# SATISFACTION DRIVERS AND REVISIT INTENTION OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS IN MALAYSIA

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*Abstract: Malaysia is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Southeast Asia as well as globally and the tourism industry opens up a myriad of opportunities for a sustainable development of the Malaysian economy. Malaysia is famous for its pristine beaches, tasty cuisines, easy access and diverse culture. However, the growth of international tourists in Malaysia is relatively lower compared to the other Southeast Asian countries and this may cause Malaysia to be less competitive. As such, understanding the international tourists' intention to revisit and the uncovering the reasons for them to revisit is vital as many countries relied heavily on the flow of the repeat visits as a revenue generator. Besides, satisfaction of their travelling experience remains a multifaceted perspective that has yet to be fully understood due to the various influencing factors. Thus, the main objective of this study is to determine the international tourists' intention to revisit Malaysia and subsequently examine the various predictors including food image, destination image, service quality of accommodation and ease of transportation towards their visit satisfaction. A deductive approach using questionnaire were distributed to 200 international tourists around Kuala Lumpur area and were analysed using SPSS. This cross-sectional study confirmed a positive indication whereby 80% of the international tourists had the intention to revisit Malaysia. Subsequently, the regression analysis revealed that the four antecedents only explained a total of 30.9 percent variance in tourists' satisfaction whereby the highest predictor is destination image, followed by service quality of accommodation and ease of transportation but food image had no significant relationship with their satisfaction. As predicted, satisfaction influenced their intention to revisit. In conclusion, relevant discussions, recommendations and limitations of the study were provided in hope to improve the overall satisfaction levels of the international tourists and to boost Malaysia's position as the preferred holiday destination.*

*Keywords: International Tourists' Satisfaction, Revisit Intention, Food Image, Destination Image, Service Quality, Ease of Transportation*

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**Introduction**

Geographically, Malaysia is consisting of two regions; Peninsular Malaysia which connecting with Thailand and Singapore, while East Malaysia is across the South China Sea on Borneo Island. Malaysia is an exotic holiday destination well-known for its perfect beaches, cultural diversity, tasty authentic cuisine, world heritage sites and price-competitive shopping. In 2016, there were more than 280 million international tourist arrivals to Southeast Asia, but only 26.7 million of them were visiting Malaysia (UNWTO, 2017). The top five international tourist visiting Malaysia in 2016 were from Singapore (13.3 million), Indonesia (3.1 million), China (2.1 million), Thailand (1.7 million) and Brunei (1.4 million).

The tourism sector in Malaysia is positioned as one of the major drivers of the country's economy (Omar & Ab. Karim, 2014). In the report published by United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Malaysia posted a solid growth of 7% increase in international tourists' arrivals in year 2014 compared to the previous year (www.e-unwto.org, 2015). Malaysia's tourism industry generated a gross income of RM82.1 billion in 2016 and expected to target more than 31.8 million of international tourists by contributing RM118 billion tourism revenue in 2017 (Tourism Malaysia, 2017). The tourist receipts opened up new opportunities for the sustainable development of Malaysia through tourism activities in terms of food and beverage, hospitality and entertainment sectors.

However, the slower growth rate of tourism industry causes Malaysia to lose its competitive advantage on the multiplier effect of income creation (Mulok, et al., 2017). As such, various marketing and promotional campaigns has been undertaken over the years by Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MOTAC) to boost the tourism industry. In a previous study, Mohamad et al., (2011) described that the Malaysian government had positioned Malaysia as 'The Tropical Paradise' and the theme 'Malaysia Truly Asia' had resulted in the total international tourists' arrival to Malaysia to be recorded at 26.7 million in 2016 (UNWTO, 2017). Although Malaysia is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Southeast Asia, the contribution of tourism receipts in Malaysia is still much lower than other developed countries (Mosbah & Khuja, 2014). The international tourists' intention to revisit has become important to the particular destinations' tourism development as many of countries heavily relied on repeat vacationers to attract higher flow of visitors.

Even though several studies have been done to assess tourist satisfaction as a factor for the intention to revisit, there are still relatively contradictory findings and inadequate to measure satisfaction effectively (Ng et al., 2017). Furthermore, tourists have become more sophisticated and this makes it more difficult to drivers and to measure their satisfaction (Ballantyne et al., 2018). Tourist destinations competitiveness depends on various service offerings including infrastructure, transportation and the attraction itself that may influence satisfaction (Neal & Gursoy, 2008).

