EXPLORING TOURISM IN THE CITY OF KUALA LUMPUR

Abdul Ghani Farinda
Faculty of Business and Accountancy, University of Malaya, email: farinda@um.edu.my

Ghazali Musa
Faculty of Business and Accountancy, University of Malaya

Thinaranjeney Thirumoorthi
Faculty of Business and Accountancy, University of Malaya

Abstract
Kuala Lumpur, the capital city and the heartbeat of Malaysia, certainly has enough tourism products to keep tourists occupied while visiting the city. This study explores the hotel managers’ perception and opinion on tourism potentials of Kuala Lumpur as a tourism destination and looks at ways to develop the tourism products that are available there. Sixty hotel managers of hotels in the city area were interviewed. The results show that Kuala Lumpur lacks a number of important elements of a successful destination, and faces serious challenges such as lack of security, bad traffic, high cost and lack of cleanliness.

Keyword: tourism product, destination, hotel managers, Kuala Lumpur

1. Research Background
Tourism is the world’s generator of wealth. It has proved to be an economic vehicle for developing nations. UNWTO’s Tourism 2020 Vision forecasts that by 2020 the world international arrival will reach almost 1.6 billion people. It also forecasts that a growth of 5% a year is possible for countries in East Asia and Pacific, Asia, the Middle-east and Africa.

Malaysia is located in the heart of South East Asia and is part of the ASEAN community. Tourism Malaysia (2008b) stated that in Malaysia there were 20.9 million foreign tourists in the year 2007. Malaysia received RM46,070 million from these tourists expenditures.
The capital city, Kuala Lumpur is the largest city in Malaysia with a population of 1.3 million (Jaafar, 2004). In the year 2007, there were 16.5 million domestic and foreign tourists staying in Kuala Lumpur’s hotels (Tourism Malaysia, 2008a) making it the most visited destination in Malaysia. Although Kuala Lumpur received the majority of the tourist in Malaysia, it is still far from becoming a successful tourism destination. In order to be a successful tourism destination, tourists must be satisfied with the tourism products and the delivery of those products (Jayawardena, 2002). Therefore, to become a successful tourism destination, Kuala Lumpur must have tourism products that will satisfy its tourists. Therefore the research objectives are as follows:

a) To explore the existing potential of the tourism situation in Kuala Lumpur.
b) To identify the complaints on Kuala Lumpur as a tourism destination.
c) To identify tourism products that needs to be developed in Kuala Lumpur.

2. Review of Literature

Tourism according to World Tourism Organisation (WTO) (1991) comprises: “the activities of a person traveling outside his or her usual environment for the less than a specified period of time and whose main purpose of travel is other than exercise of an activity remunerated from the place visited”. (Page et al., 2001). Tourism destinations are an important component of the tourism industry. Destinations are difficult to be categorized because of wide interpretations that include natural and man-made environment or a combination of both (Page et al., 2001). Tourism destination can also be considered as a product, brand or even geographical areas (Hall, 2000; Buhalis, 2000). Destinations could also be defined as the center of services and facilities intended to serve the desires of the tourists (Cooper et al., 1998). According to Buhalis (2000) a destination can be perceived differently by tourists. It shall depend on the tourists’ travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, educational level and past experience.

Swarbrooke (2002) stated that destinations can be divided into four main types which are natural environment, man-made but not originally designed primarily to attract visitors, man-made and purpose build to attract tourist, and special events. Goeldner and Ritchie (2006) said that destinations can be distinguished according to 5 elements which were cultural attractions, natural attractions, events, recreational, and entertainment attractions.

Tourism destination could also be a reflection of an individual’s opinion about a destination’s perceived ability to satisfy that individual’s tourism needs (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Van Raaij (1986) looks at destination as a product that could be natural or man-made. Man-made products include accommodation, transportation and its services, architecture and tourism facilities, while natural products may include climate, beaches, mountains, islands and flora/fauna. Leiper (1995) stated that destinations are places that tourist travels to and stay in order to obtain travel experiences. Tourism destination can be concluded as a place providing tourism products and services for tourists.

Product according to Kotler et al. (2003) is “anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a