

# Factors and Competitiveness of Malaysia as a Tourist Destination: A Study of Outbound Middle East Tourists

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## Abstract

International tourism has become one of the largest and most vital economic sectors of the global economy driving huge flows of people, commodities, and capital. Tourism has been and continues to be an important foreign exchange earner to many countries in South East Asia and Malaysia is no exception. The aim of this article is to trace the factors for visiting Malaysia, image of Malaysia as a tourism destination and competitiveness of Malaysia as a tourism destination among outbound Middle East tourists to Malaysia. A survey was used to obtain data randomly from 357 outbound Middle East tourists leaving Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). From the results, for most of the Middle East tourists, safety and security is extremely important for choosing Malaysia as a foreign country for long-haul travel. Malaysia is at the top of the list of top five countries for long-haul travel. Hospitality in Malaysia was better and excellent than many long-haul countries for the Middle East tourists, followed by natural environment. From the overall implications of this study, it could be concluded that a strong relationship between government, tourism industry players, local authorities, private agencies and businesses should be fostered to ensure that tourists' needs, especially Middle East tourists, are fulfilled. It is a known fact that Middle East tourists have a high taste. Therefore the various tourism industry players need to work hand in hand to improve all types of services provided to the Middle East tourists.

**Keywords:** outbound tourists, Middle East tourists, Malaysia as a tourist destination, international tourism

## 1. Introduction

International tourism has become one of the largest and most vital economic sectors of the global economy driving huge flows of people, commodities, and capital. It literally functions on the leading edge of globalization as it continually transfers consumer tastes, cultural practices, business people, and capital into new spaces across the globe (Hazbun, 2003). Tourism has been and continues to be an important foreign exchange earner to many countries in South East Asia. This is mainly due to the increasing number of European tourists in general and particularly Middle East Tourists as in the case of Malaysia. The reasons for this expansion are numerous and include among others the more effective organisation of tourism by these countries and packaging and promotional activities, especially in ASEAN countries. In addition, the governments of the South East Asian countries provide positive policy support to tourism development and not forgetting the rising levels of wealth in the visitor source countries and the falling costs of international travel (Hitchcock, King and Parnwell, 2009).

Forecast by World Travel and Tourism Council for the tourism industry in Southeast Asia is very strong (Hitchcock, King and Parnwell, 2009). Travel and tourism is expected to contribute \$43.2 billion to the region's GDP and be directly responsible for 6.96 million jobs in 2005, rising to \$88.3 billion and 8.5 million jobs by 2015. Likewise, in terms of demand, there is very encouraging feedback as it was expected to have increased by 6.3 per cent in 2005, and by an average of 6.2 per cent per annum in real terms between 2006 and 2015 (ibid).

There are fears that China may dwarf and dominate the countries of Southeast Asia as far as tourism is concern. However, despite the tough competition, observers reckon the strong determination and well organised tourism authorities of these countries. Thailand, for example, has long been among the top twenty tourist destinations (Hitchcock, King and Parnwell, 2009; Naved Hasan, 2009).

Despite the financial crises facing the world, tourists arrivals in Malaysia increased by 14.3 percent that is 2,078,485, in October 2009 compared with 1,818,304 in the same month in 2008 (New Straits Times, January 4, 2010). From January to October in 2009, Malaysia has seen an increase of 7.2 per cent in tourists' arrival to 19.45 million compared with 18.14 million in the same period in 2008. This shows the resilience of Malaysia's tourism industry. In the face of drop in the number of tourists worldwide, Malaysia was experiencing a rise in tourists' arrival (ibid). However, what is worth noting is that majority of these tourists come from Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, India and the United Kingdom.

Malaysia has so far adopted an aggressive approach to woo Middle Eastern Tourists to the country. This has been the case since the time of the former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir. In addition to his Look East policy, the then Prime Minister also seized the vacuum created in the aftermath of the September 11 2001, attack on USA as Middle Eastern tourists felt uncomfortable travelling to Western countries due to the treatment they received. Over-reactions, ignorance and chauvinism in those countries have forced many Arab tourists to look for new frontiers and change their traditional holiday destinations to other countries (Al-Hamarnah & Steiner, 2004). As a result, Malaysia as well as other Asian countries was found to be one of the favourite alternative vacation destinations for the Arabs (Ibrahim et al., 2009). Also the Islamic factor was also used by Malaysia to attract these tourists.

