



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON LOCAL VISITORS' BEHAVIOUR AND
PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS INFLUENCING FACTORS AND
PREFERENCES OF TYPES OF ATTRACTIONS, THE THEMES AND
SOURCES OF INFORMATION IN DECISION MAKING OF THEME PARK
IN MALAYSIA***

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**LOCAL VISITOR
INFLUENCE
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making of theme park in Malaysia / Mohamed Razip Hasan

**TOWARDS
SOURCES OF
INFORMATION**

IN DECISION MAKING OF THEME PARK IN MALAYSIA

UPM

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MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

**MALAYSIAN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

2001

**An Empirical Study on
Local Visitors' Behaviour and Perceptions Towards
Influencing Factors, Preferences of Types of Attractions,
The Themes and Sources of Information in
Decision Making of Theme Park in Malaysia**

by
Mohmed Razip Hasan

**A Thesis submitted as partial fulfilment of
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Master of Business Administration**

**An Empirical Study on Local Visitors' Behaviour and
Perceptions Towards Influencing Factors and Preferences of
Types of Attractions, The Themes and Sources of Information in
Decision Making of Theme Parks in Malaysia**

**by
Mohmed Razip Bin Hasan**

May 2001

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Theme park has been identified as one of the new tourist products in Malaysia that has a great potential in attracting locals to spend their holidays in the country and also to foreign tourists, especially those from ASEAN, South Asia and the Middle East markets to take vacation here. Many new theme parks have been developed and the existing ones are being upgraded to suit the demand and tastes of visitors.

The main objective of this study is to identify and analyze travel behaviour and perceptions of local visitors towards theme park in Malaysia. The key research

issues are to determine the important influencing factors, preferred types of attractions, the themes and source of information in making decision to visit a theme park.

This study consists of a survey of 300 randomly selected respondents living in Klang Valley. Self-administered questionnaires are circulated and only 282 responded, of which 86.2% indicate that they have visited theme parks in Malaysia in the last three years. All data collected are processed and analyzed using SPSS Version 10.0 program. The analyses include the frequency, descriptive, reliability and hypothesis testing.

The results show that cleanliness and safety are the most influential factors, fun rides as the important type of attraction and water world theme is the highly preferred. Mean while past experience and words of mouth are the most important sources of information. In terms of popularity, Sunway Lagoon is the top rated theme park and followed by Genting Indoor and Outdoor Theme Park, The Mines Wonderland, A'Famosa Water World and Wet World Shah Alam. The overall experience of most visitors is satisfactory despite some complaints about expensive food and souvenir items as well as admission fee.

Thus, to further enhance the image of local theme parks in the eyes and minds of local visitors and also to improve their service quality, tourism promoters and theme park operators are recommended to incorporate the findings of this study in their strategic marketing plans and service offerings.

Abstrak kertas projek penyelidikan yang dikemukakan kepada
Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah
Sarjana Pentadbiran Perniagaan

**Kajian Ilmiah Mengenai Gelagat dan Persepsi
Pelawat-Pelawat Tempatan Terhadap Faktor-Faktor Yang
Mempengaruhi dan Keutamaan ke atas Jenis-Jenis Tarikan,
Tema dan Sumber-Sumber Maklumat dalam Membuat
Keputusan Berkaitan Taman Tema di Malaysia**

oleh

Mohmed Razip bin Hasan

Mei 2001

Penyelia : Dr. Iskandar Abdullah

Fakulti : Pusat Pengajian Siswazah Pengurusan Malaysia

Taman Tema telah dikenalpasti sebagai salah satu produk pelancongan di Malaysia yang berpotensi besar untuk menarik lebih ramai pelancong-pelancong tempatan bercuti dalam negeri dan juga pelancongan-pelancong dari luar negara berkunjung ke sini, khususnya dari pasaran ASEAN, Asia Selatan dan juga Timur Tengah.

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti dan menganalisis gelagat perjalanan dan persepsi para pelawat tempatan terhadap taman tema di Malaysia. Isu-isu penyelidikan ini adalah untuk menentukan faktor-faktor penting yang mempengaruhi, jenis-jenis tarikan dan tema-tema yang diutamakan serta sumber-sumber maklumat yang penting bagi para pelawat tempatan membuat keputusan berkaitan lawatan ke taman tema di Malaysia.

