

MALAYSIAN YOUTH TOURISM MARKET: A LUCRATIVE BUT OVERLOOKED TOURIST SEGMENT

BADARUDDIN MOHAMED, SHIDA IRWANA OMAR & LAU PEI MEY

ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, youth travel is not a new phenomenon. Despite the fact that not many Malaysian youths travel abroad, they are certainly active domestic travelers and excursionists. Many industry experts believe that youth travel is the fastest growing travel market segment, with significant potential for long-term growth and economic impact to domestic tourism. This paper discusses the findings of a study on youth tourism in Malaysia. It focuses on the general scenario and direction of the Malaysian youth segment. The study aims to analyze the characteristics, patterns, behaviors and preferences of Malaysian young tourists, aged between 15 to 30 years old, who travel domestically. A total of 1443 sample was drawn from high school students, college/university students and career youth travelers via group administered survey, face-to-face survey and web-based survey. The findings reveal that Malaysian youths are motivated to travel for recreation and holiday purposes. Majority of them are college and university students aged between 20 to 24 years who travel with limited budget. Factor analysis reveals that these young tourists are more likely to enjoy activities associated to 'Alternative Tourism', 'Urban Tourism' and 'Sports Tourism'. The research outcomes provide implications for tourism industry or government, companies (hotels, travel agencies etc.) as well as schools.

Key words: Youth Travel, Domestic Tourism, Young Tourist, Malaysia

ABSTRAK

Di Malaysia, pelancongan belia bukanlah suatu fenomena baru. Walaupun tidak ramai golongan belia Malaysia melancong ke luar negara, namun golongan ini sememangnya aktif sebagai pelancong domestik dan pengunjung harian. Ramai pakar industri pelancongan berpendapat bahawa pelancongan belia merupakan segmen pasaran

pelancong yang paling cepat berkembang dan mempunyai potensi dalam pertumbuhan jangka masa panjang serta memberi impak ekonomi kepada sektor pelancongan domestik. Kertas kerja ini membincangkan hasil penemuan kajian pelancongan belia di Malaysia dengan memfokus kepada senario umum dan hala tuju segmen pelancong belia Malaysia. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisa karakter, corak, tingkah laku dan kecenderungan pelancong belia Malaysia yang berumur antara 15 hingga 30 tahun yang sedang dan telah melancong dalam negara. Sampel kajian terdiri daripada 1443 sampel pelajar sekolah menengah, pelajar universiti/kolej dan belia bekerjaya menerusi kaji selidik berkumpulan, kaji selidik bersemuka dan kaji selidik dalam talian. Penemuan kajian ini mendedahkan bahawa golongan belia di Malaysia mempunyai motivasi untuk melancong bagi tujuan rekreasi dan percutian. Majoriti daripada mereka merupakan pelajar kolej dan universiti yang masih bujang dan berumur antara 20 hingga 24 tahun serta melancong dengan bajet yang terhad. Hasil analisa faktor menunjukkan bahawa golongan pelancong muda ini lebih cenderung kepada aktiviti-aktiviti yang berkaitan dengan 'Pelancongan Alternatif', 'Pelancongan Bandar' dan 'Pelancongan Sukan'. Hasil kajian ini memberi implikasi kepada industri pelancongan, kerajaan, syarikat-syarikat (perhotelan, agensi pelancongan dan sebagainya) dan sekolah.

Kata kunci: *Pelancongan Belia, Pelancongan Domestik, Pelancong Muda, Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

Youth tourism is believed to be lucrative, strong and increasingly important segment to tourism industry throughout the globe. The phenomenon of youth tourism was started to expand during the more peaceful and stable time after World War II (International Bureau of Social Tourism 2002). The growth of this market has expanded significantly in the past few decades, and today, the trend is growing rapidly. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2008) revealed that with an estimated 160 million international tourist arrivals a year, youth travel would account for over 20% of international tourist arrivals. This market is worth an estimated US\$136 billion a year, or around 18% of worldwide international tourism receipts.