In fact the trend in terms of number of Middle Eastern tourists' arrival to Malaysia has been encouraging over the last few years. As reported, the influx of Arab tourists to Malaysia reached a total of 126,000 in 2004; 150,000 in 2005 and 200,000 in 2006 (New Straits Times, 2007).

The Middle Eastern tourists are the next wave of tourists Malaysia is focusing on as they have high purchasing power compared to European tourists. The Middle Eastern tourists are known to stay in 4 or 5 star accommodation where European tourists mainly stay in backpackers' type of accommodation. In 2008 Malaysia attracted 147, 646 tourists from Middle Eastern countries, an increase of 17 per cent over 2007. (Gulfnews.com, May 3, 2009). The Malaysian Tourism Board has been actively participating in Arabian Travel Market, an exhibition to promote tourism (ibid).

Following these developments and in boosting the number of tourists' arrivals from the lucrative Middle Eastern market, key aims of the new strategy of Tourism Malaysia are to introduce new destinations to the Middle East market and increase their length of stay in Malaysia (The Star Online, May 5, 2009).

From the literature, studies on the competitiveness of Malaysia as tourist destination are lacking and the current study will contribute to this area of research. Hence, suggestions and insight on how to make Malaysia more competitive can be put forward.

This article presents the findings of the study conducted on outbound Middle East tourists to Malaysia. The main objectives of the study are to investigate the tourists who currently have chosen Malaysia as their tourism destination and potential tourists as well as take the necessary steps to make sure the Middle Eastern tourists make Malaysia their fixed tourism destination. The study also aims to determine the activities, strategy and suitable marketing channel to attract more Middle Eastern tourists to Malaysia and also evaluate the impact the presence of the tourists have on Malaysian economy; to study the needs and also the requests of the Middle Eastern tourists as well as to study to what extent Malaysia has successfully fulfilled their needs and requests; to evaluate how to maintain the interest of the Middle Eastern tourists towards Malaysia so that they will continue to visit Malaysia, stay longer and spend more.

## 2. Methodology

Data for this study were obtained through a random study of outbound Middle East tourists leaving Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). In developing the questionnaire, i.e. the research instrument, a few factors were taken into consideration. The first relates to the language in the instrument. To facilitate a better understanding among the Middle Eastern tourists, it was decided that both English and the Arabic languages be used. The reasons for this were that not all the citizens of the Middle East speak the Arabic language.

A pilot study was conducted to test the validity of the questionnaire after which an improvement was made to the questions for clarity.

The questionnaire comprised eight sections; A to H. For this article focus was on sections D, E and F. Section D gathered data on factors and motivation for choosing Malaysia as tourists' destination. Section E recorded data on the perceived image and impression on Malaysia as a tourist's destination while F focussed on the competitiveness of Malaysia as a tourism destination.

On the actual data collection process, enumerators who speak both English and Arabic were employed to

interview the respondents under the supervision of a post doctoral fellow. The enumerators were post graduate students. It took about three months to gather data from 357 respondents from June to August of 2009 as that was the peak period for the Middle Eastern tourists arrival to Malaysia and some even call it 'Arab period'.

The data was analysed using SPSS 12.0 and the analysis was mainly descriptive in order to get an outlook of the trends in tourism arrival among the Middle East tourists to Malaysia.

### **3. Results**

This part presents the results of the study. For clarity and understanding, the results are presented under various sub headings. Since this is mainly descriptive only percentage and frequency are used and stated.

#### *3.1 Demography*

Based on the 357 respondents, the number of male tourists is higher than female tourists where male tourists are 73.1% while 26.9% are female tourists. More than half of the respondents with 64.7% are from the age group 20-29 years old. Majority of the respondents are degree holders with 52.7% while 33.9% are support staff and this is followed by academicians who make up 17.9%.

This study on outbound Middle East tourists found that Saudis have the highest number of tourists' arrival to Malaysia which is 106 (29.7%), Emirian, 66 (18.5%) and followed by Omani, 49 (13.7%). The citizens with the lowest number of tourists arrivals are Algerians, Eritreans, Jordanian, Moroccans, Palestinians, Arab Americans and Arab British with 1 (0.3%) each. Kuwaitis, Sudanese and Bahrain are 44 (12.3%), 38 (10.6%), and 10 (2.8%) respectively.