Kajian ini melibatkan satu tinjauan penyelidikan ke atas 300 responden yang dipilih secara rambang di sekitar Lembah Klang. Borang-borang soal selidik diedarkan dan diisi oleh responden dengan kehadiran penyelidik. Hanya 282 borang soal selidik telah diisi dengan lengkap dan dari jumlah responden ini sebanyak 86.2% menyatakan telah berkunjung ke taman tema di Malaysia dalam tempoh tiga tahun yang lalu. Semua data yang diperolehi telah diproses and dianalisis menggunakan program SPSS Version 10.0. Analisis yang dijalankan termasuklah analisis frekuensi, deskriptif, ujian kesahihan dan hipotesis.

Keputusan kajian menunjukkan kebersihan dan keselamatan adalah faktor-faktor yang paling mempengaruhi dan “gelongsor yang menyeronokkan” pula adalah jenis tarikan terpenting, manakala “dunia air” adalah tema yang digemari. Bagi sumber maklumat, didapati pengalaman lalu dan cadangan-cadangan dari anggota keluarga, anak dan sahabat handai amat penting kepada pelawat-pelawat tempatan. Sunway Lagoon adalah taman tema yang paling popular dari sudut kesedaran. Secara keseluruhannya, kebanyakan pelawat berpuas hati

dengan lawatan ke taman tema walaupun terdapat segelintir yang mengadu tentang harga makanan, barangan cenderamata dan bayaran masuk yang mahal.

Oleh yang demikian, sebagai usaha untuk meningkatkan lagi imej taman tema-taman tema tempatan di kaca mata dan minda para pelawat tempatan dan juga untuk memperbaiki mutu perkhidmatan yang diberi, maka adalah dicadangkan agar pihak-pihak yang terlibat dalam promosi pelancongan dan pengusaha-pengusaha taman tema khususnya untuk menggunakan hasil kajian ini sebaik mungkin dalam penyediaan pelan strategik pemasaran mereka dan juga untuk memperkayakan lagi perkhidmatan-perkhidmatan yang ditawarkan.

DEDICATION

**In the name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful. Praise is for Allah.
May blessings and peace be invoked upon the Prophet Muhammad,
the Messenger of Allah, and upon his most noble Family and righteous
Companions, and all those who follow them.**

First and foremost, I pray and thank to Allah for His permission, helps and guidance
that now I have completed my research project paper in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Business Administration.

I dedicate this masterpiece non other than to the following persons who have
patience, confidence and understanding in my search and struggle for
knowledge and also for their continuous support and courage for my success:

My beloved parents who teach me the meaning of victory in life
Haji Hasan Bin Sini and Hajjah Siti Norjani binti Haji Mohkta

My beloved father and mother in laws who are always caring
Abang Haji Zaidan Abang Haji Mansawi and
Dayang Hajjah Fatimah Aishah binti Abang Abdul Wahab

My beloved wife who is always inspires me to face the challenges lie ahead
Dayang Hamdiah binti Abang Haji Zaidan

My charming and lovely children:

Siti Nurul'Aisyah
Siti Nadhirah
Siti Nurhidayah
Muhammad Hasanul Arifin
Siti Nursyafiqah
Siti Nurul Sophia'Aliyah

Also, I dedicate this work to:

My caring siblings, my in-law sister, brothers and
their children who are always there to share my joy and despair

My hope, May Allah brings great benefit through this research work to people who seek
knowledge and May He enlightens us further and for assuredly,
Allah is with those who do good.

Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan
12 May 2001 Sunday / 18 Safar 1422H

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May blessings and peace be invoked upon the Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. TOURISM IN PERSPECTIVE

Tourism is thus a multi-faceted activity and geographically complex one as different services are sought and supplied at different stages from the origin to destination. More over, in any country or region there is likely to be a number of origins and destinations, with most placing having both generating (origin) and receiving (destination) functions. (Pearce, 1989).

Lumsdon, L. (1997) describes tourism as primarily about human activity, which involves travel from an originating area to a destination for pleasure or business purposes. The concept embraces cultural, economic and social exchange process. These elements are inextricably bound together in a mesh of activity, which we refer to as travel and tourism.

