

# Malaysian Tourists' Motivation, Involvement of Southeast Asia Tourist: A Case Study of Singapore and Bangkok

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## ABSTRACT

*Tourism in Southeast Asia is a very popular past time activity with strong government support for tourism within Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. These destinations consist of Singapore and Bangkok, Thailand, as well as others by Malaysian tourists. Therefore, it is of interest to examine the travel behavior of Malaysian tourists who visit these destinations for tourism. The impetus this research is to better understand how a select group of tourists from Malaysia perceive their experiences factors influencing motivation. The purpose of this study is to explore the involvement of Malaysian tourists towards a select part of Southeast Asia: Singapore and Bangkok, Thailand. A total of 394 usable surveys were collected from a sample of Malaysian tourists in the city of Kuala Lumpur. The study identified that Malaysian tourists are mostly young well-educated adult females with a high level of involvement in tourism and tend to travel alone or with families. Involvement to travel and the selection of the travel destination were multi-faceted. Malaysian tourists indicated high motivation to revisit and recommend Singapore and Bangkok to friends and relatives.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism, Malaysian Tourists, Southeast Asian Countries, Singapore, Bangkok, Involvement.*

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has become the world's largest service industry. The tourism industry creates employment across the world's economic spectrum, and helps other industries to develop economically, such as retail, banking, transportation and construction (Hui et al., 2007). Certain tourist areas such as sites in Southeast Asia are among the leaders in attracting a significant number of the traveling public. As one of the most popular tourist attractions in the world, Asia and the Pacific Rim have advanced as trendy destinations for travel, and have developed into a rapidly advancing travel segment for tourism, second only to several popular European countries (McDowell, 2010).

A thorough understanding of consumer involvement toward traveling provides a competitive edge to the destination visited. Thus, it has been posited that involvement toward tourism enables tourists to determine why they travel, and whether a destination fulfills their needs (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Damijanac & Sergio, 2013; Hsu et al., 2010; Kim & Lee, 2008; McCabe, 2000; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Ritchie et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2013). A major consideration by Pearce and Lee (2005) was that it is important

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to make a distinction between those that are experienced travelers, compared to those that are less experienced with traveling, as the purposes for travel for each group tend to vary. In other words, travelers tend to visit a destination based on motivation and whether a desired destination fills a void related to their perceived needs (Ritchie et al., 2010).

One important determinant of understanding consumer behavior for travel is the construct of involvement in making decisions about a travel destination (Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003). Examining the interactions between the involvement construct and push/pull factors have in the past been the subject of attention (Josiam et al., 1999). Involvement can be considered as the basis for recreation and leisure that underlies the fundamental basis of tourism (Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003). Since there are three major clusters of tourist in relation to involvement, it is important to note that consideration should be given to the image of the destination as perceived by the traveling public (Ruiz et al., 2011).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Motivations to travel

Scholars have defined the motivation of tourist to travel in numerous ways. Several investigators have emphasized that the motivation of tourists is one of the most important topics within leisure and tourism studies. Several studies have posited that it is not difficult to explain the “who”, “when”, “where”, and “how” of travel, but face difficulty in determining the reason “why”. Thus, motivations for travel have been considered as the first priority of all travel actions, thus, it serves as an essential concept to be considered in order to observe the behavior of tourist, and understand the several facets of tourism procedures (Pearce & Lee, 2005). Motivations can vary across cultures, i.e., individuals from different cultural backgrounds tend to display a variety of motivations that can be challenging for researchers in current tourism research areas (Kim & Lee, 2008). “Push” and “pull” factors were also introduced to the travel industry to be employed by researchers in order to discover different alternatives which influence tourists’ selection of their destinations (Meng, 2008). Push motivations are socio-psychological needs that motivate a person to travel. However, factors such as a need for personal escape, and psychological or physical health can be viewed as internal desires that have

an effect on push motivations. These internal forces are the impetus for the desire of travelers to fulfill their need to travel. Given a choice of many appealing destination which offer similar attraction, pull factors reflect unique attributes of a given destination that motivate the tourist to visit a place to the exclusion of other factors (Josiam et al., 2005). Pull factors are defined as the decision-making mechanisms pertaining to the destination, which is influenced by external resources such as natural or artificial attractions. However, push-pull motivation and escape seeking have been considered as major important concepts among tourist motivation actions. Thus, past research has provided key information to support the notion of the usefulness of these two frameworks to provide a clearer explanation of each term (Josiam et al. 2005).

