

# EXAMINING YOUNG MALAYSIANS TRAVEL BEHAVIOR AND EXPENDITURE PATTERNS IN DOMESTIC TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

Young travelers, though restricted by relatively low levels of disposable income, are commonly having high interest and leisure time in exploring new destinations. It has been found that young travelers have high expectations regarding the importance of value for money though they have their financial resources available for travelling. Therefore, it has raised questions on the worthiness of carrying out a study about the travel behavior and expenditure patterns among the young travels in Malaysia. The study employed a survey questionnaire to collect data, which was adapted from standardized measures. A total of 643 respondents, which has been randomly selected in the Northern States of Malaysia were involved in the study. The completed questionnaires were analyzed to measure the variables of the study consisted of selected socio-demographic, travel behavior and expenditure patterns. This study found the expenditure patterns of the young travelers vary with regards to the purchase of tourism products. In addition, the results of the study also portrayed the differences of selected travel-related characteristics of young travelers in relation to the motive of travel. Thus, this study may provide information which will help tourism marketers to develop marketing tools to satisfy and fulfill those young tourists' needs, and understand certain reasons behind their spending patterns.

Keywords- domestic tourism, expenditure pattern, young traveler.

## INTRODUCTION

Youth travel is one of the fastest growing and most dynamic market of the global tourism sector. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates that approximately 20 per cent of all international tourist arrivals in 2010 were young people. In that particular year, young travelers generate 165 billion USD towards global tourism receipts, affirming their financial value to the global tourism industry and local economies (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2011). According to the UNWTO, based on youth and student travel market survey 2011, young travelers often spend more than other tourists and are likely to return and give more value to the destination over their lifetime. Furthermore, as the chances of getting higher education and exposure to the world, young travelers have penetrated and played an important role in the tourism market.

Malaysian young travelers are raised in an environment with a wide and increasing range of travel opportunities. As the low-cost carriers becoming the common travelling, transportation, the ease of information

searching and tourism products, purchasing via the World Wide Web, travelling is at most accessible ever and thus increasing freedom to travel. Therefore, further study needs to be carried out to investigate their travel behavior. Despite an increasing interest in the market size of young travelers, economic potential and their desire to travel, relatively little is known about their actual travel behavior and expenditure patterns. Understanding the behavior and expenditure patterns of Malaysian young travelers in tourism and hospitality is a matter of utmost importance for improving the sustainability of the tourism industry.

The market segment of young travelers, especially in Western countries is generally studied by researchers (Carr, 2001; 2005; Hesse & Tutenges 2011; Xu, Morgan & Song, 2009). UNWTO (2008) predicted that the main source of the forecast growth in travel demand will be the young, affluent middle class that is emerging – from 175 million people in 2008 to around 500 million by 2025. In relation to that, population statistics from Department of Statistics, Malaysia shows that there are 28.25 million of young travelers in Malaysia as in 2010. It has raised questions on the worthiness of carrying out a study of the travelling patterns of Malaysian young travelers. Young travelers, though restricted by relatively low levels of disposable income, they commonly have high interests and leisure time in exploring new destinations. A convenient and inexpensive short-haul destination attracts younger and less affluent travelers (Jang, Bai, Hong & O’Leary, 2004). In addition, young travelers have high expectation regarding the importance of value for money though they have their financial resources available for travelling (Glover, 2010). They are willing to pay a premium price for it if they believe that the product, services or experience is worth it.

In terms of tourist spending, a recent report of tourism in Malaysia showed that even though Malaysia has the highest tourist arrival in the Southeast Asia region in 2012, the total revenue for tourism was less than Thailand and Singapore which have fewer tourist arrivals (The Star, 2013). That was in the case of international tourists. For domestic tourists, however, it was found that they are more active as compared to their international counterparts (Carr, 2002). This is due to the fact that those tourists who travelled the furthest to the holiday destination were likely to exhibit the ‘allocentric’ behavior, while those travelling a relatively short distance behaved in a ‘psychocentric’ manner (Debbage, 1991). An ‘allocentric’ tourist may be defined as an inquisitive and curious individual, who is self-confident and adventurous, which is the opposite of a psycho-centric tourist (Hoxter & Lester, 1988). Furthermore, it was suggested that the differences may have been a result of the greater ability of domestic tourists to become involved with the host population because of the lack of any language barriers, and the relative familiarity of their vacation surroundings, as compared to those of the foreign travelers (Laing, 1987).