Comparing with previous generations, many young tourists nowadays tend to travel more frequently and stay longer at destinations compared to their older counterparts (Richards & Wilson 2003) and at younger age (Peter 2004). As reported by UNWTO (2008), 70% percent of all trips taken by young people are motivated by goals such as a desire to explore, volunteer, work or study abroad. Peter (2004) also mentioned that youth are thirsty for experiencing difference of cultures, opening to new ideas and pioneering for new destinations. In terms of travel expenditure, a typical youth traveler spends more than the average tourist during his/her trip because of longer average trip duration. The average expenditure of youth traveler was US\$ 2,600 per trip, of which US\$ 1,550 is spent in the destination (UNWTO 2008). As a result of youth travel, 80% of them return home and was reported to be more tolerant and respectful of other cultures (UNWTO 2008).

Many countries in the world have huge potential to benefit from further development of youth market. Industry experts also believe that youth tourism provides an important basis for the travel decisions of future generations. As noted by Nash, Thyne and Davies (2006, 526), there are many advantages to targeting the youth market and these are outlined as follow.

- i. They travel year round
- ii. They travel country-wide
- iii. They use public transport
- iv. They stay for long periods of time
- v. They are likely to return to the destination visited at later stages in their lives
- vi. They only tend to carry essentials with them and will therefore spend on local businesses

As the result of the youth growing market, accommodation sector also receives the benefits from youth travel. Research done by UNWTO (2008) revealed that 50% of youth accommodation suppliers have increased their capacity in 2006. The choice of accommodation is often determined by the needs, expectations and perceptions of tourists. For instance, hostels and backpacker hotels are the preferred accommodation for youth tourists (Keeley 1995; Seeking 1998; Nash, Thyne and Davies 2006), mainly due to the preference for low cost accommodation. Research by Loker-Murphy

and Pearce (1995) revealed that backpackers in Australia were more likely to spend in a range of inexpensive accommodation specifically homes of friends and relatives, backpacker hotels, camping and youth hostels. They, however, pointed out that more backpackers spent majority of their nights in backpacker hotels and camping, and spent at least one night at the home of friend or relative.

Defining the Youth Tourist

Many authors have used variety of terms to describe a youth tourist. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines youth tourist as travelers aged 16 to 25 years old, who take a trip of at least one night stay. Aramberri (1991) stated that young tourists are those aged in between mid-teens and mid-twenties, independent travelers and travel more frequent either in groups or alone. However, the Student and Youth Travel Association (SYTA) (2004) expanded the definition to include youth less than 16 years of age. This is in accordance with the growing number of younger children travel with school, church and other youth groups. Meanwhile, the Youth Tourism Consortium of Canada (YTCC) also expanded the definition by including young adults between the ages of 26 and 30 (Alice 2004). The definition was expanded due to recent statistics which indicated that young adults in Canada tend to follow similar travelling pattern with younger group. Carr (2001) stated that young tourists to London are generally aged 15 to 34. Sullivan (2004) also described youth travelers to Australia are generally aged 15 to 34 years, independent and highly unstructured, always seek for opportunities to immerse themselves in local culture, driven by experience not by icons, motivated by self improvement through travel and prefer adventurous, exotic and 'edgy' destinations and experiences.

Recently, the youth travel market experiencing the emergence of new generation called 'flashpacker' and 'gap-packing'. Flashpacker is defined as older backpackers (aged over 30 years old) with bigger budget (UNWTO 2008), tech-savvy adventurers (often prefer to travel with a cell phone, digital camera, mp3 player and a laptop) (The Flashpacker: A New Breed of Traveler 2006) and adhere to a modest accommodation and meal budget while spending freely even excessively for activities at their chosen destination (Backpacking 2010). While 'gap-packing' refers to students as backpackers who travel to several countries in a short period of time whilst on their gap year between high school and college/university, or between

university and their first job (Shapiro 2009; Backpacking 2010).

To date, there is lack of agreement concerning the definition of youth tourist (UNWTO 1991; Clarke 1992; Seekings 1995; Carr 1997; Seekings 1998). Therefore, this paper defines Malaysian youth tourism market as tourist between the age of 15 and 30.