Destination attributes such as weather, attractions, accessibility, accommodation, marketing and promotion can be viewed as external forces. Some studies have shown that the combination of expectation (E), motivation (M), and attitude (A) constitute the EMA model. This model assists researchers and destination planners to predict tourist behavioral development by assimilating the three variables. Since the 1960s, travel motivation has received a higher concentration of attention due to the benefits of providing a better understanding of tourism decision-making. Wong et al.(2013) stated that motivation might be analyzed as “a state of need, a condition that serves as a driving force to display different kinds of behavior toward certain types of activities in order to derive expected satisfactory outcomes.” Furthermore, tourist motivation can be categorized into two types; the “process model” which purports to forecast the pattern of behavior of organism after the stimulation, and the “content model” that is involved with a diverse concept of need (Hsu et al., 2010).

### INVOLVEMENT AND TOURISM

Within the last decade, involvement has become increasingly popular among the leisure, recreational, and tourism industry. Even earlier, since 1962, the concept of involvement has been a useful tool to express behavioral and decision-making processes. The level of perceived personal involvement underlying certain travel decisions proved to be of importance to the destination (Cai et al., 2004). Involvement is defined as the perceived personal importance and/or interest consumers will attach to the character of goods,

purchasing of those goods, and the consumption of the goods (Gross & Brown, 2008). Most research on involvement has probed for the relationship between causality of involvement and related variables. Behavioral research on leisure activity should add involvement, i.e., a psychological variable, to explain fully the behavior of leisure travel (Hwang et al., 2003). The degree of involvement of travelers in the past has been associated with leisure choices, including travel destinations, and with the satisfaction obtained from the travel activity. In fact, of importance has been a consideration for segmenting involvement into high and low states of involvement (Josiam et al., 2005). High and low involvement has been previously defined for the former as very important or personally relevant to the consumer, while the latter is concerned with concepts of low importance that provides no importance or relevant information to the consumer (Josiam et al., 2005).

Gursoy & Gavcar (2003) stated that involvement can be approached from three major orientations. These consist of product-centered, subject-centered, and response-centered approaches. These orientations are important for a better understanding of consumer behavior toward travel. While all three perspectives are important, the subject-centered perspective is often used as a framework for understanding the motivation for individual tourist's involvement in decision-making about international leisure destinations. Vacation trips appear to be the leader in hospitality and tourism products that are purchased, consumed and evaluated. Production, consumption, and evaluation differ in fundamental ways from the purchase of tangible goods. The differences can be thought of as being mostly intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable, and perishable.

### REVISITING A DESTINATION

The measurement of tourist satisfaction is of major importance and can determine if tourists will return to a destination, as well as spread positive word-of-mouth to others. Moreover, tourist satisfaction is a very important concept to be considered when determining if consumer expectations meet the requirements/perceptions as to whether to re-visit. Past research has shown that before a purchase is made, consumers have their own expectation as to the value of the product. They evaluate the product with their expectation after using the product (perception), and if the actual product is better than

expectation, it is more likely that they are satisfied with their experience and are willing repurchase repeatedly (Neal & Gursoy, 2008). In order to maintain loyal customers, customer expectations need to meet or go beyond the norm customer loyalty is, therefore, greatly influenced by customer satisfaction (Hui et al., 2007). Thus, many studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between customer satisfactions, re-visitation to the destination, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Hui et al., 2007). Within the tourism industry; it is complex to measure and retain loyal customers. For example, tourists may not want to revisit the same destination even if the destination meets all their requirements because tourist, at times, wish to search for new experiences at different destinations (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; McDowell, 2010; Siri et al., 2009).

The general trends of tourism from all countries to Singapore and Thailand as related to tourism arrivals, and the percent change from 1990 to 2014 increased, except from 1995 to 2000, where there was an 8% decrease of tourists traveling when compared to the previous period. The number (and percent-change) of all general visitors was as follows; 1990: 5.32M, 1995: 7.12M (26%↑), 2000: 7.69M (8%↓), 2005: 8.94M (14%↑), 2010: 11.7M (24%↑), and 2013: 15.57 (25%↑). Thus, the percent increase from 1990 – 2013 was 66%.

