Chapter 21

Global Perspective in Tourism Development: Positioning Malaysia as a Culinary Destination

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia offers a rich potpourri of delicious cuisines from diverse ethnicity. However, not much attention given to promote Malaysian food and the food seems to be ignored in the tourism industry. Furthermore, the concept of utilizing Malaysian food as a marketing means is tenuous. In this chapter, the image dimensions of Malaysian food and the effect of food images on tourists’ satisfaction are discussed. Additionally, the influence of socio-demographic factors on tourists’ perceived image is deliberated. Univariate and multivariate statistics are used to describe the obtained findings. The results of the study will significantly fill in the gap in the literature about Malaysian food’s image and the potential of Malaysia being promoted as a food destination. Additionally, the results would indisputably provide better insight to the tourism and hospitality industry on the perceptions of international tourists towards Malaysian food and Malaysia as a food tourism destination.

INTRODUCTION

The Malay Peninsula (now Peninsula Malaysia) was known as the Golden Khersonese to the ancient Greeks (Hutton, 2005) and the land was inhabited by the Malays who originally lived along the coasts and the rivers (Ryan, 1976). Some came during the glorious Melaka Sultanate era while others who settled down in the Malay Peninsula were the Bugis from the Celebes and the Minangkabau from Sumatra (Ryan, 1976). Soon after, in 1963, the peninsula coalesced with Sabah and Sarawak.
or the Borneo States to form Federation of Malaysia (National Institute of Public Administration [INTAN], 2003; Hutton, 2005).

As time faded changes in Malaya’s social structure occurred; from singular to a plural society. Chinese immigrants were brought into the flourishing land via the Straits Settlements to work in the tin mines (Ryan, 1976; INTAN, 2003). Eventually, Indian immigrants joined the labor force for the then booming rubber plantation activities (Ryan, 1976; INTAN, 2003). Intermarriage took place between the immigrants and the locals. The intermarriage between the Chinese immigrants and the local Malay women enriched the social structure with another group of ethnicity which is the Peranakan community or the Straits Chinese; where males are called Baba and females are Nyonya (Ryan, 1976). Since the migration of the Chinese and Indians, the cultural and social structure of the country had enormously altered as well as the eating habits (Hutton, 2005). People, regardless of ethnicity had cross-culturally borrowed the cooking styles of others and this has led to the creation of a number of distinctive Malaysian dishes (Hutton, 2005). Since then, assimilation of cultures transpired and Malaysia is seen as an exciting and rich potpourri that offers variety of cuisines from different ethnicities.

Gastronomy tourism, culinary tourism and food tourism are tourism activities related to food and cuisines in a destination. With the advancement of technology and global networking, people or even culture travelled beyond boundaries. Restaurants selling ethnic cuisines from other countries can be easily found. Despite the convenience of enjoying different ethnic food in a person’s local setting, today’s travelers’ would seek to experience ethnic cuisine in the original setting of the cuisine. At potential tourist destinations, food is usually presented as an attraction by strategizing the promotion of different ethnic food of unfamiliar people and the culture of a country (Cohen & Avieli, 2004).

When travelling across Malaysia, it is not surprising to find regional styles of cuisine. The northern Malaysian states such as Perlis, Kedah and Kelantan have considerable influences from Thailand as these states are situated at the border of the neighbor country (Hutton, 2005). Meanwhile, Terengganu and Pahang which share the border with Kelantan also portray Thai influences in their cuisine (Hutton, 2005). Nasi ulam and Nasi kerabu are popular dishes in Kelantan. Nasi kerabu is cooked using the juice of butterfly pea flower that gives a natural bright indigo blue color and a tinge of sweet-scented flower aroma to the rice. Meanwhile Nasi ulam (rice salad with fresh herbs) is commonly cooked with pandanus leaves, galangal, lemongrass and kaffir lime leaves (Hutton, 2005). Both dishes are usually served with a combination of fresh herbs such as cilantro, dill, fennel leaves, parsley, sprig mint leaves, lemon balm leaves, wild ginger bud, and fresh ginger (Hutton, 2005); however the combination of herbs is subject to own preference. Not forgetting the accompanying condiments which is a must to the dishes are sambal belacan (chili shrimp paste) and budu (fermented fish sauce).

In the state of Pahang, fresh and luscious seafood are definite items to savor and being abundance in seafood, the state is also popular for its salted fish especially in the capital; Kuantan (Hutton, 2005). Traditional dishes such as Puding Raja (king’s pudding) and Ayam Golek (rolling chicken) are famous in royal weddings in Pahang (Saw, 2009). At times, these dishes are also popular among the masses in festive celebrations. Alternatively, bean sprouts is to be boasted in Perak due to its minerals wealth in the underground water especially in Buntong region that produces big, fat and juicy bean sprouts (Saw, 2009). Ipoh Nga Choi Kai or Ipoh bean sprout chicken that is famous in Perak is well-liked among Malaysians.

Whereas in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (the capital of Malaysia), abundance of supreme restaurants are available to cater to individual’s needs.