Thus, this research aims to investigate the relationship between the factors of food image, destination image, service quality of accommodation and ease of transportation and their overall satisfaction. The subsequent objective is to examine the relationship between their satisfaction and their intention to revisit Malaysia. The result is hoped to contribute to the existing pool of knowledge on tourists' satisfaction during their travelling experience in Malaysia and provide relevant suggestions for practitioners to improve the satisfaction level and revisit intention.

## Literature Review
### Revisit Intention
Past studies have widely ascertained that customer satisfaction is positively related to behavioural intentions (Liu & Jang, 2009; Ryu & Han, 2010; Canny, 2014). Customer satisfaction is considered as one of the fundamental precursors of post-purchase behavioural intentions because it substantially improves the insight of customers towards the product or service. It can also heighten the conscious effort of customers to come back again in the future (Oliver, 1980). Customers are more likely to revisit again if the restaurants give them a positive impression (Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007). Considerable numbers of studies have shown that improving customer satisfaction level is essential to increase revisit and recommendation intentions besides being a predictor of customer loyalty (Han & Ryu, 2006; Nam & Lee, 2011).

The main reason for international tourists' loyalty and revisiting the country was due to satisfaction (Assaker et al., 2011; Valle et al., 2006). The importance of international visitors' intention to revisit would also be related to their future behaviours as they would engage in positive Word-of-Mouth (WOM) by making recommendations to their friends or relatives (Philips et al., 2013, Chen & Chen, 2010). In the effort to position Malaysia as the preferred holiday destination, tourists' revisit intention remains an important measurement to determine the country's tourism growth and its future potential.

### Tourists' Satisfaction
Tourist satisfaction is a positive perception or feeling that tourists develop or acquire by engaging in recreational activities and is expressed as the degree of pleasure derived from such experiences (Chen and Tsai, 2007). Tourist satisfaction also is important to tourism management because it influences destination choice. Prior studies (Baker and Crompton 2000; Bigné, et al., 2001; Engeset and Elvekrok 2015; Prayag & Ryan, 2012) consented that satisfied tourists are more likely to say positive things about the destination to others. In order for a country to remain competitive, organizations in both public and private sectors should seek to satisfy their customers by fulfilling their demands (Lamsoo et al., 2013). A customer's overall satisfaction of hotels may be related to their assessment of not only service quality but also the features of the hotel and price (Parasuraman, et al, 1994). Thus, satisfaction of tourists can be said as a multifaceted element and to measure satisfaction, one must consider the tourists' attraction and image of the destination (Pizam, Neumann & Reichel, 1978). Satisfaction of tourists as an emotional perception is more appropriate to be measured after the visit (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Kozak, 2001).

### Destination Image
Destination image is the tourists' overall mental representation or perceptions of their feelings and knowledge towards a specific destination (Assaker et al., 2011; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Based on previous studies, the formation of destination image could be different between first time and repeat visitors and 'leisure activities' contributes the most to the overall destination image (Liu et al., 2017). Tourists have been said to make travel decisions based on destination image and it plays an important role in their decision-making process as it is argued that destination image leads to the tourists' emotional attachment that subsequently influence tourists' satisfaction (Silva et al., 2013). Destination image can be assessed from cognitive, affective and conative perspectives (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) and empirical results found that affective image component plays a greater influence compared to cognitive component (Xu, et al., 2017; Stylidis, 2017). In terms of revisit intention, destination image does have a significant influence (Zhang, et al., 2017, Lertputtarak, 2012; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). For

instance, a tourism destination's image that are included in the World Heritage List (WHL) would merit in achieving growth in international tourists (Rao, 2010). For instance, Macau was declared as World Heritage status since 2005 and as a result, the arrival of international tourists had significantly increased and have directly or indirectly impacted on the local economies growth (Huang, et al, 2012). It is found that overall favourable destination among leads to tourists' satisfaction (Bigné et al., 2001; Lee, 2009; Pratminingsih et al., 2014) and intention to visit the particular place (Gallarza et al., 2002; Leisen, 2001; Prayag 2012; Liu et al., 2017). Contradictorily, Mohaidin et al., (2017) concluded that destination image and perceived service quality have no significant influence on the tourists' intention to select sustainable tourism destination.