In different perspective, Mill and Morrison (1992) define tourism as the term given to the activity that occurs when tourist travels. This encompasses everything from the planning of the trip, the travel to the place, the stay itself, the return, and reminiscences about it afterwards. It includes the activities the traveler undertakes as part of the trip, the purchases made and the interactions that occur between host and guest. In sum, it is all of Middleton (1994) stresses that tourism includes the activities of day visitors or excursionists.

1.1.1. Principles of Tourism

Bukhart and Madlik (1989) summarize the principles of tourism as follows: -

- Tourism is an amalgam of phenomena and relationship
- Two elements, the journey to the destination (dynamic element) and the stay (static element) are fundamental.
- This type of activity takes places away from the normal place of residence and work, and is therefore different to those enjoyed by residents in the areas through which the visitor travels or stays.
- Movement is short term and is intended to be of a temporary nature
- Visits to destinations take place for a number of reasons, but exclude taking up permanent residence or employment, which is remunerated.

There is another important principle that governs tourism as stated by Jefferson and Lickorish (1988), Middleton (1994) and Morgan (1996). They conclude that tourism concerns primarily the consumption of a wide range of products and services provided by public and private organizations.

Lumusdon, L. (1997) points out on the need for tourism marketer to be able to manage the interaction between supply and demand within appropriate social and environmental constraints and in a manner, which is commensurate with the principles of sustainability. This requires an understanding of tourism from a variety of disciplinary approaches. McIntosh, Goeldner and Ritchie (1995) provide a useful

outline on various approaches that can be used to understand tourism. These include, an institutional approach, product, historical, managerial, economic, social geographical, inter-disciplinary and system approaches. They define a system as a set of interrelated groups coordinated to form a unified whole and organized to accomplish a set of goals.

1.1.2. Tourism Dimensions

Tourism has several dimensions other than economic, among them the complex of interactions and their consequences that occur before, during, and after a tourist trip. There have also psychological, sociological, ecological, and political travel impacts. (Lundberg, D.E., Krishnamoorthy, M. and Stavenga, H.K. (1995).

Some parts of the tourism businesses include accommodations, travel expeditors like travel agents and tour wholesalers, transportation, recreation facilities, tourist offices and the backbone of the industry is the tourist attractions museums, natural wonders, gardens, stately homes and galleries as well as theme parks.

1.1.3. Theme Parks as Visitor Attractions

Steven, T. (2000) reports that changing patterns of leisure behavior over the past ten years have resulted in the growth of demand for leisure shopping, eating and drinking and entertainment as essential components of a day trip. Consumers are becoming more constrained by increasingly complicated lifestyles and, as a result

are seeking leisure offers that are more in touch with their needs. It has an effect to visitor attraction like theme parks.

While Wong and Cheung (1999) argue that the theme parks industry has witnessed a fairly rapid international expansion in recent years. It is popular in the US and Europe. Asia has been identified as the world's next leading international theme park market. In the North Asia, like Europe, the industry has experienced a rapid growth phase spurred on by strong demand, a growth, which is expected to continue over the next ten years. They further reveal that thematic tourism has become increasingly popular where travel is motivated by interest in a particular subject or area rather than by the more traditional motivations such as idyllic scenery and climate.

Steven, T. (2000) further reports that worldwide theme parks and amusement parks enjoyed a good year in 1999 but this was a turnaround for the top most visited parks, which suffered a 6% decline in visitors in 1998. The picture in 1999 is not consistently positive, however, either globally or regionally. Walt Disney Attractions is ranked first in the top amusement/theme parks worldwide and although it has far fewer parks as compared to 35 parks of Premier Parks, it does have the largest cumulative attendance at its nine theme parks like Tokyo Disneyland, Disneyland, Disneyland Paris and Everland in South Korea.

1.1.4. Global Theme Parks Industry

Page, S. (2000) argues that since the opening of Disneyland in Anaheim, California in 1955, the global growth of theme park (also known as amusement park) has emerged as a major element of leisure, recreational and tourist activity patterns in the developed world. The global theme park industry has grown to a US\$11 billion a year business, with an estimated 119 major theme parks spread across the world. These parks received in excess of 300 million visitors in 1996, many attracting over 1 million visitors each a year.