Besides, regarding to the motivational theories in tourism, the theory of push and pull provides a simple method for the detection and differentiation motivation underlying tourist behavior (Dann, 1981). Motivation is the key to understand travel behavior of tourists. This is due to the fact that motivation affects the initial purchase, tourist experience and future decision (Bogari, Crowther & Marr, 2004). The notion is the travelers are both “pushed” to travel by personality traits or individual needs and wants, and “pulled” to travel by appealing attributes of travel destinations. Push and pull factors play an important role in tourism as a motivational construct of investigating tourists’ behavior motives (Hall, 1992). Therefore, the current study is motivated to explore the Malaysian young travelers travel behavior when travelling to a domestic holiday destination. In other words, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the young traveler behavior and expenditure patterns in domestic tourism. Specifically, this study aimed to provide the meaningful perspectives to achieve the following research objectives:

- 1.1. To develop a demographic profile of young Malaysians who have travelled within Malaysia in the past 12 months.
- 1.2. To identify the domestic travel behavior among young Malaysians.
- 1.3. To explore the young travelers’ domestic travel behavior and their spending patterns in relation to their motive of travel.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Sample**

This study population includes Malaysian young travelers aged between 21 to 35 years old from the states of northern region of Malaysia. These destinations have been selected because most of these destinations are among the

most well-known tourist destination in Malaysia (Oppermann, 1992) and offering different types of travel activities. Therefore, the number of tourists at these destinations can be expected to be relatively high. University students from Universiti Utara Malaysia, Polytechnic Perlis and Sunway College, Penang were selected randomly to participate in this study. Respondents of the study include those who have traveled domestically in the previous 12 months from the day they participate in this study.

## **2.2. Instrumentation**

The questionnaire was developed by adapting standard measured from various sources. The questionnaire consists of three sections. In Section A aimed to gather the socio-demographic background of each respondent. There were six questions regarding the socio-demographic profiles of respondents such as gender, age, ethnicity, education level, year of study, and source of income. Section B of the questionnaire consisted of questions related to the respondents' travel behavior. Section C includes questions regarding the type of travel and expenditure patterns that can be divided into seven sub-section, type of travel such as: leisure, shopping, visiting theme park, sightseeing, visiting historical & cultural destination, sport & recreation, and visiting friends and relatives.

The questionnaire was prepared in Malay (Malay national language), hence, translation processes of selected sources which originally in English were performed via back translation (Brislin, 1971). Then, we conducted a pilot test on the designed questionnaire to 100 respondents to evaluate reliability of the questionnaire. The results of this pilot test show that the measured reliability based on Cronbach's Alpha is adequate. Thus, such findings allow us to use the translated questionnaire for actual study.

## **2.3. Data Collection**

A quantitative approach by using self-completed questionnaires were administered by two trained research assistants to collect data. The questionnaires were distributed between November 2012 to January 2013. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The respondents were asked to complete a survey questionnaire. The respondents were informed concerning the purpose of the study and general instructions were provided and help was offered when needed. The responses were confidential.

From the total 800 distributed questionnaire, 685 questionnaires were returned by the respondents, 42 survey questionnaires were either incomplete or did not meet the criteria for each section of the questionnaire, which resulted in a total of 643 usable questionnaires to be analyzed for this study.

# **RESULT**

## **1.4. Socio-demographic of Respondents**

The demographic data of the respondents are presented in Table 1, according to their gender, age, ethnicity, education level, year of study, and source of income. Females represented 68.7% of the respondents and males represented 31.3%. The majority of respondents were age group between 19-21 years of age (56.3%), 22-24 years of age (39.8%), 25-27 years of age (3.4%), while 28-30 years of age represented only 0.3% and 31 years of age and above group represented 0.2% of total respondents. In terms of ethnicity, 52.9% of the respondents were Malays, 37.2% were Chinese, 7.2% were Indians, and only 2.8% representation of other ethnic groups of the total respondents. The majority of the respondents (85.7%) pursuing their bachelor degree, 12.9% pursuing other academic qualifications such as diploma and certificate, and only 1.4% study at postgraduate degree level, and 98.3% of the respondents were in year1 to year 4 of their tertiary education, while only 1.7% were in more than year 4. In terms of source of income, the majority of the respondents (82.1%) obtained their source of income from student loan (PTPTN), 8.1% relied on the family, 5.8% reported income from scholarship, and 4% of the respondents reported obtained from another source of income.