*Food Image*
Food is an important part of Malaysian culture and the Malaysian government had been using ethnic food authenticity to promote tourism in Malaysia (Mohammad & Chan, 2011). Their research also revealed that the authenticity representation of Malaysia's local food is very important to maintain the tourism development because food represents the unique and multifaceted culture of Malaysia and its ethnic groups. The uniqueness of Malaysia authentic cuisine is one of the competitive advantage as many international tourists seek to fulfil their travelling experience by tasting the authenticity of Malaysian cuisines. However, previous studies indicated that most international tourists did not recognised whether the foods were original from Malaysia or Singapore because both of the countries were multi-racial societies and sometime the origins and ownerships of "authentic cuisine" may be disputed (Henderson, 2014). However, international tourists desires 'authentic' food whereby the taste of the food should truly reflect the country of its origin (Lean et al., 2014). Previous studies supported that Malaysia's food image contributes to good cultural experiences that would have a strong influence on tourists' satisfaction (Ling et al., 2010; Chi et al, 2013) and their intention to return to the destination (Lertputtarak, 2012). Malaysian cuisine are highly complex and diversified therefore the symphony of flavours have giving the international tourists curious the special of Malaysia and potential to attract them revisit Malaysia as a food tourism destination.

*Service Quality of Accommodation*
To measure service quality, the SERVQUAL model conceptualised by Parasuraman et al., (1988) has been widely used that included the five dimensions of reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness. Various studies have applied this model to evaluate service quality in general and also specifically on other types of services such as taxi service (Latiff & Ng, 2015) and hotel or accommodation services (Rao & Sahu, 2013). Alternatively, some studies have measured customers' perception of hotel's service quality by applying SERVPERF (Tabaku & Cerri, 2016) and since tourists satisfaction are dependent on experience, studies have applied experience quality as a measurement scale (Chen & Chen, 2010) . A good service quality of accommodation that would influence international tourists' satisfaction includes the prices, types of rooms, catering services, flexibility of check-in and check-out time, pick and drop facilities (Chen, 2013; Kim et al., 2012). In addition, availability of information provided in the hotel on places to visit or tourist spots do influence international tourists' satisfaction towards Malaysian hotels (Amin et al., 2013). For example, the hotels and accommodation are required to prepare the booklets and maps for international tourists to understand better the locality and to make their travel plans easily. Good service quality of accommodation that can satisfy the needs of international tourists and retain them will strongly persuade them to revisit Malaysia in future (Deng et al., 2013). When international tourists leave their home to visit Malaysia, a comfortable lodging that provides up to standard services

is very important. Thus, service quality of the accommodation is considered as an important influencing factor of tourists' satisfaction.

*Ease of Transportation*
Air transport is the most important of carriers that contributes to Malaysian economic growth especially the tourism development. There were more than 120 low-cost airline flights in Malaysia thus Malaysia have many low-cost airlines such as Air Asia, Malindo Airlines, Tiger Airlines, Firefly and KLIA1, KLIA2 will be the hub of low cost carriers' terminal. According to Pulina and Cortes, (2010), the availability of Low Cost Carriers (LCC) in the particular country can influence both of local and international tourist thus boosting economic growth. The emerging and rapid development of low-cost airlines will have significant impact on tourism market especially Malaysia that has so many congenital conditions such as foods, world heritage, duty free and promotion (Alivernini et al., 2012; Olipra, 2012). The emergence of budget carriers will create new demand in tourism industry, probably those existing of passengers were changed from traditional airline to budget carriers or even increases new international tourists to spend for traveller when they were able to afford it. Connecting flights and comfort of ground travelling in Malaysia significantly contributes to the satisfaction of international tourists (Salleh et al., 2013). Besides, excellent public transportation system such as transit trains and city buses that exceeds customer expectation have been said to influence satisfaction of tourists (Van der Veen et al., 2012; Noor & Foo, 2014) and the ease of travelling and availability of parking lots contributes to the accessibility of the destination thus also improving satisfaction of visitors (Chen et al., 2011).

