level of tourism and travel officers, tourism officials	3.67	7
Environmental quality of destinations	3.67	7
Dealing with ethical issues	3.56	11
Safety and security	3.65	8
Streets and Road systems inside a destination	3.36	16

Statistics
Mean

Figure 2: Mean Score of Destination Attractions, Amenities/Facilities and Other-Related Issues
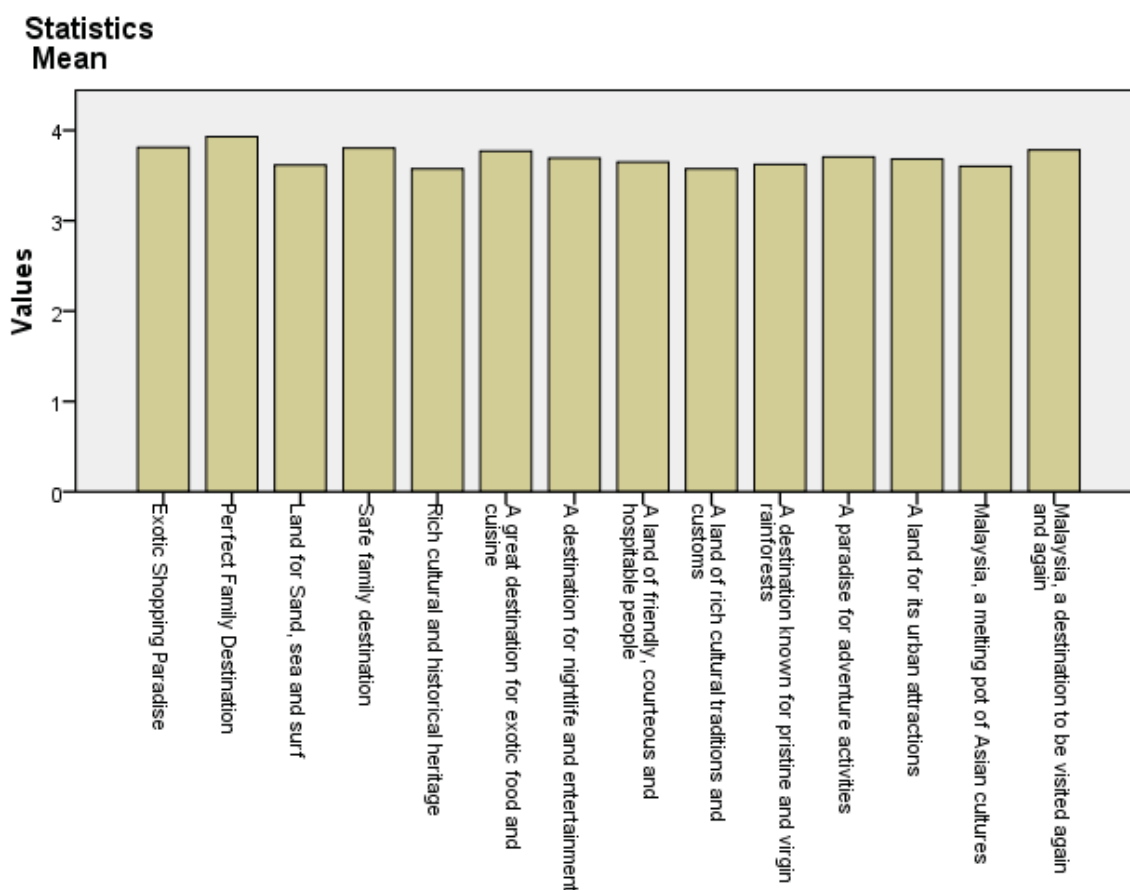
Destination Attributes Malaysia

In terms of the destination attributes, Malaysia's image as a perfect family destination has been the most important attribute followed by its image as an exotic shopping destination and safe family destination. The attributes which was lowly rated by the respondents were Malaysia as a land for rich cultural traditions and customs and rich historical heritage as well as Malaysia being a melting pot of different Asian cultures. Cultural aspects of Malaysia as per the survey did not appeal to the respondents as a destination attribute.