He further reveals that the visit per capita to theme parks varies from 0.6 in the USA, and Japan to 0.5 in Australia to 0.23 in Europe. These statistics illustrate the global impact of theme parks, which have attracted a great deal of debate among researchers on their wider significance to contemporary society. While Assendelft, V.R. (1994) argues that the arrival of EuroDisney naturally has a tremendous effect on all Europe's parks, especially in the field of marketing communication. Again Page, S. (2000) argues that one of the most incisive and current synthesis of the debates associated with the rise of theme parks in modern society is Hannigan's (1998) *Fantasy City*.

1.1.4.1. Hannigan's (1998) *Fantasy City* Analysis

In this study, according to Ryan, S. (2000) Hannigan considers theme parks as one facet of the development of *Fantasy City*, with its roots in tourism, sports, culture

and entertainment. Hannigan identifies six fundamental characteristics of Fantasy

City: -

- A focus on themocentricity; namely that is based on a scripted theme;
- The city is aggressively branded, which is reflected in the place-marketing strategies and product range;
- Day and night operation is a common feature, unlike shopping malls, which are largely daytime operations;
- Modularisation of products, where a diverse array of components are assembled to produce a wide range of experiences;
- Solipsisticcity, where the city is economically, culturally and physically detached and isolated from surrounding neighborhoods in a City of Illusion;
- Postmodernity, where the city is constructed around the technologies of simulation, virtual reality and thrill of the spectacle. The city draws a major source of inspiration from the Disney model, which is widely imitated. The Disney model merges the concept of the motion picture and amusement park into a fantasy world using technologies, which create conditions of hyper reality. Soja (1989) has termed such creations, postmodern agglomerations, with their attendant concerns for globalisation.

Based on his review of the Fantasy City analysis, Page, S. (2000) suggests that from the entertainment, leisure and from industry perspective, many powerful business interests have recognized these trends as part of the growth sector for the future. On the other hand, he mentions that the theme parks, which are part of the Fantasy City

experience, have been criticized as the high technology playground of the middle classes, of little benefit to the communities. He further argues that the theme parks have however played their role in the liminality of the tourist experience, where pleasure and thrill seeking in post modern cities is a traded community.

In this context, French sociologist Bordieu (1984) interprets that the patronage of theme parks as part of the acquisition of cultural capital, which he put it as **“been there, done that”** which confers status in the postmodern society. Christiansen and Brinkerhoff-Jacobs (1995) support Bordieu’s argument and progressed it a stage further by suggesting that the architects of Fantasy City are creating a new kind of experience for the consumer. Here, however, Page, S. (2000) cautions that the consumer (as meant by Christiansen et. al) is in the context of theme parks. To him, this consumer is requiring a constant and technologically dazzling level of amusement incorporated into their repertoire of cultural capital.

Page, S. (2000) also acknowledges that Rojek (1993) observes that an important element in the packaging of the fantasy experience is the provision of a safe, reassuring and predictable environment, termed as the “recurrence of reassurance”. Here what Ritzer (1993) has termed the **“Mc Donaldization of Society”**, based on the principles of efficiency, calculatability, predictability and control epitomized in the theme parks environment. Page, S. (2000) adds other elements like the easy to decipher signs, the standardized behavior and limited human interactive experience.

1.1.5. Theme Parks Industry in Malaysia

Malaysians have been exposed with the idea of theme parks and leisure parks as early as the sixties. Many funfairs are organized then; even until now; in conjunction with national and states' festivals and celebrations. In many cases, the fun rides and children entertainments are given the main focus. However, the history of full-fledged theme park in Malaysia has started early in the 70's with the opening of Mimaland in Gombak, Selangor and Genting Highland in Pahang which have become among the popular tourist destinations, both locally and internationally. However, Mimaland was closed in the late 80's after a series of attempts to rescue it failed. Another highly publicised theme park i.e. The SamaWorld Theme Park, which was planned to be developed in Genting Highlands and opened in 1994 (New Straits Times, December 18, 1991) did not taken off as well.