This paper discusses general scenario of the direction of youth tourism market in Malaysia. It discusses characteristics, travel patterns, behaviors and preferences of our youth when they embark in travelling activities. It calls for better understanding and effective strategies to prepare better products that suit the demands and behavior of the youth market.

Characteristics of Youth Tourist

Based on the study on 2,300 youths from Canada, the Czech Republic, Hong Kong, Mexico, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden and the UK, youth tourists can be categorised into three groups (UNWTO 2003). According to this self-identification 'travel style' categories by respondents themselves, over half identify themselves as 'travellers', and around one third identify themselves as 'backpackers' and roughly one fifth as 'tourists'. Those respondents who identifying themselves as 'backpackers' tend to be more 'experience seekers' and is trying to look for contact with their fellow travellers. Those identifying themselves as 'travellers' have more social motives and are more likely to visit friends and relatives during their trip. It is those identifying themselves as 'tourists' who are more likely to look for relaxation during their trip (Richards and Wilson 2003). According to Richards and Wilson (2003), most of the younger tourists who are under 26 years old, tend to place more emphasis on social contact and excitement. On the other hand, slightly older tourists are seeking more individualised experiences and are less often in search of extreme experiences (Richards and Wilson 2003).

Research done by Student and Youth Travel Association (SYTA) (2004) revealed that nowadays, students want interactive school trips that are different from conventional tourist routes in order to experience first-hand of culture, art, heritage and history of the destinations. They want school trips that allow them to directly involve with the people and culture of the places they visit. Besides that, they also seek hands-on, interactive

experiences that reflect their career goals and cultural background, as well as their artistic interests. They want a total educational experience.

According to Mohamed (2000), travelling is not a new phenomenon among youths and students in Japan. School travel has been established as part of the educational curriculum (Richards 2005). Japanese outbound youth travel contributed 5.7% of total international tourism expenditure in 2001 (UNWTO 2002). During April every year, a lot of Japanese will go for trips either locally or internationally. A lot of newly graduates from universities will go for a trip to celebrate their graduations. Some of them went abroad and joined the homestay programmes in the countries such as Malaysia, New Zealand and Australia. They wanted to gain new experiences by exposing themselves to the new environment and they tried to communicate with the locals in English.

YOUTH TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

According to a report prepared by Rehanstat Sdn. Bhd. (2000), 44.6% of domestic tourists in 2000 were youth aged 15 to 34 years old. Numbers of young tourists are expected to increase significantly in the future. This positive trend may perhaps was a result of various promotional strategies and festivals carried and hosted by the Malaysian government throughout the country all year round such as shopping carnivals, the *Cuti-Cuti Malaysia* and homestay programmes.

Based on the statistics of the Ninth Malaysian Plan (Economic Planning Unit 2006), total Malaysian youth aged 15-39 years old in 2005 was 11.1 million. So, it is believed that youth market is experiencing a steady growth. The increasing numbers indicated that youth tourists in Malaysia are now more adventurous and will travel more frequently in the future. Therefore, the establishment of recreation clubs in schools and universities is a wise effort to encourage students to involve in tourism activities, as well as to allow them to become directly involved with the people and culture of the places they has visited (Mohamed, Yusof and Omar 2005).

In Malaysia, youth travel can be divided into three main market segments which comprise students in high schools, students in higher education institutions and working young tourists. School-based trips among

high school students are normally conducted in medium-sized groups (11 to 30 students) travel on school buses and with assistance from accompanying teachers. The trips are most likely planned to popular mass travel destinations like Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Penang, Cameron Highland, Langkawi and Johor Bahru. The itinerary of the trips often includes excursions to historical places, zoos, museums, art galleries and theme parks.