Overall visitors to Thailand consisted of: 2004: 11.65M, 2006: 13.82M (16%↑), 2008: 14.58M (5%↓), 2010: 15.94M (8%↑), and 2012: 22.35 (29%↑). The percent increase or decrease was variable from year-to-year when compared over a two-year basis, from 2004 - 2012. It can be seen that a comparison of general visitors to Thailand from 2004 – 2012 saw an increase of 48%. It is of interest to make a comparison of Malaysian visitors to Thailand. The numbers consisted of 2006: 1.59M, 2008: 1.81M (13%↑), 2010: 2.06M (13%↔), and 2012: 2.56M (20%↑). Malaysian visitors to Singapore consisted of 2004: 0.537M, 2006: 0.634M (16%↑), 2008: 0.647M (3%↓), 2010: 1.04M (38%↑), 2012: 1.23M (16%↓) (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2014).

### OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of this study were to:

- (1) Identify Malaysians' tourists' travel and pattern demographics
- (2) Examine the level of Involvement of Malaysian Tourists in Southeast Asia
- (3) Identify the key factors of the 'pull' motivators between Singapore and Bangkok
- (4) Compare Malaysian tourist's perceptions of Singapore and Bangkok
- (5) Determine the intention to revisit, and the willingness to recommend to others to visit Singapore, Bangkok, and Thailand areas.

## METHODOLOGY

### Questionnaire

The study consisted of a convenience sample of 394 Malaysians who had traveled to either Singapore or Bangkok and/or both. The self-administered survey was used to collect data in Kuala Lumpur. Respondents were given incentives after completing the survey. Respondents were also obtained via the Internet utilizing a snowball convenience sample during same period.

### TEST INSTRUMENT

The 10-item involvement scale was modified from the bipolar scale adapted by Josiam et al. (2005). The involvement scale was originally developed by Zaichkowsky (1985), which has been used in several studies related to tourism (Clements and Josiam, 1995; Josiam et al., 1999; Josiam et al., 2005). All respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in Southeast Asia travel for each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from: 1= strongly disagree, to 5=strongly agree. To obtain an individual involvement score, the responses were summed and the mean was calculated. The push factors reflected travel motivation to Southeast Asian countries such as "to enjoy international travel experience" and "to visit historical places" were measured on 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=unimportant to 5=extremely important. The 19 push factors were adapted from the studies of Crompton (1979), Kozak & Rimmington, (2000) and Josiam et al. (2005). The pull factors were derived from several previous studies (Jenkins, 1999; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Narayan, Rajendran & Sai, 2008). The pull factors have 27 items categorized into six dimensions that consisted of factors such as hotel/lodging, transportation, food and beverage, shopping, service quality, and tourism

experiences. The push factors were measured by asking respondents their opinions of Singapore and Bangkok destination attributes on the 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=very poor, to 5=very good.

The outcome variables such as "revisit intention" and "recommendation intention," related to Singapore, Bangkok, and Thailand, were measured using a "Yes/No" dichotomy.

A Categorical scale measured demographic information, while an Interval scale measured income. Information about a respondent's past travel experience included whether they had travelled to Singapore/Bangkok, timing of trips and purposes of the travel.

## RESULTS

### Objective 1: Identify Malaysian's Tourist Travel and Pattern Demographics

The total number of respondents that completed the survey instrument in this study consisted of 394 individuals. Table 1 depicts the demographic data of gender, marital status, age, employment status, educational level, and monthly income. The majority of survey respondents were female, representing 69.2% (n = 184) of the total, while 30.1% (n = 80) represented the number of male participants. The results showed that most of the participants are single, or 66.2% (n = 176) of the total participants, while 31.6% (n = 84) were married. However, a small and insignificant group of participants representing 1.9% (n = 5) were in a partnership. The age group among these participants was stratified into four different age groups: 18 - 25 years (55%, n = 147), 26- 35 years (26.6%, n = 71), 37-45 years (7.3%, n = 19), and +46 years (7.0%, n = 18). Thus, the findings indicate that the majority group were in the age range between 18 - 25 years, while the least group of participants were from the age group of +/- 46 years. The most frequent monthly income range of the Malaysian travelers was RM 25,000 - 50,000 (48.9%, n = 130).