Based on Malaysia Tourism bi-monthly magazine (May-June 1998) and the Visitors' Guide to Malaysia (2000), there are now at least ten major theme parks in Malaysia namely: The Mines Wonderland; Sunway Lagoon Resort both in Selangor; Wet World Water Park in Shah Alam (with two newly open in Batu Pahat in Johor and Pemas in Negeri Sembilan); Genting Indoor and Outdoor Theme Park in Genting Highland, Pahang; Desa Waterpark in Kuala Lumpur; Bukit Merah Lake Town Waterpark in Perak; A'Famosa Water World in Melaka; and Midlands Water Theme Park in Penang. With the recovery of economy and the government serious

efforts to promote domestic tourism, it is expected that more new theme parks will be developed, while the existing ones are being expanded to meet the demand. From our observation and investigation, it is found that most of the parks are water-based attractions and some are projecting themselves with superlatives. For instance, A'Famosa Water World is claimed to be the largest water theme park in Malaysia and also the Monsoon Buster, which is one of the popular attractions in Wet World Shah Alam is reputedly to be the longest uphill water-coaster in Asia.

In the promotional aspect, theme parks have been identified by Tourism Malaysia as one of the key visitor attractions and potential tourist products for family travel both at domestic (Tourism Malaysia Marketing Plan 2000) and international levels especially in the ASEAN region, India and the Middle East countries. PATA Arab Gulf Countries Outbound Market Report (1999) indicates the type of products and experiences that commonly form the basis of Arab family holiday needs, which include shopping, "fun" or unusual things to do like theme parks, wildlife parks and halal restaurants.

The interest among locals on theme parks is however, considerably low and seasonal. The Domestic Tourism Study 1997-1998 conducted by Tourism Malaysia reveals that **only 7.3 % of local holidaymakers visited theme parks** as compared to 32.2% strolling at the beach, 24.8% sightseeing in the city, 21.3% for entertainment, 16.7% for recreational activities and 15.7% for shopping.

The study further reveals that May is the peak month for visiting theme parks with 5.7% and followed by July (5.3%), August (4.9%) and June (4.2%). January until April is the off peak period.

In terms of places of residence, visitors from Labuan (18.8%) is reported to be the larger group visiting the theme parks, and followed by those from Kuching (10.4%) and Kangar (7.8%). While those from the areas and cities that most of the theme parks are located or in close proximity showed the slower trend. These include Seremban (4.4%); Penang (4.1%); Klang Valley (3.3%); Ipoh (1.5%) and Melaka (0.0%).

This phenomenon is attributed to many factors like decision-making, source of information, demographic and psycho-graphic profiles as well as factors that influence the choice of destination including the destination image. However, the Domestic Tourism Study does not specify the image factor to the attraction like theme park but rather as an influential factor to destination in general. The destination here refers to all the states in Malaysia and not on a place, a product or an experience.

1.2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Since early 90's, the number of theme parks in Malaysia has increased rapidly in different sizes, concepts and in different areas. This is especially obvious in the tourist inclined regions in the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia like Klang Valley,

Penang, Melaka and Negeri Sembilan and Genting Highlands. It may be seen too many and risky as compared to the size of local population. This may be related to a study done by Leiper, N. (1997) on the big success and the big mistake of Big Banana as a road-side attraction and as a horticultural theme park in the north of Coffs Harbour in Australia. He stresses that permanent residents in the locality of a theme park often provide a significant percentage of customers. He also acknowledges that repeat visits by local residents are what sustains Disneyland (Real, 1977) and are also important in many other theme parks. In the case of Big Banana, it has to depend more on tourists, compared to the norm for theme parks, which are dependent on locals and this represents a risk.

With the exception of Tourism Malaysia's Domestic Tourism Study 1998, apparently there is no published literature on domestic theme park industry that we could further review. Thus, with the curiosity in mind to know about the behaviour of local visitors toward the attributes of theme parks that later could be beneficial to tourism promoters, we conduct personal interviews with the local theme park managers as an effort to identify the possible issues in the industry.

Based on these interviews and past studies as discussed in depth in the literature review, below are the **key research issues**:

- a. What are the important factors that do actually influence local visitors to decide whether to visit or not to visit a theme park in Malaysia?

- b. What are the preferred type of attractions, the “theme” and sources of information of theme parks as perceived by local visitors when making a decision to visit a theme park in Malaysia?
- c. How frequent do local visitors patronise a theme park in Malaysia and do they repeat their visit to the same park?
- d. What is local visitors main purpose of visit to a theme park in Malaysia and who accompany them most?
- e. Is there any effect on the rating of attributes, attractions, themes and source of information of theme park by the demographic profiles of local visitors?
- f. What is their level of awareness on the existing major theme parks in Malaysia?