On the other hand, students in higher education institutions prefer to travel in smaller group, with an average of 2 to 5 people. They are more independent, flexible, and prefer to travel in private vehicles, public transportations or by (budget) airlines to remote places such as Pulau Payar, Pulau Redang, Pulau Perhentian, Pulau Tioman and Taman Negara Pahang. Other than leisure, they also travel for education purposes, visiting friends and families and for sport tournaments. This group of tourists enjoys shopping, swimming, mountain climbing and visiting theme parks. However, some of the young adults thought that they feel safer and more comfortable traveling with family members (Mohamed, Yusof and Omar 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire Design

Questions and variables used in the questionnaire are derived from past research by Aramberri (1991), Joon (2002), Richards and Wilson (2003) and Sullivan (2004). The questionnaire contains five parts that are travel planning, travel expenses, motivation and distraction factors, travel experience and preference, and demographic. The process of questionnaire design involved a few testing, corrections and reductions. A pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire and from there, several changes were made. The preliminary test managed to secure 20 respondents and a more refined questionnaire was developed from the suggestions and comments from the respondents. The questionnaire was prepared in both Malay and English. Each questionnaire took about 3 to 5 minutes to be completed.

Sample

The survey involved Malaysian youth aged between 15 to 30 years old from the groups of high school students, students in academic institutions

and career youth travelers. The sample consisted of 41.1% male and 58.9% female, with majority of them are single (91.5%). The biggest age group was respondents at the age between 20-24 years old (65.4%), followed by group at the age between 25-30 years old (21.7%) and group at the age below 19 years old (12.9%). Majority of them were students at higher education institution (64.5%), followed by high school students (14.8%) and 20.7% of the respondents are working youths. 66.1% of the respondents were Malay, followed by Chinese (19.7%), Bumiputera (9.3%), Indian (4.0%), and others.

Data Collection

The researchers undertook three methods in distributing the questionnaire forms. Firstly, the researchers delivered hundreds of questionnaire forms to selected schools and higher institutions as follow and requested the assigned teachers and lecturers to distribute the forms among their students. The completed forms were mailed back to researchers once the task completed.

- i. 77 high schools in Malaysia;
- ii. 36 vocational institutions;
- iii. 8 public universities; and
- iv. 7 private colleges.

Secondly, hundreds of questionnaire forms were distributed among youngsters at the public areas throughout the country by using convenience sampling method. The third method was by using web-based survey. As to ensure high response rates, the researchers employed snowball techniques. Email messages were sent to all possible contact of the researchers. Respondents were required to answer the online questionnaire that can be accessed at <http://www.hbp.usm.my/tourism/youth>. Then, they were requested to forward the URL to all their contacts. From the total of 3310 returned questionnaire, only 1443 questionnaires were usable, while the rest were incomplete and therefore were discarded.

Data Analysis

The data was entered and coded onto SPSS program. Extensive data cleaning, editing and crosschecks were performed during the data

entry process. Responses from open-ended questions were recoded to allow meaningful descriptive analysis to be performed. In depicting the respondents' profile, descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages were calculated. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha reliability test was conducted on 14 items of tourist activities to determine the reliability of the data. In overall, the reliability coefficient was 0.721, which is an indication of strong item homogeneity. Nunnally (1978) suggested that the minimum of 0.70 would be an acceptable level for Cronbach's alpha reliability test. Besides that, a factor analysis with extraction method of Principle Component Analysis and Varimax Rotation (cut-off point of 0.4) was carried out to analyze the underlying factors of the data and to find out the dimensions and correlations among the activities interested by youth tourists when they visit to a destination.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Characteristics and Travel Patterns of Youth Tourists

The main purposes of travel among the youths were mainly for leisure or holiday (61.1%), followed by attend education/courses/seminar/exhibition (12.7%) and visit friends and relatives (9.2%) (Table 1). These are quite similar to the finding based on the research carried out by UNWTO (2003) towards the youth tourist from Germany, United Kingdom and France. Majority of them (46.2%) travelled during school/semester holidays, followed by public holidays (12.4%) and weekends (8.5%). The rest have no specific time to travel.