Table 2 indicates the Malaysians tourists travel patterns to Southeast Asia. The results show that there were a larger number of participants who traveled to both Singapore (86.1%, n = 229) and Bangkok (82%, n = 218) within the past 24 months. It is noted that independent travel arrangement (94%, n = 250) was the most frequent travel type that was selected by most of the respondents.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristic of Malaysian Tourists**

	N	(%)
Gender		
Female	184	69.2
Male	80	30.1
Marital status		
Married	84	31.6
Single	176	66.2
Partnership	5	1.9
Age		
18-25 years old	147	55.0
26-35 years old	71	26.6
37-45 years old	19	7.3
46 and older	18	7.0
Employment status		
Employed	48	18.0
Self-employed	17	6.4
Retired	5	1.9
Students	137	51.5
Housewife	36	13.5
Other	18	6.8
Education		
High School	38	14.3
Some College	76	28.6
Associate Degree	25	9.4
Bachelor Degree	91	34.2
Master Degree	20	7.5
Doctorate	2	0.8
Monthly income (RM)		
25,000-50,000	130	48.9
50,001-75,000	38	14.3
75,000-100,000	5	1.9
100,000-125,000	3	1.1

*Note:* Total differ due to missing data

**Table 2: Southeast Asia Travel Pattern**

	N	(%)
<b>Travel to Singapore in past 24 months</b>		
Yes	229	86.1
No	37	13.9
<b>Travel to Bangkok in past 24 months</b>		
Yes	218	82.0
No	48	18.0
<b>Travel Type</b>		
Package Tours	12	4.5
Independence Travel	250	94.0

*Note:* Totals differ due to missing data.

### Objective 2: Examine the level of Involvement of Malaysian Tourists in Southeast Asia

Factor analysis (see Table 3) was used in this study to demonstrate the level of Involvement of Malaysian tourists as they traveled to Southeast Asia. Table 3 shows the factor of involvement that examined 10 relevant variables related to tourist travel. The Involvement variables consisted of: (1) Means a lot, (2) Interesting, (3) Important, (4) Appealing, (5) Valuable, (6) Wanted, (7) Beneficial, (8) Essential, (9) Exciting, and (10) Relevant. It should be noted

that the Involvement variables chosen for this study were not hierarchical, i.e., each one did not assume an order of magnitude of being “more” or “less” important within the context of travel involvement. Involvement has two categories of “medium” or “high”. What was indicated was that the 10 variables were highly related, with an overall alpha score = 0.944, values that were very high and indicated that the variables chosen were of importance to involvement. The highest factor loading was 0.857 for the variable of “Means a lot”. The lowest factor loading was obtained for “Relevant” with 0.777 value.

**Table 3: The Level of Involvement of Malaysian Tourists in Southeast Asia**

Factor Loading	
<b>Factor 1: Involvement</b>	
Alpha = 0.944; explained variance = 66.825	
Means a lot	0.857
Interesting	0.839
Important	0.832
Appealing	0.827
Valuable	0.825
Wanted	0.814
Beneficial	0.802
Essential	0.802
Exciting	0.796
Relevant	0.777

### Objective 3: Identify the key factors of the “pull” motivators between Singapore and Bangkok

Factor analysis was used in order to determine the “pull” motivators for Singapore and Bangkok (see Tables 4 & 5). What was created were groups

of factors with different meanings that explained the core concepts of the pull responses of travelers. In interpreting the factors, a loading cut-off of 0.65 was used. Cronbach’s alpha value of “1.0” indicated a perfect reliability, while a score equal to or greater than 0.65 was acceptable. The factors for Singapore are indicated in Table 4.