Based on the above literature review conducted, the conceptual framework was developed (Figure 1) which includes four independent variables (food image, destination image, service quality of accommodation and convenience of transportation) and it is hypothesized that all the four factors have positive influence towards the overall satisfaction of international tourists. Subsequently, it is also predicted that overall satisfaction would have a positive significant relationship towards their intention to revisit Malaysia in the future.
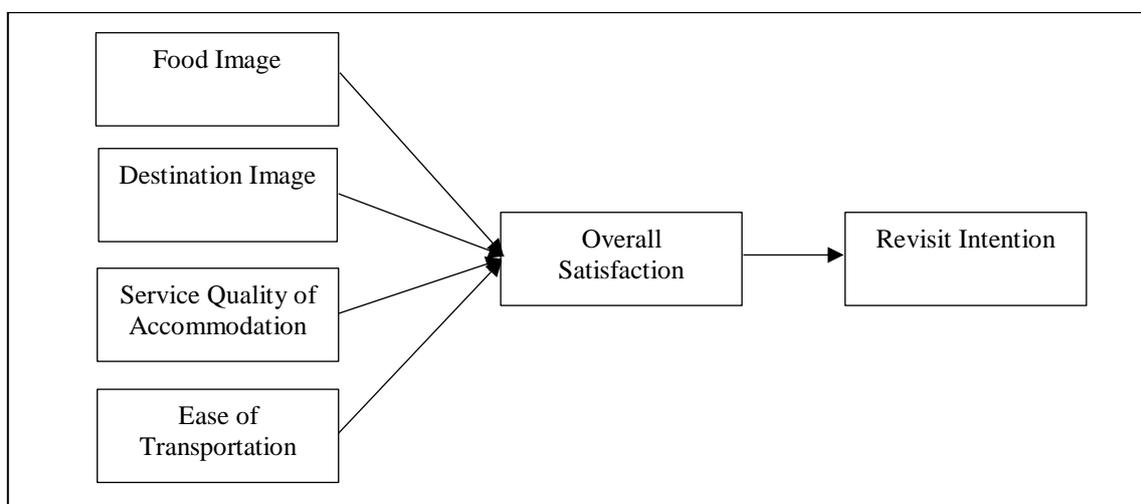


**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

**Methodology**
This cross-sectional study applied a quantitative approach to collect the data from 200 respondents. The target population are international tourists including those who are above 18

years of age, regardless of nationality, either male or female that are revisiting or visiting Malaysia for the first time. The primary data was collected from areas in Kuala Lumpur that has high traffic of international tourists including Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA and KLIA2) and famous shopping malls - Suria KLCC, Sunway Resorts, IOI Mall and Publika. Therefore, these locations are chosen for questionnaire distribution due to the higher concentration of international tourists. Each respondent approached were first asked if they were from Malaysia or otherwise in order to ensure that the questionnaire is only distributed to tourists from other countries.

A pilot study on 30 respondents resulted in five items removed from the four constructs and thus only 27 questions were utilised instead for the actual study (Lancaster et al., 2004). Based on the pilot test, the reliability analysis result for all the variables' Cronbach Alpha were more than 0.70 (Hair et al., 1998). In the first part of the questionnaire, their demographic characteristics were asked using eight questions. In the second section, there were total four independent variables measured using fifteen items (food image- three questions, destination image-three questions, service quality of accommodation-five questions and ease of transportation-four questions), and in the last section, three questions each were used to measure the overall tourists' satisfaction and their revisit intention respectively.

**Findings and Discussion**
*Profile of Respondents*
The demographic information of all of 200 respondents were recorded in Table 1. Based on the survey, the male tourists represented 48.0% and female tourists represented 52.0%. According to the demographic profile, majority of respondents (138 out of 200) were self-employed, 11.5% of respondents were working in private organisation and 11.0% of respondents were retired, only a 5.0% and 3.0% of respondents who were working as government servant and students respectively. Therefore, the self-employed and retirees had more time for leisure and relaxation compared to others.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

| Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | | |
|     Male | 96 | 48 |
|     Female | 104 | 52 |
| Age | | |
|     18-25 | 76 | 38 |
|     26-40 | 99 | 49.5 |
|     41 above | 25 | 12.5 |
| Education | | |
|     High school | 7 | 3.5 |
|     Undergraduate | 112 | 56 |
|     Postgraduate | 88 | 44 |
| Occupation | | |
|     Government | 10 | 5 |
|     Private organisation | 23 | 11.5 |
|     Self-employed | 138 | 69 |
|     Not employed/Retiree | 22 | 11 |
|     Revisiting | 83 | 41.5 |
|     First time visiting | 117 | 58.5 |
| Purpose of visit | | |
|     Personal trip | 141 | 70.5 |
|     Business trip | 41 | 20.5 |
|     Studying | 18 | 9 |