#### *3.2 Travelling Information and Tourist Expenditures*

Emirate Airlines was the favourite among the Middle East tourists as 159 (44.5%) respondents used it to travel to Malaysia. This is followed by Etihad Airways, 131 (36.7%). Saudi Airlines was the third favourite among the respondents with 16 (4.5%) and Qatari was fourth, 15 (4.2%). Only 9 (2.5%) respondents used Malaysian Airlines to travel to Malaysia.

Majority, of the respondents, 330 (70.6%), spent from 1 to 30 days in Malaysia. Some 8 (2.3%) respondents spent from 31 to 60 days. Only 7 (2.1%) respondents spent 60 days and more. It is likely that the longest the tourists stayed in Malaysia, the more amount of money they spent.

From the results most of the respondents, 130 (36.45%) travelled with their spouse. Meanwhile, 85 (23.8%) of the respondents reported they brought family or relatives as travelling partners and 61 (17.1%) respondents chose their friend to accompany them to Malaysia. Most of the respondents, 326 (91.3%) visited Kuala Lumpur/Selangor. Pulau Pinang was the next state visited with 128 (35.9%) respondents and followed by Melaka, 78 (21.8%).

For total expenditure, 16 (4.5%) respondents spent RM 10,000 and it is followed by 4 (1.15) respondents who said they spent between RM 20,000 and RM 30,000 in Malaysia.

#### *3.3 Factors for Visiting Malaysia*

From the results most of the Middle East tourists, safety and security is extremely important with 224 (62.7%) respondents saying safety and security is extremely important for choosing a foreign country for long-haul travel. This is followed by cleanliness with 206 (57.7%) respondents. Besides, good image of the country as well is extremely important for 193 (54.1%) of the respondents. Some 168 (47.1%) respondents said that overall cost of trip is extremely important for long -haul travel. Despite the fact above, 186 (52.1%) respondents said that friendliness of local people is not important at all for them. Nevertheless, tourists from Middle East truly emphasize on safety and security wherever they travel to since 9/11. Some travel agency including tour operators and travel guide confessed that Arab tourists are hard to please in everything including cleanliness, infrastructure, supporting facilities as well as decoration in their hotel room.

The level of satisfaction based on Middle East tourists experience in Malaysia. The result shows that 175 (49%) respondents were very satisfied with varieties of tourism products and destinations. This is followed by safety and security with 163 (45.7%) respondents. Although respondents said that friendliness of local people was not important at all, 170 (47.6%) respondents said they were extremely satisfied with the local people. Good image of the country gave satisfaction for 96 (26.9%) of the respondents. Some 95 (26.9%) respondents were satisfied with the varieties of tourism products/destinations and 93 (26.1%) respondents were satisfied with support facilities and infrastructure. Overall cost of trip gave extreme satisfaction for 111 (31.1%) respondents, 84 (23.5%) respondents were satisfied, and 32 (9%) respondents moderately satisfied but these factor was unsatisfactory for 27 (7.6%) of the respondents.

Refreshing the tourist's mind became extremely important among the motivational factors with 184 (51.5%) respondents being motivated by this factor. This is followed by enjoying oneself with 176 (49.35) respondents. Some 169 (47.3%) respondents said they wanted to search out experience or visit popular places and the next motivational factor which was extremely important was relaxing one's body with 153 (42.95) respondents. Nevertheless, visiting friends and relatives in Malaysia was not important at all for 143 (40.1%) of the respondents. Some 129 (36.1%) respondents also said it was not important at all to have extra income for travelling to Malaysia. Last but not least, challenging self or travelling companion was also not important at all for 126 (35.3%) respondents.

### *3.4 Image of Malaysia as a Tourism Destination*

Some 53 (14.8%) respondents described Malaysia as a beautiful destination. This is followed by Islamic country with 45 (12.6%) respondents. Besides, 35 (9.8%) respondents said that Malaysia is a popular tourist's destination and KLCC was the first thing which came in the mind of 24 (6.7%) respondents and 23 (6.4%) respondents said Malaysia is a green. Meanwhile 20 (5.6%) respondents attached the word Malaysia to a wonderful weather. Some 9 (2.5%) respondents attached the image of Malaysia with entertainment and this is followed by shopping centre, 8 (2.2%) and 7 (2.0%) who said Malaysia was truly Asia. Only few respondents 6 (1.7%) said Malaysia was a destination with friendly people, place of rest and mental relaxation and beaches.