**Table 4: Factor Analysis of Pull Motivators of Singapore**

Factor Loading	
<b>Factor 1: Service Appearance</b>	
Alpha = 0.913; explained variance = 17.485	
Honesty in Business Practice	0.871
Efficiency of Service	0.867
Reliability/Consistency of Service	0.861
Timeliness of Service	0.850
Cleanliness of Facilities	0.796
Value for Money service	0.671
<b>Factor 2: Transportation</b>	
Alpha = 0.936; explained variance = 11.891	
Taxi & Buses	0.911
Metro	0.901
Airport	0.861

<b>Factor 3: Attraction</b>	
Alpha = 0.786; explained variance = 10.644	
Bar/Clubs	0.746
Restaurants	0.712
Luxury Branded retailers	0.705
Malls	0.705
<b>Factor 4: Social Background</b>	
Alpha = 0.801; explained variance = 9.995	
Communication Ability of Locals	0.851
Safety and Security	0.790
Overall Trip Experience	0.768
Friendliness of Local People	0.742
<b>Factor 5: Activities</b>	
Alpha = 0.841; explained variance = 7.893	
Cultural and Historical Sites	0.888
Many things to See	0.861
<b>Factor 6: Shopping Attraction</b>	
Alpha = 0.770; explained variance = 7.299	
Night Markets	0.849
Boutique Stores	0.841
<b>Factor 7: Food &amp; Lodging</b>	
Alpha = 0.670; explained variance = 7.270	
Cleanliness in food service	0.610
'Street Hawker' foods	0.595
Luxury hotels	0.555
Standard hotels	0.546
Budget hotels	0.429

The factor analysis statistical technique was used to examine the 26 pull motivators for Malaysian tourists visiting Bangkok (see Table 5). From these

26 pull motivators, researchers analyzed major components by using varimax rotation in order to determine seven factors.

**Table 5: Factor Analysis of Pull Motivators of Bangkok**

Factor Loading	
<b>Factor 1: Overall services</b>	
Alpha = 0.893; explained variance = 16.244	
Reliability/Consistency of Service	0.864
Efficiency of Service	0.845
Timeliness of Service	0.837
Honesty in Business Practices	0.823
Value for Money	0.680
Cleanliness of Facilities	0.563
<b>Factor 2: Entertainment</b>	
Alpha = 0.796; explained variance = 12.631	
Bar/Clubs	0.819
'Street Hawker' foods	0.681

Restaurants	0.674
Many things to See	0.555
Friendliness of Local People	0.519
Luxury hotels	0.516
<b>Factor 3: Social Background</b>	
Alpha = 0.701; explained variance = 9.577	
Communication Ability of Locals	0.815
Cleanliness in food service	0.678
Safety and Security	0.654
Cultural and Historical Sites	0.479
<b>Factor 4: Transportation</b>	
Alpha = 0.857; explained variance = 9.445	
Metro	0.895
Taxi & Buses	0.890
Airport	0.825
<b>Factor 5: Fun things to do</b>	
Alpha = 0.643; explained variance = 8.169	
Boutique Stores	0.829
Night Markets	0.754
Overall Trip Experience	0.544
<b>Factor 6: Shopping Mall</b>	
Alpha = 0.730; explained variance = 6.547	
Malls	0.874
Luxury Branded Retailers	0.871
<b>Factor 7: Accommodations</b>	
Alpha = 0.616; explained variance = 5.770	
Budget hotels	0.814
Standard hotels	0.667

#### Objective 4: Compare Malaysian Tourist's Perceptions of Singapore and Bangkok

Participants were asked questions based on a five point Likert Scale, in which "1" indicated "very poor" and "5" indicated "very good." Accordingly, the mean scores of Malaysian tourist's perceptions

of Singapore and Bangkok area's attributes are illustrated in Table 6. The sections were divided into various levels from the lowest to the highest perception levels. Malaysian tourists were rated as to their perception differently among each area attribute and between the two travel areas, Singapore and Bangkok.