**Table 1**  
**Demographic profile of respondents**

Characteristic		Frequency (N=643)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	201	31.3
	Female	442	68.7
<b>Age (year)</b>	19 – 21	362	56.3
	22 – 24	256	39.8
	25 – 27	22	3.4
	28 – 30	2	.3
	31 and above	1	.2
<b>Ethnic Group</b>	Malay	340	52.9
	Chinese	239	37.2
	Indian	46	7.2
	Other	18	2.8
<b>Education</b>	Post Graduate	9	1.4
	Bachelor	551	85.7
	Other	83	12.9
<b>Year of study</b>	Year 1	176	27.4
	Year 2	208	32.3
	Year 3	181	28.1
	Year 4	67	10.4
	Other	11	1.7
<b>Source of Income</b>	PTPTN	527	82.1
	Scholarship	37	5.8
	Family	52	8.1
	Other	26	4.0

### **3.2. Travel Behavior and Expenditure Patterns**

Table 2 summarizes the results gathered from the survey pertaining to respondents' travel behavior and expenditure patterns. The results indicate that the majority of students choose to travel during their semester breaks. However, some of them preferred to travel during weekends and public holidays for the purpose of leisure, shopping, sightseeing, visiting historical and cultural sites, sport and recreation, visiting friends and relatives, and theme parks. A total of 493 (76.7%) out of 643 respondents reported they traveled for leisure purpose in the previous 12 months. The majority of respondents (50.1%) out of 493 reported spending two nights at the destination visited and most of them (57.2%) reported that they stayed in a hotel. In terms of spending, a majority of 44.2% of respondents reported average expenditure between RM201 and RM400, where most of their spending was on food and beverage (89%). Meanwhile, 371 respondents reported that they have traveled for shopping in the previous 12 months, where the hotel was their main choice of accommodation (49.3%). As compared with those who travelled for leisure, the majority of those who travelled for shopping stayed only one night (48.2%). Majority from this group (44.8%) spent between RM201 and RM400 while they were on their travel and surprisingly, spending on food and beverage was ranked the highest (84.1%) while money spent for shopping was ranked second (83.6%). A total of 301 (46.8%) out of 643 respondents reported they travelled for sightseeing in the previous 12 months. Most of the respondents (46.5%) reported spending one night at the destination visited with the hotel was the main choice of accommodation (42.2%). For this purpose of travel, most of them (a total of 53.2%) spent between RM101-RM300 where food and beverage was found to be the main reason of their spending.

For those who reported that they traveled to visit historical and cultural destination, hotel was still found to be the main selection of them (37.6%), which was followed by those who stayed in a friends' or relatives' house (33.6%). About 39.7% of respondents reported average expenditure between RM51 and RM200 while 37.6% reported between RM201 and RM400 with 80.8% of them ranked highest expenditure on food and beverage, which was followed by 47.6% and 46.3% spent on shopping and souvenirs respectively. The results also indicate that a total of 200 (31.1%) out of 643 respondents reported they travelled for sport and recreation in the past 12 months. For this purpose of travel, three different modes of accommodation were found to be their major selections, where 25.5% out of 200 reported they stayed in the hotel, 23.5% chose to stay in the relative's or friend's house, and 27.5% reported stayed in chalet or resort. The majority of them stayed for two nights (44.5%) when travelling for sports and recreation. Those who are involved in this type of travel seemed to have spent more where 45.5% of respondents reported their average expenditure between RM201 and RM400 while only 36% reported between RM51 and RM200. Apart from their expenditure on accommodation and transportation, 82% of them reported that food and beverage is the reason that they spent most, and as expected, 61.5% reported spending on entertainment and recreation.