The result demonstrates that the respondents' perceived image before coming to Malaysia was very positive with 187 (52.4%) respondents perceiving Malaysia as pleasant. Some 144 (40.3%) perception of Malaysia before arriving here was that Malaysia was very arousing while 117 (32.8%) perceived that Malaysia is very relaxing and 158 (44.3%) respondents perception before arrival was that Malaysia is exciting place to be.

Some 192 (53.8%) respondents impression after visiting Malaysia was that Malaysia was very relaxing while 131 (36.7%) had the impression that Malaysia was very arousing. For 125 (35%) respondents, the impression they had after visiting Malaysia was that Malaysia was very relaxing while 156 (43.75) said it was exciting.

### *3.5 Competitiveness of Malaysia as Tourism Destination*

From the results, 233 (65.3%) of the Middle East tourists have never visited any country in South-East Asia and 111 (31.1%) said they have visited before. Therefore, a large number of the respondents are not quite familiar with countries in South East Asia and not many of them have been in these countries.

Thailand was the only SEA country which has been visited by two-third of the Middle East tourists with 69 (61.7%) respondents and followed by Indonesia, 21 (18.7%) respondents. Singapore was fourth with 14 (5.4%) respondents while Philippine, 5 (4.4%) respondents and Malaysia and Brunei with 2 (1.8%) and 1 (0.9%) respondents respectively. A few of the respondents stated countries which are not located in South-East Asia, such as China, Hong Kong, Japan, Sri Lanka, India, and even France. The fact that a lot of Middle East tourists have visited Thailand, Malaysia nowadays has become rival to Thailand by offering better facilities such as giving visa to let them stay for longer period, the image as an Islamic country and safety, among others.

From the list of top five countries for long-haul travel, the result proved that Malaysia is at the top of the list. Malaysia emerged the highest with 115 (32.3%), 34 (6.4%) in the second top list and 23 (6.4%) for third top list. Besides, rivalries exist between Thailand and Britain which are also among the highest rated countries. Therefore, Thailand is the major rival for Malaysian tourism industry especially among South East Asian countries as tourism destination by Middle East tourists.

The result of the study also revealed that the hospitality in Malaysia was better and excellent than many long-haul countries for 111 (31.1%) of the Middle East tourists, followed by natural environment with 104 (29.1%) respondents agreeing to this. Besides, 94 (26.3%) of the respondents felt that the level of safety in Malaysia was much higher and better than many countries. Some 85 (23.8%) respondents also chose Malaysia in terms of cleanliness. Meanwhile, 77 (21.6%) respondents said that food/cuisine in Malaysia was ahead of a few countries, followed by 77 (21.6%) who felt Malaysia was ahead in terms of security, and for 72 (20.2%) respondents Malaysia was ahead in terms of transportation. Other than that, there were 92 (25.8%) respondents who said that Malaysia was at the same level with other countries in terms of value for money. The reason is that Malaysian currency is stronger than rival countries such as Thailand and Indonesia.

Nevertheless 89 (24.9%) respondents said that Shopping in Malaysia was at the same level with other countries as well as accommodation with 83 (23.2%) respondents. Many countries exceeded Malaysia in terms of tourism products and services according to 60 (16.8%) respondents, while 73 (20.4%) respondents said that a few countries exceed Malaysia. Hence, many countries exceeded Malaysia in terms of cleanliness, 37 (10.4%) respondents and 59 (16.5%) respondents said a few countries exceeded Malaysia.

### 3.6 Tourism Marketing Effort

Some 190 (53.2%) respondents strongly agreed that recommendations from friends/relatives are very influential in their choice of or knowing Malaysia. This is followed by 179 (50%) respondents who strongly agreed that Malaysia is very well known in their country. The fact that there are many travel agencies promoting Malaysia as tourism destination was strongly agreed by 167 (46.8%) respondents and 112 (31.4%) said they strongly agreed with the fact that information on Malaysia is accessible. However, only 25 (7%) respondents strongly disagreed with the fact "I know where to seek information about Malaysia" and also 21 (5.9%) respondents for the statement of "information on Malaysia is accessible". The result illustrate that relationship marketing is the most influential for the tourists to know about Malaysia.