**Table 6: Mean Scores of Pull Factors of Singapore and Bangkok**

Singapore	Mean	s.d.	Bangkok	Mean	s.d.
<b>Hotel/Lodging attributes</b>					
Budget hotels	2.81	0.826	Budget hotels	3.63	0.826
Standard hotels	3.66	0.566	Standard hotels	3.62	0.650
Luxury hotels	4.06	0.500	Luxury hotels	4.05	0.511
<b>Transportation</b>					
Airport	3.64	0.560	Airport	3.52	0.566
Taxi & Buses	3.66	0.550	Taxi & Buses	3.64	0.556
Metro	3.65	0.560	Metro	3.50	0.593

<b>Food &amp; Beverage</b>					
Restaurants	3.66	0.598	Restaurants	3.63	0.591
Bar/Clubs	3.88	0.520	Bar/Clubs	3.81	0.565
'Street Hawker' foods	3.86	0.483	'Street Hawker' foods	3.81	0.565
Cleanliness in food service	3.87	0.498	Cleanliness in food service	3.11	0.707
<b>Shopping</b>					
Malls	3.93	0.441	Malls	3.84	0.484
Luxury Branded Retailers	3.98	0.404	Luxury Branded Retailers	3.75	0.575
Boutique Stores	3.86	0.480	Boutique Stores	3.97	0.527
Night Markets	3.81	0.519	Night Markets	4.01	0.650
<b>Service Quality</b>					
Efficiency of Service	3.84	0.489	Efficiency of Service	3.67	0.594
Reliability/Consistency of Service	3.82	0.499	Reliability/Consistency of Service	3.67	0.589
Timeliness of Service	3.71	0.556	Timeliness of Service	3.67	0.615
Cleanliness of Facilities	3.69	0.583	Cleanliness of Facilities	3.22	0.654
Honesty in Business Practices	3.81	0.514	Honesty in Business Practices	3.53	0.605
Value for Money	3.61	0.641	Value for Money	3.90	0.586
<b>Tourism Experiences</b>					
Many Things to See	3.61	0.596	Many Things to See	3.83	0.542
Cultural and Historical Sites	3.50	0.613	Cultural and Historical Sites	3.76	0.601
Safety and Security	3.85	0.504	Safety and Security	3.46	0.642
Communication Ability of Local	3.85	0.486	Communication Ability of Local	3.23	0.761
Friendliness of Local People	3.91	0.394	Friendliness of Local People	3.73	0.569
Overall Trip Experience	3.95	0.350	Overall Trip Experience	3.95	0.469

**Objective 5: Determine the intention to revisit, and the willingness to recommend to others to visit Singapore, Bangkok, and Thailand areas**

A majority of Malaysian tourists indicated that they would revisit Singapore, Bangkok and Thailand, as travel destinations. Table 7 illustrates

265 respondents or 99.6% of participants were willing to revisit Singapore, 99.6% of the participants were willing to revisit Bangkok, and 98.9% were willing to revisit Thailand. Moreover, 99.6% of the Malaysian tourists were willing to recommend Singapore, while 98.9% of them were willing to recommend Bangkok, and 98.5% were willing to recommend Thailand.

**Table 7: Intention to Revisit and Willingness to Recommend Singapore, Bangkok, and Thailand**

<i>Intention and Willingness</i>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>(%)</b>
<b>Willing to revisit Singapore</b>	Yes	265	99.6
	No	0	0.0
<b>Willing to revisit Bangkok</b>	Yes	264	99.6
	No	1	0.4
<b>Willing to revisit Thailand</b>	Yes	263	98.9
	No	2	0.8
<b>Willing to recommend Singapore</b>	Yes	265	99.6
	No	0	0.0
<b>Willing to recommend Bangkok</b>	Yes	263	98.9
	No	2	0.8
<b>Willing to recommend Thailand</b>	Yes	262	98.5
	No	3	1.1

## DISCUSSION

### Demographics: Travel Patterns

The majority of tourists from Malaysia involved in Southeast Asia tourism were mostly female students within the age range of 18 – 25 years, with a bachelor's degree, or at least some college background. The majority of the respondents were not married. Male travelers from Malaysia were less likely to travel to Singapore and Bangkok. It is noted that greater than 80% of the respondents visited both Singapore and Bangkok. It is highly likely that this trend will continue in the future for Malaysian travelers to the Southeast Asia area. The majority of the Malaysian tourists traveled independently while ignoring package tours offered by travel agents or other tourist entities. Findings suggest that tourists who want to have an international travel experience with perhaps financial constraints will continue to ignore costly and at times restrictive packaged tours. The selection of travel type is not affected by demographic differences since age, gender, marital status, educational level, employment or income, no did it influence their decision to travel.