1.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to identify and examine the most preferred influencing factors (attributes) and other choice criteria of local theme parks as perceived by local visitors. These would be the important factors to affect visitors' appraisal in the selection or the choice of theme parks to be visited. According to Russel and Snodgrass (1987), people develop affective appraisals or an affective quality of a place before entering the environment, in the environment, and after leaving the environment. They further argue, “behaviour may be influenced by the (estimated, perceived, or remembered) affective quality of an environment rather than by its objective properties directly”.

Specific objectives are as follows:

a. To identify and analyze the following variables among local visitors: -

- Demographic and psychographic profiles;
- Important **influencing factors** (attributes) (e.g. safety; close proximity)
- Preferred **types of attractions** in the theme park (e.g. fun ride; show)
- Preferred **themes** (e.g. fantasy; historical);
- Important **source of information** about the theme parks.
- Overall experience encountered in theme parks

b. To determine any significant differences in local visitors' perceptions by ethnic group towards the level of awareness of theme park, influencing factors, attractions, themes and source of information;

c. To determine any significant relationship between demographic profiles and variables; and between variables and variables (influencing factors, types of attractions, themes and sources of information).

1.4. HYPOTHESES

The main objective of this study is to investigate the local visitors' perceptions on the influencing factors and their preferences on types of attractions, themes and source of information as theme parks' choice criteria in Malaysia. For this, we

formulate the following hypotheses to measure the significance and association of those dimensions, among local visitors.

1.4.1. Level of awareness, influencing factors, types of attractions, the themes and source of information

In discussing tourist travel choice, Dellaert B.G.C. et. al (1998) propose two main categories of destination characteristics that a tourist will base on; that are the possibility to undertake certain activities at the destination like outdoor recreation, sports and cultural activities; and the attributes of the destination itself like accessibility, climate and prices level. They review the work of Woodside and MacDonald (1994), who introduce the **time frame** and describing that in making choices, visitors would consider a set of interrelated travel choices that involve choices of destination, route/mode, accommodation, activities, attractions and areas and shops to visit. In this regard, different consideration sets motives and information search procedures can exist for each choice, which can be made at different points in time. Dellaert B.G.C. et. al. (1998) also makes a statement that many decisions tourist make are not single independent choices of separate elements, but rather are complex multi-faceted decisions. Moutinho, L. (1988) reveals that the behaviour of visitors to theme parks; who would base their decisions to visit or not to visit a theme park on multi criteria, namely the attributes, types of attractions, and sources of information about the theme parks. While McClung, G.W. (1991) argues that in discussing theme parks' selection, four major items have to look into, including the uniqueness of the theme park; profiles of visitors;

preferred attractions; and the appropriate theme used by the parks. Based on the above empirical evidence, we propose the following hypotheses to be tested.

1.4.1.1. Level of awareness

In his study on amusement park visitor-Scottish attitudes, Moutinho, L. (1988) asks the respondents on their amusement parks preference and the respondents' choice for the most preferred park is Blackpool, followed by Alton Towers and Disneyland. In the recent study by Kau, A.K. (1994), he asks the respondents to rate their places of interests in Singapore that they enjoy most. These include Sentosa Island, Orchard Road, Jurong Bird Park and Haw Par Villa Dragon World. Malaysia has many major theme parks and so far no published information reveals the popularity of those theme parks. This leads to the formulation of first hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 1:

There is no difference in local visitors' (by ethnic group) level of awareness towards the major theme parks in Malaysia.

1.4.1.2. Influencing factors

Mc Clung, G.W. (1991) reveals his findings from the study conducted in the United States that **climate** is consistently rated as the most influencing factor in the

decision to attend or not to attend a theme park. This is followed by preference of the park as the second, children's desire to visit the park and cost as the third and fourth in importance. Others are crowds control, distance and lodging. While Moutinho (1988) who carries out his study in Scotland concludes that the most important criteria for choosing an amusement park are to be the existence of fun rides, little waiting and good climate/environment. These are followed with proximity, overall prices, family atmosphere and hours of operation. Thach and Axxin (1994) find that the cleanliness, rides, nice scenery, shows and family atmosphere, overall prices, line control, proximity and food are among the important attributes of the parks as perceived by their respondents in the United States. We find some similarities in the findings. These lead us to test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2:

There is no difference in local visitors' perception (by ethnic group) on influencing factors to visit a theme park in Malaysia