Table 1 Main purposes of travel

Purpose of travel	Percentage (%)
Leisure/holidays	61.1
Education/courses/seminar/exhibition	12.7
Visit friends/relatives	9.2
Family vacation	6.3
Shopping	5.2
Business trip/conference/meeting	2.2
Religious/cultural/festive celebrations	1.2

Sport tournament/event	1.1
Attend concert/ performances	1.0
Total	100.0

The survey discovered that 35.6% of the respondents travelled on their parents' money and 26.7% of them travelled by using their own savings. However, some of them travelled with the money from salary from full-time/part-time job (19.6%), sponsor/scholarship/education loan (17.2%) and other sources (0.9%). Most of the respondents (26.3%) spent around RM251.00-RM500.00 during their trips, followed by 19.4% of the respondents who spent around RM101.00-RM250.00. The survey also found that 17.4% of the respondents spent more than RM1000.00, as they were either travelled to a far destination or stayed longer time at the destination. The survey also found that majority of the respondents (62.0%) planned their trips and make real reservations. About half of them (42.5%) make hotel room reservations prior to their trips.

As shown in Table 2, 42.9 % of the respondents travelled with their friends and 42.3% travelled with family members/relatives. Only 0.5% travelled with other tourist met during the journey. The survey revealed that majority of them (37.4%) travelled with their own transports (either car/van), 25.5% travelled by bus, and 13.6% travelled by flight. Others travelled by cruise/ferry/boat (8.6%), rented car/van (7.1%), and very few of them travelled by bicycle (0.2%) as cycling for long journey is not a culture in Malaysia.

Table 2 Companions of the trip

Travel companion	Percentage (%)
Friends	42.9
Family members/relatives	42.3
Tour group/club	7.0
Alone	4.7
Lecturer/teacher	1.6
Incentive group	1.0
Other tourist met during the journey	0.5
Total	100.0

While the general Malaysian travellers have opted to stay at hotels and resorts and no longer find friends' and relatives' houses to put the night, the majority of the respondents also follows the same patterns which 40.5% stayed at hotels and resorts while 25.3% stayed at their friends' or relatives' houses, and 11.1% at rest houses, bungalows and service apartments. Other types of accommodation include chalets, camping sites, hostels, homestays and motels. Staying at friends and relatives' houses is perhaps an example of cost cutting measure among youth tourists. The average length of stay was rather short with 41.5% of them spent between 1 to 3 days at destinations, while 23.2% of them spent between 3 to 6 days. The result of cross-tabulation between travel companion and choice of accommodation revealed that hotels and resorts are preferred accommodation among youth tourist while on holiday with family or relatives (Table 3). Also, they preferred to stay at hotels and resorts rather than the house of relatives or friends while travelling with a group of friend. However, if they are unaccompanied, staying at friend's or relative's house is more preferable.

Table 3 Cross-tabulation between travel companion and choice of accommodation

Cross-tabulation	Alone	Family members/ relatives	Friends	Other tourist met during the journey	Incentive group	Lecturer/ teacher	Tour group/ club
Hotel/resort	17	317	219	2	10	11	32
House of friends/ relatives	37	175	160	1	1	0	6
Chalet/ motel	5	65	66	1	2	5	12
Rest house/ bungalow/ apartment	6	84	57	0	0	2	17
Camping sites	3	18	53	0	3	2	12
Backpacker's hostel/hostel	6	7	37	2	1	5	13
Homestay	1	12	13	0	0	1	2

Source of Information

When planning for a trip, most of the respondents (27.0%) will discuss and obtain information from friends/family members/relatives and 16% of them will be based on their own experiences, and 13.8% will obtain information from the Internet (Table 4). The survey revealed that there is a very high potential for the Internet to be the main information source for youths when planning for their trips (mean 2.25; SD 0.98). Results showed that 16.1% of the respondents will always try to obtain information from the Internet while planning for trips. Only 16.1% of them never use the Internet as a source of information. The rest will either often (22.6%) or sometimes (45.2%) use it as source of information.