From the study advertisements through newspaper were the most successful marketing tool as most of the respondents, 85 (23.8%) noticed it. This is followed by 43 (12%) respondents who saw the advertisements at travel agencies and 42 (11.8%) respondents read the advertisement from magazines. Internet was the next successful marketing effort with 34 (9.5%) respondents. Marketing effort through radio failed as only one respondent heard the advertisement over the radio.

### 3.7 Tourist Satisfaction Level

The results show that overall the Middle East tourists were satisfied with their trip to Malaysia. Some 189 (52.9%) strongly agreed to this statement, followed by 98 (27.5%) who quite agreed, while 23 (6.4%) agreed. Meanwhile 14 (3.9%) strongly disagreed and 13 (3.6%) disagreed. Only 5 (1.4%) respondents quite disagreed.

Most of the tourists would certainly recommend Malaysia to other people. Some 194 (54.3%) respondents strongly agreed with the statement, followed by 76 (21.3%) who quite agreed and 33 (9.2%) who agreed. However, 16 (4.5%) respondents strongly disagreed and similarly the same number of respondents disagreed. Only 5 (1.4%) respondents quite disagreed.

Some 203 or (56.9%) strongly agreed that they will visit Malaysia again in the future. Meanwhile, 52 (14.6%) respondents quite agreed to this statement and 26 (7.3%) agreed. Also 25 (7.0%) respondents disagreed and 22 (6.2%) strongly disagreed. Only 12 (3.4%) respondents quite disagreed to the statement.

## 4. Discussions

From the results there were more male tourists (73.1%) as compared to female. This was partly due to the nature of the Arabs where females do not travel unless with a *mukhrim* or with their spouse. Moreover in answering the questionnaires the males mostly tend to answer as the women don't always feel comfortable to interact with men. Majority of Arab women normally travel with husband or families. Most women in Arab nations always travel with husbands or male relatives. Women are seldom allowed to travel alone. This is especially in the countries near to the Arab Peninsula (Ibrahim et. al., 2009)

Friends and relatives play a major role in spreading information about Malaysia to the Middle East tourists. As this study revealed, two-thirds of the respondents learned about Malaysia through their friends and relatives. This calls for intense promotional campaign by the Malaysian Tourism Board using variety of media to reach the audience. Yet still the Middle East citizens who come here should be treated well so that they can pass the message around as tourists from this region depends mainly on friends and relatives for information.

Holiday, rest, relaxation and honeymoon were the main purposes of visiting Malaysia by the Middle East tourists as almost two-thirds visited Malaysia for this purposes. The finding of this study is congruent to the finding by Ibrahim et. al (2009) where 83.8 per cent of Arabs travelling to Malaysia was mainly for holiday purposes. This might be due to the fact that Malaysia has distinctive and unique natural scenery. Besides, they might have changed their travelling trend and choose Malaysia rather than Europe because of the September 11 tragedy. Plus, Malaysia is an Islamic country and shares the same religion with them couple with the peace and tranquillity found in Malaysia.

Among the factors which motivated the Middle East tourists to travel to Malaysia is the Islamic country factor as half of the respondents gave this as a reason. The presence of many tourists' attractions and suggestions by friends and relatives were also very important in motivating the Middle East tourists to choose Malaysia. Malaysia should continue to provide a conducive environment and more tourists' attraction apart from maintaining and improving the already existing facilities.

After the 11 September attack on New York, Muslims and Middle East tourists in particular became object of intimidation and likely reprisal from angry westerners. In addition to this there were attacks on tourists in Bali putting the security and safety of tourists in jeopardy. It is therefore not surprising when about two-thirds of the

Middle East respondents said safety and security is extremely important for choosing a foreign country for long-haul travel. Malaysia being generally safe and secured is bound to attract these tourists coupled with the fact that the issues of terrorism continue to plague the world making the Middle East tourists feeling uncomfortable to travel to Western countries and terror attacked areas of the world.

Among the motivational factors in choosing Malaysia, refreshing one's mind, enjoying oneself, getting experience or visiting popular places and relaxing one's body were extremely important for the respondents. However, visiting friends and relatives, having extra income, challenging oneself and allocation when travelling were not really important motivational factors for the Middle East tourists. This is obvious as the main reason for travelling was for holidays and relaxation.