| Region of origin | | |
|---|---|---|
| Asia | 132 | 66 |
| Europe | 24 | 12 |
| North America | 16 | 8 |
| Oceania | 13 | 6.5 |
| South America | 6 | 3 |
| Africa | 5 | 2.5 |
| Middle East | 4 | 2 |
| Length of stay | | |
| Less than a week | 64 | 32 |
| One week | 105 | 52.5 |
| More than a week but less than a month | 22 | 11 |
| More than a month | 9 | 4.5 |

(Source: Survey, 2017)

In terms of origin, 66.0% of respondents were from Asia, European tourists make up 12%, followed by North Americans (8.0%) and from Oceania (6.5%). However, the tourists from South America, Africa and Middle East were 3.0%, 2.5% and 2.0% respectively. This study also showed that majority (52.5%) of these international tourists are staying in Malaysia for at least one week. There were 32.0% of the international tourists who responded that they are staying in Malaysia for less than one week, followed by 11.0% who is staying between one week to one month and 4.5% of them are staying in Malaysia for more than a month.

Nearly 60% of the respondents were visiting Malaysia for the very first time and 70.5% of them said that it was a personal trip either as a holiday or for the purpose of visiting family, friends or relatives. The main activities for personal holidays by international tourists included shopping, sightseeing at historical and cultural sites, and participation in natural or recreational activities (Chiu, et al., 2015). A majority (80%) of the respondents surveyed indicated that they do have the intention to revisit Malaysia in future.

Reliability analysis was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the measurement items used in the questionnaire and the results of the reliability analysis, the results are as presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Reliability Analysis Summary**

| Construct | Cronbach Alpha of coefficient | Items |
|---|---|---|
| Food Image | 0.809 | 3 |
| Destination Image | 0.801 | 3 |
| Service Quality of Accommodation | 0.767 | 5 |
| Ease of Transportation | 0.740 | 4 |
| Satisfaction | 0.639 | 3 |
| Revisit Intention | 0.687 | 3 |

To provide answers to the research objectives outlined earlier, a multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the factors that make the most contribution in overall satisfaction of the international tourists visiting Malaysia. Referring to Table 3 below, the regression model was statistically significant, $F_{(4, 195)} = 21.769$, $p < 0.05$. The coefficient of determinant ($R^2$) indicates that the four variables (food image, destination image, service quality of accommodation and convenient transportation) accounted for approximately 30.9% of the variance of tourists' satisfaction ($R^2 = .309$, Adjusted $R^2 = .295$).

**Table 3: Model Summary**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .556[a] | .309 | .295 | .54710 | 1.216 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), DestImage, FoodIMage, SerQualA, EoT
b. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

As can be observed in Table 4, the multiple regression model examined the relationship between overall satisfaction and the four predictors. The result of collinearity test confirms that no multicollinearity exist since the value of tolerance for each predictor is greater than 0.1 (VIF < 10) (Grapentine, 1997). The results indicated that only three out of four variables were statistically significant (p<0.05) except for food image (p = 0.583). The results showed that destination image explained the largest portion of the variance in overall satisfaction at 26.5% (p=0.000); followed closely by service quality of accommodation (26%, p = 0.000) and lastly, ease of transportation (24.1%, p=0.000).

**Table 4: Results of Regression Analysis**

| Model | Unstandardize Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std Error | Beta | | | Tolerance | VIF |
| (Constant) | 0.848 | 0.313 | | 2.710 | 0.007 | | |
| Service Quality of Accommodation | 0.279 | 0.069 | 0.260 | 4.060 | 0.000* | .867 | 1.154 |
| Food Image | 0.028 | 0.050 | 0.034 | 0.550 | 0.583 | .945 | 1.058 |
| Ease of Transportation | 0.252 | 0.071 | 0.241 | 3.565 | 0.000* | .777 | 1.287 |
| Destination Image | 0.261 | 0.064 | 0.265 | 4.063 | 0.000* | .833 | 1.200 |