1.4.1.3. Types of attractions

Moutinho (1988) does not classify the attractions of the theme park instead group them under choice criteria. As mentioned earlier, his study shows that fun rides were the most preferred attraction among the Scottish. McClung, G.W. (1991) later finds that exhibits attraction promoting learning as the most preferred attraction

among the respondents. Variety quality of restaurants is the second, followed by animals in their natural habitat, general shows and entertainment, animal shows, water rides, thrill rides, big name entertainment, rides for small children, roller coaster, cartoon characters, movie-based rides entertainment and gifts of souvenir shop. When the above attractions are grouped, three major attractions are preferred namely family with a mean score of 3.45, thrill (3.58) and leisure (3.28). Thach and Axinn (1994) on the other hand, finds that the (combination of influencing factors and types of attractions) the preferred attributes of theme parks are the shows, tourist features, rides, ambiance, young families, price and order, food, entertainment and access. Thus, the next hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 3:

There is no difference in local visitors' perceptions (by ethnic group) towards the preferences of types of attractions of theme parks in Malaysia.

1.4.1.4. The Themes

Again, McClung, G.W. (1991), concludes his findings that the preferred themes are educational exhibits, exotic animals, technology, botanical gardens, wilderness, history, river trips, foreign cultures, live entertainment, water rides, animal shows, flower displays, fantasy and night club. Wong and Cheung (1999) who specifically

study on the themes of the parks reveal the results that nature is the most preferred theme among their Hong Kong's respondents with the highest percentage of 66.7%. Fantasy, adventure, futurism, history and culture, international and movie themes are ranked accordingly. This leads to the formulation of fourth hypothesis that:

Hypothesis 4:

There is no difference in local visitors perceptions (by ethnic group) towards the preferences of themes of theme parks in Malaysia.

4.1.4.5. Sources of Information

(Moutinho, L, 1988) concludes his study that the family members and friends play the most critical role as information providers in the decision making process to visit the theme park. Others are the wife and husband, television advertising, influence of the children.

In their study, Thach and Axinn (1994) find that friends score the highest mean score of 4.06 being the most important source of information. While family members, television advertisement, newspaper advertisement, brochures, radio advertisement, magazine advertisement, children, billboards and travel agents are also among the top sources preferred by the respondents to obtain information about

theme parks. There is no evidence about the same attitude among Malaysian visitors, therefore the fifth hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 5:

There is no difference in local visitors perception (by ethnic group) towards the preferred sources of information about theme parks in Malaysia.

1.4.1.6. Experience

Thach S.V. and Axxin C.N. (1994) propose two types of experience measurements i.e. breadth of experience and depth of experience on theme parks. Ryan, C. (2000) highlighted the work of Woodside and MacDonald (1993) in which one of the process in customer choice decisions is the evaluation of experience of the customers. Therefore, the following hypothesis is: -

Hypothesis 6:

There is no strong correlation between past experience of local visitors and influencing factors, types of attraction, the themes and source of information.

1.4.1.7. Themes and attractions

In his study, McClung, G.W. (1991) examines the correlations between the major themes and the key attractions. He finds that a strong positive relationship between a learning theme and both family ($R=0.53$, $p<0.001$) and leisure ($R=0.40$, $p<0.001$) attraction factors, wet/wild theme and family attractions ($R=0.53$, $P<0.001$), botanist theme with leisure ($R=0.43$, $p<0.001$) and family ($R=0.38$, $p<0.001$). Therefore, the seventh hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 7:

There is no relationship between themes and types of attractions in theme parks choice criteria in Malaysia

1.4.5. Family Life Cycle

Sharp and Mott (1956) proposes that both the husband and the wife held responsibilities for decisions in specific product categories. Fodness (1992) concludes that both spouses jointly decided on the family vacation. Davis (1970) extends the work of Sharp and Mott by breaking down family decision making into functional sub-decisions (i.e. when to purchase, where to purchase, how much to spend, etc.) Jenkins (1978) reveals his findings of his work (replicated the work of Davis) that husbands dominated vacation information collection and decisions on

length of trip, timing of vacation, and expenditures. Filiatrault and Ritchie's (1980) work on joint decision making between husbands and wives; and conclude that: -

- Husbands dominates decision making in families with children; joint decision making is more prevalent where there are no children;
- The relative influence of husbands and wives across sub-decisions varies more in families than in couples;
- Children have little influence in the overall process.