**Table 2**  
**Travel behavior and expenditure patterns**

Purpose of Travel	Leisure (N=493)		Shopping (N=371)		Sightseeing (N=301)		Visiting Historical & Cultural Destinations (N=229)		Sports & Recreation (N=200)		Visiting Friends & Relatives (N=471)		Theme Park (N=282)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Duration of stay</b>														
One night	95	19.3	179	48.2	140	46.5	109	47.6	59	29.5	108	22.9	143	50.7
Two nights	247	50.1	122	32.9	101	33.6	76	33.2	89	44.5	166	35.2	98	34.8
Three nights	111	22.5	50	13.5	43	14.3	31	13.5	40	20.0	104	22.1	32	11.3
Four nights or more	40	8.1	20	5.4	17	5.6	13	5.7	12	6.0	93	19.8	9	3.2
<b>Place to stay</b>														
Hotel	282	57.2	183	49.3	127	42.2	86	37.6	51	25.5	56	11.9	150	53.2
Chalet/Resort	77	15.6	33	9.0	52	17.3	32	14.0	55	27.5	9	1.9	44	15.6
Friend's/Relative's house	93	18.9	127	34.2	93	30.9	77	33.6	47	23.5	390	82.8	64	22.7
Homestay	38	7.7	22	5.9	19	6.3	20	8.7	18	9.0	14	3.0	18	6.4
Others	3	0.6	6	1.6	10	3.3	14	6.1	29	14.5	2	0.4	6	2.1
<b>Average Expenditure</b>														
Below RM50	5	1.0	2	0.5	12	4.0	14	6.1	12	6.0	51	10.8	7	2.5
RM51 – RM100	29	5.9	32	8.6	37	12.3	26	11.3	15	7.5	79	16.8	23	8.1
RM101 – RM200	79	16.0	67	18.1	76	25.3	65	28.4	57	28.5	138	29.3	56	19.9
RM201 – RM300	137	27.8	100	27.0	84	27.9	51	22.3	46	23.0	95	20.2	74	26.2
RM301 – RM400	81	16.4	66	17.8	37	12.3	35	15.3	45	22.5	46	9.8	47	16.7
RM401 – RM500	68	13.8	40	10.8	28	9.3	13	5.7	13	6.5	24	5.1	38	13.5
RM501 and above	94	19.1	64	17.2	27	9.0	25	10.9	12	6.0	38	8.0	37	13.1
<b>Time of travel</b>														
Semester break	325	65.9	224	60.4	151	50.2	122	53.3	92	46.0	254	53.9	154	54.6
Weekdays	27	5.5	19	5.1	19	6.3	13	5.7	17	8.5	25	5.3	17	6.0
Weekends	39	7.9	74	19.9	56	18.6	48	20.9	52	26.0	87	18.5	44	15.6

Public holidays	99	20.1	53	14.3	74	24.6	46	20.1	36	18.0	104	22.1	67	23.8
Others	3	0.6	1	0.3	1	0.3	0	0	3	1.5	1	0.2	0	0

**Money spent  
apart from  
accommodation  
& transportation**

Shopping	340	69.0	310	83.6	152	50.5	109	47.6	84	42.0	317	67.3	119	42.2
Food & Beverage	439	89.0	312	84.1	249	82.7	185	80.8	164	82.0	381	80.9	224	79.4
Souvenirs	172	34.9	145	39.1	121	40.2	106	46.3	63	31.5	151	32.1	92	32.6
Entertainment & Recreation	250	50.7	168	45.3	243	47.5	70	30.6	123	61.5	230	35.8	162	57.5
Entrance fee & Tickets	153	31.0	67	18.1	87	30.0	90	39.3	56	28.0	59	12.5	148	52.5
Tours & Visiting	188	38.1	93	25.1	108	36.0	92	40.2	49	24.5	140	29.7	65	23.1
Others	1	0.2	8	2.2	3	1.0	4	1.8	6	3.0	15	3.2	3	1.1