Table 4 Source of information while planning for a trip

Source of information	Percentage (%)
Friends/relatives	27.0
Previous experiences of the respondent	16.0
Internet	13.8
Brochures/travel guides	13.2
Newspapers/magazines	7.7
TV/radio	7.2
Travel agencies	4.7
Tourism office/tourist information centre	4.6
Travel Fair/Expo	2.9
Airlines	1.8
Higher education institution	0.5
Management (employer)	0.3
School	0.2
Total	100.0

Factors Influencing Youths' Travel Decisions

The survey discovered that the travel cost was the most important aspects that the respondents considered before traveling. As show in Table 5, 16.2% of the respondents think that the total cost of the trip will be the most important factor that influencing their travel decision. Besides that,

with whom they go for the trip (8.9%) and obtaining permission from parents/family members (8.7%) are also important factors that influencing their decision making. However, travel agency selected for the trip (0.4%) is not really affecting their decision.

Table 5 Factors Influencing Youth’s Travel Decisions

Source of information	Percentage (%)
Total cost of the trip	16.2
With whom they go for the trip	8.9
Permission from parents/family members	8.7
Transport to the destination	8.3
Travelling time	8.3
Safety levels of the destination	8.0
Beautiful natural scenery	6.9
Health condition of respondents themselves	5.5
Food and beverages	4.9
Image of the destination	4.3
Distance of the destination	3.4
Cleanliness of the destination	3.3
Facilities of the destination	3.0
Shopping facilities	2.8
Cultural/heritage attractions	2.8
Mobile phone services coverage	2.2
Night activities	1.9
Travelling agency used	0.4
Total	100.0

The survey also discovered that, majority of the respondents (27.9%) consider limited financial resources is the main factor that stop them from going for a trip as most of the respondents are students (Table 6). Besides that, time constraints/lack of holidays (19.2%) and weather (14.0%) can also limits youths from travelling. In Malaysia, some of the tourist spots are affected by monsoons or raining seasons during certain periods of time in a year. On the other hand, very few respondents (1.7%) consider religion/culture as hurdle for them to go for a trip.

Table 6 Constraints that Limit Youths to Travel

Source of information	Percentage (%)
Limited financial resources	27.9
Time constraints/lack of holidays	19.2
Weather	14.0
Disapproval from parents/family members	9.4
Safety of the destination	9.4
No companion	8.1
Transportation problems to access to the destination	7.4
Limited information about the destination	2.9
Religion/cultural constraints	1.7
Total	100.0

Interested Activities at the Destination

This study found that the respondents have highest interest rate (five-point scale was used) in visiting ecological and natural excursions (mean 4.04; SD 0.92), followed by sightseeing in cities/towns (mean 3.98; SD 0.92), visiting parks/gardens (mean 3.97; SD 0.95) and shopping (mean 3.97; SD 0.98). They have least interest in entertaining in discos/night clubs (mean 2.16; SD 1.27). Besides conducting descriptive analysis, principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted and three factors have been identified (Table 7). The main reason of carrying out factor analysis is to find out the dimensions and correlations among the activities interested by youth tourists when they visit to a destination. The first factor consists of five types of activities, such as visiting Orang Asli (aborigines) settlements and villages, visiting heritage/historical sites, visiting ecological and natural excursions, visiting museums/art galleries, and attending traditional cultural performance. Therefore, this factor can be considered as “Alternative tourism”. The second factor comprises four types of activities. They are sightseeing in cities/towns, visiting parks/gardens, shopping and attending concerts/theatres/musical performances. This factor can be categorised as “Urban tourism”. The third factor includes five types of active and energetic activities, which are playing golf/tennis/sport games, swimming/snorkeling, playing water sports, entertaining in

discos/night clubs, and jungle trekking/hiking. This factor can be grouped as “Sport tourism”.