The image of Malaysia as a beautiful destination did not go down well with most of the Middle East tourists as only 14.8 per cent of the respondents thought Malaysia is beautiful. Similarly the image of Malaysia as an Islamic country was only held by 12.6 per cent, a very small number of the respondents and this attests to the fact that the Middle East tourists are very hard to be satisfied. The Tourism Board of Malaysia has to do a lot in order to sustain the Middle East tourists. Contrary, the results demonstrate that the Middle East tourists had a positive image of Malaysia before visiting as more than half of the respondents perceived Malaysia as pleasant.

From the findings the Middle East tourists are not quite familiar with countries in South East Asia as not many of them have been in these countries. Two-thirds of the respondents have never visited any country in South-East Asia. Contrary, Thailand has been exposed to the outside world and has been traditionally a holiday destination even to the Middle East tourists which has been visited by two-thirds of the respondents. Competitively Malaysia is listed number one for top five countries for long-haul travel by the respondents with Thailand trailing second. Of course this is not surprising as Arab tourists have been visiting Thailand long before they started coming to Malaysia.

The competitiveness of Malaysia is mainly due to its hospitality as the tourists see Malaysian hospitality is somehow encouraging as about one-third of the respondents said Malaysia is better and excellent than many countries for long-haul travel. Almost about a third said Malaysia is better in terms of natural environment. These aspects therefore have to be monitored by the authorities concern to make sure they are maintained and upgraded from time to time because they are good selling point for Malaysia. However, less than one-third of the respondents thought Malaysia was at the same level with other countries in terms of value for money. The reason could be that Malaysian currency is stronger than rival countries such as Thailand and Indonesia.

The impact of the Internet on tourism by way of providing information to potential Middle East tourists cannot be overlooked. Internet is a power house of information and about half of the respondents obtained their travel information from the internet. This is an opportunity for Tourism Malaysia and other tourism industry players to maintain and increase their presence online by way of making their websites attractive, informational and up to date. In addition to the Internet, other advertising media such as travel fairs, print and electronic media have to be deployed.

The influence of friends and relatives on the Middle East tourists is very immense. Perhaps this is not surprising knowing the nature of the people in this region who have strong family ties. More than half of the respondents of this study strongly agreed that recommendations from friends and relatives are very influential in their choice of or knowing Malaysia. Some 50 per cent of the respondents also strongly agreed that Malaysia is very well known in their countries. This might be due to the promotional activities by travel agencies in Middle East as about half of the respondents agreed to this.

Malaysia is doing all that it can to make sure it attracts the Middle East tourists to travel to Malaysia. Among the initiatives by the government is the creation of Arab Street or "Ain Arabia" situated at the busy Bukit Bintang shopping area within the vicinity of the Golden Triangle, a fully developed area in the heart of the capital city Kuala Lumpur. Some 42 per cent of the respondents in this study strongly agreed with the creation of Arab Street and said it is good to have. Malaysian Tourism Board is always ready to respond to the needs of tourists and this is attested by one-third of the respondents.

It is no wonder that in 2009 despite the world financial crisis which was expected to impact on tourism the world over, the inbound tourists' arrival to Malaysia increased by 7.2 per cent to 23.64 million (Malaysia Tourist Arrivals, 2009). Malaysia registered 22.05 million tourists in 2008, an overall increase of 5.1% compared to 2007 (Asiatraveltips.com, 2009). From these figures, Malaysian tourism sector has been resilient and cannot afford to lose this resilience as the tourism sector is a very important income generator.

Another selling point for Malaysia is the tagline “Malaysia Truly Asia” and one-third of the respondents said it is true in the actual context. Malaysia is made up of three of the world’s major religions – Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Likewise it has two of the world’s largest races, the Chinese and Indians. A visitor visiting Malaysia has the opportunity to experience Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures.

Generally, the Middle East tourists are generally happy with their stay in Malaysia as more than two-thirds of the respondents agreed that they will visit Malaysia again in future. What this means is that Malaysia has met their expectation in one way or the other.

## 5. Conclusion

From the overall implications of this study, it could be concluded that a strong relationship between government, tourism industry players, local authorities, private agencies and businesses should be fostered to ensure that tourists’ needs, especially Middle East tourists, can be fulfilled. It is a known fact that Middle East tourists have a high taste. Therefore the various tourism industry players need to work hand in hand to improve all types of services provided to the Middle East tourists. Failure to develop such a unity of approach would mean that the aspirations of the Malaysian government to make Malaysia a world class tourist destination would be difficult to achieve.

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