### Involvement in Southeast Asia Tourism

The 10-item involvement scale used in this study was shown to be reliable and a useful discriminating scale for the factor of involvement (Clements & Josiam, 1995; Josiam et al., 1999; Josiam et al., 2005). The involvement concepts of “medium” and “high” were used to segment the findings. The findings indicated a concentration of personal involvement as Malaysians traveled to Southeast Asia. This suggested that Southeast Asia is a very popular tourist destination and perhaps suggests that marketers have been effectively marking and promoting specific advantages and qualities in order to attract Malaysian tourists to areas in Southeast Asia. Perhaps there is a need for governments and travel entities to put more emphasis on those travelers who tend not to travel to the destinations such as men or others of different educational levels, with advertising campaigns that can targeted and promoted so that those tourist falling into the “medium” involvement level may be converted to “high” involvement level.

### Pull Motivators of Singapore and Bangkok

The findings suggested that Malaysian tourists were pulled to Singapore and Bangkok for several

different but equally important reasons. Both Singapore and Bangkok placed an emphasis on what is offered by luxury hotels - a major revenue source. That is, the development of high quality accommodations appears to be a key factor to attract more tourists. Therefore, advertising luxurious travel experiences with affordable pricing could be considered for operators in both countries. Due to rapid economic development, a standard legal system, as well as an English educational system, Singapore tends to welcome tourists with diverse opportunities such as high-end shopping and dining facilities, easy communication, high quality service, and a safe and secure environment. These tourists wish to experience cleanliness, safety, internationalism, modern communications, good transport infrastructure, and overall quality of life. Therefore, Singapore can afford to push efforts in promoting popular traveling activities such as shopping, fine dining, and the casino experience. On the contrary, Bangkok, the city, and Thailand, the country, in general, can emphasize their abundant natural beauty and cultural attractions, with an emphasis on value for money spent. It is noted that Thailand has many beaches to offer as a pleasant tropical experience besides promoting night markets, unique boutique stores, and Thai food. These findings were observed in previous studies (Sangpikul, 2008; Siri et al., 2009; McDowall, 2010b) where it was suggested that a beautiful environment, shows and entertainment, cultural/historical sites and domestic festivals, arts and crafts were primary attractions for international tourists.

### Intention to Revisit and Willingness to Recommend

A very large percentage (98%) of Malaysian tourists indicated a positive intention to revisit, as well as recommend to others to visit Singapore, Bangkok, and Thailand. The most important implication of this finding suggests that tourists were satisfied with their travel in Singapore and Bangkok. Tourists' satisfaction will lead to stronger intention to revisit or recommend to their family and friends. These findings confirm previous studies and incite that that tourists' intention to revisit depends on their satisfaction with the destination (Selnes, 1998). Previous research indicated that satisfied customers' positive word-of-mouth testimonials may be a more effective influencer than advertisements for a destination (Danaher and Rust, 1996).

Research findings suggest that Malaysian tourists not only would like to revisit Singapore and Bangkok, but also are willing to recommend to their family and friends. Due to their favorable travel experience in Bangkok, Malaysian tourists are willing to visit other cities in Thailand, such as Chiang Mai, Phuket, etc. Many destinations in Thailand are famous for their beautiful environment, historical significance, street food vendors, and exciting nightlife. Therefore, it is imperative for operators and tourism planners to better understand the importance of tourist satisfaction, especially identifying those elements that have a positive impact on tourist' intention to revisit and recommend. Moreover, it is strongly suggested that tourism marketers and/or governments provide emphasize pleasing and satisfying travel experiences in order to further develop and sustain their tourism markets.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, this study has shown that luxury hotels are a major contributor to the attraction of Malaysian tourist visiting Southeast Asia. Malaysian tourists are influenced by several pull motivators (hotel lodging, transportation, food and beverages, shopping, etc.) that influence their decision to travel to Singapore and Thailand. These findings will perhaps motivate both marketers and researchers to better understand the "key" motivators of Malaysian tourists to Singapore, Bangkok, and Thailand. Implications indicated that travelers from Malaysia will continue to be major contributing factor to the travel industry of both Singapore and Thailand. The limitation of this study is that while the objectives concentrated on Singapore and Thailand, the survey could be extended to other Southeast Asian countries as a travel destination for Malaysians in order to be more inclusive.

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