Table 7 Factor Analysis of the Activities Interested by Youth Tourists

Activities	Component			Communalities
	1	2	3	
Visiting ecological and natural excursions	0.699	0.009	0.152	0.512
Sightseeing in cities/towns	0.002	0.755	0.060	0.573
Visiting parks/gardens	0.273	0.673	0.115	0.541
Shopping	-0.053	0.817	-0.019	0.670
Visiting heritage/historical sites	0.787	0.025	-0.030	0.621
Jungle trekking/hiking	0.317	-0.111	0.609	0.484
Playing water sports	0.150	0.155	0.694	0.528
Visiting museums/art galleries	0.691	0.115	0.052	0.493
Attending traditional cultural performance	0.542	0.328	0.101	0.412
Attending concerts/theatres/musical performances	0.019	0.511	0.402	0.423
Swimming/snorkeling	0.018	0.117	0.669	0.462
Playing golf/tennis/sport games	0.182	0.059	0.604	0.402
Entertaining in discos/night clubs	-0.293	0.066	0.467	0.308

Note: Cut off point 0.40

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

DISCUSSION

Youth market is a significant but largely overlooked segment of the tourism industry in Malaysia. This study intends to extend the literature and to provide greater understanding of the Malaysian youth tourists’ characteristics, behaviors, travel patterns and preferences. This study

discovered that despite their financial constraints, youths do enjoy and engage in tourism activities. Increasing drives to travel among youths might reflect higher level of freedom, higher level of confidence, as well as greater affordability.

This study found out that respondents have highest interest in visiting ecological and natural excursions, sightseeing in cities/towns, visiting parks/gardens and shopping. At the same time, three dimensions of activities that youth tourists are interested have been identified, namely “alternative tourism”, “urban tourism”, and “sport tourism”. Since most of the activities fall on the dimensions of “alternative tourism” and “urban tourism” received high mean (all above 3.50) of interest, more activities that fall in this two types of tourism can be organised to attract youth tourists. Greater understanding of specific needs and characteristics of the youth tourists is very vital to further encourage them to travel more.

The advancement of budget airlines like the Air Asia, FireFly as well as various student travel cards and packages introduced by various tour agencies and transportation establishments throughout the country can further promote youth tourism. This positive trend, however, must be complemented with more affordable accommodation like budget hotels, youth hostels and guesthouses. Besides that, greater promotions of homestay programme can be carried out to attract youth tourists. Homestay not just able to provide more affordable accommodations to the youths, it will also allow youth, especially those from big cities, to get nearer to locals’ or villagers’ lifestyle and gain new experiences. Therefore, more information about homestay should be widely available to the youths through booklets, magazines or websites about homestay.

Results also show that the internet is one of the important sources of information when youths plan for their trip. However, a lot of popular tourist spots in Malaysia are still do not provide complete information through online. According to Richards (2006), personal sources of information are the most trusted, but the Internet is very frequently used to plan travel (over 80%). This means that tourism products have more chance of being found if they are online. So, tourist attraction operators, hotels operators, tourism agencies as well as government authorities should provide more interesting and complete information through the Internet with well developed websites.

CONCLUSION

It is acknowledged that there are limitations associated with this research. The first limitation is the time of the data collection. A more appropriate time to collect the data would be in year-end school holiday from November to January when the majority of Malaysian youths take their holidays. Further limitations relate to the number of responses. It is acknowledged that the responses mainly from the group of career youth travelers could be increased, in order to obtain a more representative view of the market. This could be achieved by distributing the questionnaire forms at the budgeted hotels as well as backpacker's hostels.

Youth tourist is like other clients or customers, once their requirements and preferences are clearly identified and understood, tourist attraction operators are more likely to be able to anticipate and fulfill their customers' needs and wants (Juwaheer and Ross 2003). The more satisfied the tourists are, the more likely they would return or prolong their stay.

Findings of this study might be able to help the relevant parties which involving in planning and development to structure products and services that suit to the youth tourists. Hopefully, information obtained from this study will directly or indirectly contribute to the growth of Malaysia' tourism industry.

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PROFIL PENULIS

Badaruddin Mohamed, PhD

School of Housing
Building and Planning
Universiti Sains Malaysia
11800 Pulau Pinang
bada@usm.my

Shida Irwana Omar

School of Housing
Building and Planning
Universiti Sains Malaysia
11800 Pulau Pinang
trci@usm.my

Lau Pei Mey

340, Distd College
Macalister Road
10350 Pulau Pinang
peimey@yahoo.com