

An Inventory of Youth Tourists in Event Tourism

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Abstract: Youth tourists are often described as inactive segments by tourism providers in developing countries. The seasonal and non-thematic nature of their travel undertakings has underprivileged them from being regarded as active participants and dominant segments in the tourism market. To tap on this marketing potential of the youth tourists event tourism may be organized that would provide opportunities for the youth tourists to travel within their financial capabilities. This article analyses the profiles of youths participating in event tourism in conjunction with the Visit Malaysia Year 2007 (VMY2007). The analysis was based on a field study in which 130 youths from selected tourism sites in Kuala Lumpur responded to a self administered survey. The results of the study showed that youths supported event tourism and their preferences were highly related to leisure, companionship, self-satisfaction and the availability of events. It is recommended that youth tourists be considered a major player in event tourism. In this connection, having a comprehensive inventory of youth tourists makes sense as it provides an operational guide in organising and planning thematic event tourism.

Key words: Youth • Youth tourist • Event tourism • Event suitability • Inventory

INTRODUCTION

In both developed and developing countries tourism industry is facing a rapid change in demand in almost all market segments [1,2]. Similarly, the trends of youth tourists are also changing, from seasonal and inactive to all year round and active participants of veritably all types of tourism events. Youth tourism is growing rapidly due to changes in global socio-demography, lower travel costs and widespread backpacker's culture [1,3,4]. In developed countries, youth tourists are not only dominating the backpacker's segment but also dominating the major world event tourism [3, 4]. In contrast, youth tourism is still in its infancy and an untapped market in developing countries [5-7].

Event tourism involves a variety of forms, themes, influences and localities [8-9]. Four major themes characterize contemporary event tourism studies, namely, economic impact, behavioral studies of large and world events including motivations of attendees, marketing and place identity, promotional and planning issues in event tourism [8-10]. Unlike event tourism, youth tourism is identified only with specific international sport events,

small-scale sports, backpackers and cultural events [11-14]. Obviously, not much work has been done on youth involvement in event tourism particularly year-round events in developing countries.

In Malaysia, the general approach to strengthen youth market is to offer various tourism activities in event tourism. It is expected that through event tourism, youths can participate actively in accordance with their preferences, needs and spending capabilities [6-8]. One of the initiatives taken was hosting a Visit Malaysia Year 2007 (VMY 2007) which offered a total of 50 major events throughout the year. The Malaysian government targeted a total of 20 million foreign tourists and 44.5 billion ringgit of tourist receipts from the VMY 2007 in an effort to give a boost to the national economy and its tourism-related industries [15]. The events were showcased throughout the country, allowing visitors to witness a unique multi-racial and multi-cultural tourism activities and lifestyles of the country [15]. Part of the idea was also to strengthen domestic youth tourism as the youths constitute some 10.1 million, or 45 per cent of Malaysia's total population of 25 million [7].

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Notwithstanding the VMY 2007, only a limited aspect of youth tourism was ever explored in Malaysia. These range from a general trend of youth tourists [15], factors delimiting the growth of youth tourism [5-6], the interest of youth in responsible tourism [11] and small scale sport events [12] and community involvement in event tourism [16]. Crucially, there exists no uniform typology of youth travel that can be applied in marketing and promotion and in uncovering their potentials.

Basically, a youth tourist is an individual, aged 18 to 24 or 30 who travel domestically or internationally for experience, leisure and educational purposes [7, 17-18]. In terms of tourist behaviours, their purpose of travel varies, ranging from soft to hard-core experiences. Youths in Australia are commonly called Generation Y with alternative labels such as 'Millennial' and the 'Dot.Com' [17]. They enjoyed arts and events and most of the trips desired are to explore, experience, work or study abroad. Added to this, youths as travel market love wandering to unusual and remote locations to experience a variety of culture, including dancing and searching for identity [18-21]. Several authors assert youths prefer on budget accommodations as well as short haul rather than long haul travel. They created their own itinerary and used public transportation, including bus or train as these allow them to interact with the local community [18-19, 16]. They stayed longer than an ordinary tourist in a particular destination and were generally more tolerant and less concerned with threats of such as terrorism, disease, environmental and political unrest [19-20].