Table 4: Destination Attributes Malaysia

Destination Attributes Malaysia	Score	Rank
Exotic Shopping Experience	**3.81**	2
Perfect Family Destination	**3.93**	1
Land for sand, sea and surf	3.61	11
Rich cultural and historical heritage	3.57	13
Destination for exotic food and cuisine	3.77	5
Destination for nightlife and entertainment	3.69	7
A land of friendly, courteous and hospitable people	3.64	9
A land for rich cultural traditions and customs	3.57	14
A destination known for pristine and virgin rainforests	3.62	10
Safe Family Destination	**3.80**	3
A land for its urban attractions	3.68	8
A paradise for adventure activities	3.70	6
Malaysia, a melting pot of Asian cultures	3.60	12
Malaysia, a destination to be visited again and again	3.78	4

Figure 3: Mean Score of Destination Attributes Malaysia

About 90% of the respondents were satisfied with Malaysia as a destination in overall and about 95% would recommend friends and relatives to visit Malaysia.

Therefore the findings clearly reveal that destination features like weather and climate, facilities and amenities in destinations like telecommunication services, destination information services as well as banking and foreign exchange facilities as well as quality of accommodation facilities like quality of food and beverage services, cleanliness and hygienic standards as well as other facilities in a hotel, determine the quality of experience of tourists as given in Hypothesis1. Based on the quality of during and post-visit tourist experience in terms of destination features, the destination image of Malaysia is established which is a perfect and safe family destination and also a destination for exotic shopping experience. This finding confirms the hypothesis 2. Finally, Hypothesis 3 is confirmed as the quality of during and post-visit experiences determine the satisfaction levels and behavioural patterns of the Indian tourists.

CONCLUSION

Therefore the study gives an idea about the perception of Indian tourists on Malaysia based on their experiences during their visit to Malaysia. The results and findings of the study which indicate reasonable satisfaction levels of Indian tourists are very much indicative of the growth of Indian tourist arrivals as well as the growing popularity of Malaysia as tourist destination as revealed from the statistics of Tourism Malaysia. The aspects which came as unexpected were the perception of the respondents as Malaysia not a very cultural destination. The strength of Malaysia's tourism promotional tagline 'Malaysia, Truly Asia' i.e. melting pot of different Asian cultures has been one of the pillars of Malaysia's success as a tourism destination (Tourism Malaysia, 2011). Yet the findings of this study revealed a different picture which perhaps leads to the fact that Malaysia's uniqueness as a cultural and ethnic melting pot, which includes strong elements of Indian culture, has not been promoted well to the Indian market.

Besides, Malaysia needs to identify unique products and formulate innovative promotional and marketing strategies to sell these products. At the same time, it needs to continue promoting its existing products and increase market share and share in footfalls from India. It needs to be noted that in terms of Indian tourists, the competitors for Malaysia are not just its neighbours in South East Asia but also destinations like Dubai, Vietnam and Mauritius besides Singapore and Thailand. Hence attractions like the pristine and unexplored rainforests of Malaysia are something that can emerge as a unique offering for the country. Its wildlife resources and ethnic cultures especially in Eastern Malaysia can help the country enjoy competitive advantage. The Rainforest World Music Festival held in the Sarawak is one such example of unique product offering. The Borneo region is indeed unique and creates an opportunity for Malaysia to stand on its own. Besides, this part of Malaysia has many unseen and pristine islands and beaches that have not experienced too many human footmarks. All these attractions if sustainably developed and responsibly promoted as new product offerings can give Malaysia a new identity of itself as a leading nature-based tourism destination as well as a Green Paradise for ecotourists, in the region. Besides, in Peninsular Malaysia, destinations like the Islands off the coast of Terengganu province and the coastline of Kelantan province can be a part of its product offerings to the Indian market.

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