Dependent Variable: Satisfaction, *Statistically significant at p<0.05

This study provided support to past research that the destination image does influence the international tourists' overall satisfaction. This confirmed that Malaysia's historical and architectural buildings did impress the international tourists. Various studies also indicated that destination image influences satisfaction and loyalty among tourists (Chen, & Tsai, 2007; Rao, 2010; Assaker et al., 2011; Lee, 2009; Hernández-Lobato, 2006)

Besides, hotels that provide excellent service quality by keeping to their promises, having attentive service staff and providing on-time assistance are the key drivers to ensuring high satisfaction levels of the international tourists towards the hotel that they stayed in (Bitner, et al., 1990; Kim, et al., 2012; Latiff & Ng, 2015). In addition, ease of transportation explained 24.1 percent of variance in international tourists' satisfaction. International tourists were generally happy with the availability of public transportation and various low-cost airlines (Pulina & Cortes, 2010). Holiday sites that are easily accessible from their hotels were highly preferred and should be well connected via public transportation such as buses, taxis and light rail transits (Latiff & Ng, 2015; Noor & Foo, 2014).

As depicted in Table 4 above, food image was the only variable that did not show a significant relationship with tourists' satisfaction (β=.034, p = 0.583). The international tourists were not satisfied with the local Malaysian delicacies in tandem with Henderson (2014) findings that

majority of international tourists could not distinguish any uniqueness in Malaysian food (Duruz & Khoo, 2014). This could also be due to the constitution of the sample respondents that were mainly from Asian countries and somehow have tasted similar food before in their countries and hence did not find that Malaysian food was extremely different from what they have tasted before.

**Table 4: Results of Regression Analysis**

| Model | Unstandardize Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 0.920 | 0.174 | | 5.284 | 0.000 |
| Satisfaction | 0.721 | 0.047 | 0.735 | 15.255 | 0.000* |
| R² | 0.540 | | Durbin Watson | | 1.773 |
| Adjusted R² | 0.538 | | F value | | 232.707 |

Dependent variable: Revisit Intention, *Statistically significant at p<0.05

To achieve the aim of confirming the relationship between their satisfaction and the revisit intention, further linear regression analysis revealed that satisfaction indeed has a positive significant relationship with revisit intention as shown in Table 4 above. As indicated in past studies, tourist's satisfaction influences destination choices and are most likely to engage in positive word of mouth (Baker and Crompton 2000; Bigné, et al., 2001; Engeset and Elvekrok 2015; Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

**Conclusion and Future Research**
This paper proposed to examine the factors influencing overall satisfaction of international tourists and their intention to revisit Malaysia. Findings from the study concluded that only three influencing factors, namely service quality of accommodation, ease of transportation and destination image significantly influenced the international tourists' satisfaction and in return they have higher tendencies to revisit Malaysia. However, as revealed, food image did not have a significant contribution to their overall satisfaction. As such, it is recommended that Tourism Malaysia take action so that international tourists can distinguish our unique dishes through proper branding through signature dishes like 'rendang' and by creating a better image of Malaysia as a Halal gastronomical trail (Jalis et al., 2014; Samori et al., 2016; Zainal et al., 2010). Further enhancement to improve their satisfaction by continuously promoting Malaysia as a multicultural destination focusing on ecotourism sites can also drive international tourists to revisit. Besides, hoteliers and tour operators continue to play important roles in providing excellent services and to ensure that Malaysia is well-known as a friendly and courteous place to visit. The growth of budget airlines and proper regulation of e-hailing services could also increase their satisfaction levels (David, 2013; Han 2013).

To have a better representation, a further breakdown by using quota sampling method based on tourist's arrivals data could reflect a more meaningful result as Singaporeans are the highest number of international tourists. As only 30.9 percent variance in tourists' satisfaction is explained by the three factors undertaken in this study except food image, the inclusion of other variables such as the variety of quality of activities, cost, seasonality, and availability of infrastructure could provide greater explanation towards understanding international tourists' satisfaction. Future research could consider extending the geographical locations of data collection to cover entry points at Johor Bahru, Penang and Sabah. As the responses were gathered from around Kuala Lumpur area only hence it was found that the tourists were

generally satisfied with the ease of transportation due to the current available infrastructure. But this may be contradictory are visiting more rural areas of Malaysia. Lastly, future studies can be made to compare the satisfaction levels between the local and international tourists to discover the existing gaps and to improve the overall tourism scene in Malaysia.

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