As compared with those who travelled for sports and recreation, the majority of those who traveled to visit friends or relatives (471 respondents) reported spending two nights at the destination (35.2%) and unsurprisingly, most of them (82.8%) reported they stayed in the relative's or friend's house. The amount of money spent was also found to be lower than other types of visits where most of them (46.1%) spent only between RM51 to RM200. However, most of them (80.9%) still rated food and beverage as they have spent most on, which was followed by shopping (67.3%). Finally, the survey found that a total of 282 (43.9%) out of 643 respondents reported they travel to visit a theme park in the past 12 months. About half of them (50.7%) reported spending one night at the destination visited, and mostly stayed in a hotel (53.2%). About 43% of respondents reported average expenditure during visiting theme park travels between RM201 and RM400. Apart from their expenditure on accommodation and transportation, 79.4% ranked food and beverage to be on the top three most spent on this kind of travel, while 57.5% reported spending on entertainment and recreation, 52.5% reported on entrance fee and buying tickets.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the survey, it was found that most of the young travelers who participated in this study preferred to stay in hotels, which was followed by relative's and friend's house. Other than staying in hotels, this result has been contributed by those who traveled for visiting friends and relatives where most of them stayed at the friends' or relatives' house. This finding is in line with a study by Swarbrooke (2007) where young travelers will stay at the friend's or relative's house to save budget. An equal percentage of respondents were found to have stayed for one night or two nights during each travel. As expected, since respondents for this study are mainly students, the travelling time is during semester break, weekends and public holiday. This finding provides an insight to the tourism marketers about when to promote their travel packages, especially those tailored to the young traveler.

The results portrayed that even though students have relatively low income, where they relied mainly on scholarship and study loans (PTPTN) to fund their travelling activities as similar to Hsu and Sung's (1997) and Xu *et al.*'s. (2009) findings, and that they have high interest in travelling. This has also been proven by Jang *et al.* (2004). Results from the current study also found that, in terms of where they spent their money, young travelers spent most of their money on food and beverage and shopping. Results also showed that young travelers also spent a big fraction of their money on recreation and entertainment. As stated by UNWTO (2008), many countries have specified their marketing activities to attract young travelers' niche market (such as sports and adventure). This study proved that young travelers are actively involved in the tourism activities in Malaysia and thus, evidenced that there is a big potential in the youth travel market in Malaysia.

This study also found that young travelers spent less on souvenirs, entrance fees and tickets as well as tours and visiting. However, Glover (2010) suggested that young travelers are willing to pay a premium price if they believe

that the product, services or experience is worth it while at the same time, they have high expectation regarding the importance of value for money though they have their financial resources available for travelling.

Based on the overall results of this study, young travelers have been found to be very important to the future of the tourism industry, as what has been suggested by UNWTO (2008). This highlighted the importance of understanding the young travelers' behavior and their expenditure patterns, especially the tourism marketers and policy makers. By understanding the needs, wants and desires of this group, the marketers as well as policy makers could tailor their product or even design, promotional campaigns that could attract more of these people to travel.

It is crucial for the tourism industry to investigate how, when, why and where the young Malaysians to be more willing to spend on domestic tourism and their behavior during the entire travel. Policy makers and travel industry marketers will benefit from the knowledge of their behavior. The information gathered from this study also can be used as guidelines in formulating promotional programs to encourage more spending on various tourism products and services especially by the young Malaysian traveler market.

### ***1.5. Limitations and Future Research***

This study raised the question of why the young travelers were unwilling to spend more on particular products. Though most young travelers are adventurous and flexible in the matter of visiting new attractions, the monetary cost involved are taken into consideration before heading to the destination (Grigolon *et al.*, 2012). This highlights a gap and future research should explore further into why this is so and how to encourage the young travelers to spend more on certain areas. Further studies shall include the mode of transportation to examine how it influences the domestic travel holiday planning process, including the destination choice and length of stay.

Since this study had limited access data from official statistics regarding young Malaysians' travelling patterns, a repeat cross-section analysis shall be carried out annually to study the current and actual travelling trends among young Malaysians. Also, it is recommended that motivation theories such as push-pull framework, expectancy-value or goal directed behavior (Prayag & Hosany, 2014) shall be added to derive more interesting conclusions. Other than money and time issues, the demand for domestic tourism too is subject to travelers motivation and intention. This study establishes a general understanding of the travel behavior and expenditure patterns among young Malaysian travelers. Overall, this study has shown the importance of young travelers to the Malaysian tourism industry and the importance of this tourist segment in undeniable for the growth of tourism industry in the future.

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