Being at its infancy in the tourism sector of most developing countries, current knowledge on youth tourism provides but a limited understanding of the demand and travel pattern needed for future thematic planning of a country's tourism events and destination. To contribute towards the closing of this gap of knowledge on youth event tourism, this article aims to identify the profiles of youth tourists in Malaysian event tourism, with special reference to the Visit Malaysia Year 2007.

METHODS

This study was conducted in May 2007 and employed a self-administered survey of 130 respondents in selected areas of Kuala Lumpur, the capital city. The study area, Kuala Lumpur was chosen because it was the central venue for VMY 2007. Several sites were chosen to

collect samples and these included the Mid Valley Shopping Centre and the Central Market. The survey used close and open ended questionnaires to gauge the profiles of youth tourists. The major components examined were the socio-demography of youths as event tourists, youths' forms of participation, event suitability, youths' knowledge of the Visit Malaysia Year 2007 campaign and youths' recommendations. The data were analysed using a SPSS Statistical package.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profiles of Respondents: The study involved 68% females and 32% males and their profiles are shown in Table 1.

The majority were in the age group of 20 to 24 years old. Most respondents were single studying, (95%) and still studying (82%). A total of 61% of the respondents were Malay, followed by Chinese and Indian, who comprised less than 10 percent of the total respondents. A total sixty-five percent of respondents had their educational attainment at Diploma/ Degree level, followed by 30% at secondary school level. Almost 93% of the respondents were from outside of Kuala Lumpur.

Forms of Participation: From the study, two forms of youth participation were identified, namely active and passive. An active participation refers to 'an active travelling to a destination', 'stayed or overnight at the destination', 'paid spectator' and 'a participant of an event'. On the other hand, passive participation refers to a 'day tripper', 'free entrance event spectator' and to some extent 'watch showcase events aired on the television'. Table 2 shows over 60% of the respondents were active participants while only 30.8% were passive.

In terms of preferences, results show the respondents' tendencies of choosing a particular event. The respondents they were more fascinated towards such events consisting entertainment and shopping, contributing as entertainment (55.3%) and shopping (41.5%). The educational event, family oriented activities and ICT exhibition were also of their choices and these ranged around 35% to 15% of the total visits. These trends were associated with reasons such as events as interesting entertainments to experience the events were interesting and entertaining, medium and a means to reduce stress, provide enjoyment and eliminate fatigue. Shopping activity was associated with youth's 'wandering' in shopping complexes.

Table 1: Profiles of Respondents' Socio-demography

Profiles	Aspect	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	42	32.3
	Female	88	67.7
Age	15-19 years	38	29.2
	20-24 years	79	60.8
	25-29 years	12	9.2
	30-34 years	1	0.8
Race	Malay	119	91.5
	Chinese	7	5.4
	Indian	3	2.3
	Others	1	0.8
Marital Status	Single	123	94.6
	Married	7	5.4
Occupation	Own work	2	1.6
	Government	16	12.4
	Private	5	3.6
	Others (including studying)	107	82.4
Origin	In Kuala Lumpur	9	6.9
	Not in Kuala Lumpur	121	93.1
Level of education	Diploma/First Degree	84	64.6
	Secondary School	39	30.0
	No schooling	1	0.8
	Others	6	4.6

N = 130 respondents

Table 2: Multiple Responses for Youth Tourist VMY 2007

Aspects	Answers	Numbers	Percentage
VMY suits youth taste and needs	Yes	105	80.8
	Not	25	9.2
Form of participation in TMM07	Active participation	84	64.6
	Passive participation	40	30.8
	No response	6	4.6
Types of Events (multiple answers)	Entertainment	72	55.4
	Shopping	54	41.5
	Education	20	15.3
	Family activities	46	35.4
	Exhibitions and festivals	30	23.1
	Other	4	3.1
	Companion when attending events during VMY (multiple answers)	Friends	78
Couple		18	13.0
Family		69	53.1
Others		6	3.4
Satisfied with the program organized	Yes	90	69.2
	No	40	30.8
Cost per visit	Less than RM500	87	66.9
	RM501-RM1000	25	21.9
	RM1001-RM1500	4	3.1
	RM1501-RM2000	4	3.1
	More than RM2000	10	7.7
Mode of transport (multiple answers)	Private cars	63	48.5
	Taxi	12	9.2
	Bus	31	23.8
	LRT / commuter	83	63.8

N = 130 respondents.

Table 3: Support for Future Event Tourism

Aspects	Response	Number	Percent
VMY programme should be held again	Yes	117	90.0
	No	13	10.0
Aware of VMY 08 programme and promotion in Kelantan and Terengganu	Yes	39	30.0
	No	91	70.0
Intention of visiting VMY08 programme in Kelantan and Terengganu when promoted as the major event of the year.	Yes	70	53.8
	No	60	46.2

N = 130 respondents in each aspect

As youths prefer companions when travelling, the results of the study confirm their ‘wandering’ preferences. A total of 60 percent stressed their friends were their companions. Among events shared with friends were shopping, adventure and fun-based events, while events accompanied by family members were the Month of Golden Celebration, shopping, visiting trade and fairs. Youths of event tourist are classified as ‘minimalist’ as most of them spent either less than RM500 and (66.9%) or around RM500- RM1000, with a total 66.9 percent and RM 1000 (21.9%). They were regular public transportation users and guests of budget hotels. All these behaviours are consistent and similar to backpackers highlighted by other scholars.

As many events were held in the capital city, it was unnecessary to be involved in long haul travel. Instead, it was adequate to become a day tripper or an attendee to experience a wide range of tourism programmes within their spending capacity, free time or leisure and daily life routine.

Event Suitability: Organizing events throughout the year acts as ‘stimulus’ for an stimulates active participation of youth tourists. From the findings, 80.8 percent of respondents mentioned that VMY 2007 suited their taste. Notably, from their written views, many still stressed on the event appropriateness that in meeting and respecting local culture. The tattoos were mentioned to be the least appropriate as the ‘practice of tattoos was contradictory to Islam’. Even though it was only a military art performance, due to lack of information and familiarization of events, it has created a misleading interpretation among youths. On the other hand, youths’ willingness to pay and to be part of the spectacular events such as Formula One at the expense of their pocket money, was well accepted by most respondents and it was among the prestigious events the country had offered to all market segments.

Youth Support in Event Tourism: This study solicited youth’s support and recommendation for event advancements, at either international or local levels. During this study, the state of Kelantan and Terengganu would be hosting the Visit State Year in 2008 and both states had made promotion nationwide (Table 3).

Despite the fact that youths normally keep track of leisure and lifestyles information the results on awareness on both events were quite limited, as only 30 percents of the respondents knew about them. They, nevertheless, had given a positive indication on future visit to the host states. Nearly one third had agreed to do so and many stated that it was a bonus when a trip offered a festive environment. As an untapped market that needs to be developed and sustained in the country, the respondents were also giving good response supported initiatives to ensure the sustainability of event tourism. Initiatives such as fiscal incentive, entertainment, educational campaigns and promotions were suggested. Their responses imply that youths remain the special groups with requiring ‘special incentives’ to generate active participation.

Based on the three aspects elaborated above, the study presented empirically what is understood and desired by youths as event tourists. The study found that youth behaviour pattern in event tourism was similar to youth that in backpackers’ market and youth tourist in general. They seem to be are young, active and demand budget holidays and competitive pricing. They support a epitomise the minimalist traveller in accommodation, transportation and tours.

Another concern is the concentration and suitability of event tourism. Overall, youths supported event diversification, even diversification although preferring a more concentrated venue. Based on event suitability, the study found a general understanding of what constitutes event tourism among youths. Their preferences were the fun, play and relax activities compared to the knowledge based experiences and role-play activities, whereby all of which were linked to the ‘limitation of money and time’ as majorities most were still studying and new at work.

CONCLUSION

This study evidence affirms the importance of youth tourist in event tourism. Youth tourists do take part in year round events. Their active participations warrant their preferences to be considered by tourism providers, be they private or public sectors.

It is suggested that more event tourism designed for youths be showcased at the national, regional and local levels. It is also recommended that comprehensive studies on youth as event tourist been implemented youths as event tourist be conducted to produce youth tourist typologies, as it is crucial that youths become the key strategic players at every level of planning, development and hosting of event tourism.

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