In contrast to the earlier studies, Fodness, D. (1992) in his study on the impact of family life cycle (FLC) on family travel decision-making reveals the finding that wives in the study are found to be more likely to make individual decisions in families with children, not less likely. Accordingly, the researcher hypothesizes that: -

Hypothesis7:

There is no relationship between the Family Life Cycle (FLC) of local visitors and influencing factors, types of attraction, themes and sources of information in making a decision to visit a theme park

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The success of this research will contribute significantly to the body of knowledge and provide benefits to the following groups:

1.5.1. Tourism Marketers and Planners

The findings on the representative set of preferred attributes (influencing factors), important sources of information and the most appealing theme of the theme parks would be useful to the theme parks marketers and planners.

Moutinho, L. (1988) states that, knowledge of how visitors and users perceive the attractiveness of alternative types of amusement parks or recreation settings in different situations is essential to proper recreation marketing planning and project development within the context of amusement parks

He stresses that local theme parks marketers must recognize the patrons' needs and preference as the competition among the providers are stiff and the extra services and unique appeal will influence the visitors' decision making. If amusement park planning decisions are to be made effectively, they must reflect the varying competitiveness of alternative amusement setting in the different usage situations, which arise for visitors.

Hence, the result from the study is important to tourism marketers comprises of tourism boards, tour operators, as well as the policy makers to understand the perception and motivational factors of theme parks visitors and make the necessary adjustment to their marketing plan and promotional activities.

1.5.2. Management of the Theme Parks

The ultimate purpose of amusement park (also known as theme parks) planning is to create opportunities for visitors to use specific amusement settings. (Montinho, L, 1988). Thus, the study findings like leisure related demographic and psycho-graphic would be useful for planning reasons especially for new theme park. The management of the theme park would be able to understand the needs and expectations of a new theme park by potential visitors and the improvement and programs to be introduced to meet such needs. (Kau, 1994).

1.5.3. Academicians and Researchers

The study will also benefit the academicians and researchers particularly in the tourism disciplines. This is due to the fact that the leisure research is still limited despite its wide spectrum of coverage and continual introductions of new tourism products and services in the industry like theme parks, Meetings, Incentive, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE), health tourism and sports and recreation.

Page, S. (2000) highlights his review that within the tourism literature, the research studies on theme parks and the wider issues of visitor attractions remains a neglected area, although a number of overview studies do exist (Oliver, 1989; Steven, 1991; Jones, 1994) along with more substitute study by Swarbrooke (1995) and a specialist study of heritage attractions by Leask and Yeoman (1999). Thus, the research findings would enlighten the issue and give the opportunity to academicians and researcher to further enhance the findings.

1.6. DEFINITION OF TERMS

a. Perception

(Robbins, S. P. 1998) defines perception as a process by which, individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment. In tourism and hospitality context, Tat Choi, (1998) suggests in his review that perception is defined as the way customers' rate, judge and compare hospitality operations with those of competitors (Lewis, R.C. (1984). While Hemmasi, M., Strong, K.C. and Taylor, S.A (1994) state that customer satisfaction lies in customers' perceptions of performance of the product/services attributes.

b. Theme Parks

Camp (1997) defines a theme park as being: -

- An outdoor attraction with combines rides, attractions and shows
- Designed around a central theme or group of themes; and
- Charging a pay-one price admission fee to visitors.

Milman (1988) notes that a theme park essentially attempts to create an atmosphere of another place and time, and usually emphasizes one dominant theme around which architecture, landscaping, costumed personnel, rides, shows, food services and merchandise are coordinated.

The International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) defines a theme park as an amusement park that has themed attractions, be it food, costumes, entertainment, retail stores and / or rides.

The American Marriot Corporation define a theme park as a family entertainment complex orientated towards a particular subject or historical area, combining the continuity of costuming and architecture with entertainment and merchandise to promote a fantasy-provoking atmosphere.

c. Image

Baloglu, S. and Brinberg, D. (1997) suggest that image is the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a place or destination (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993; Crompton 1979); an overall impression with some emotional content (Dichter 1985; Oxenfeldt 1974,1975); an expression of knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual has of a specific object or place (Lawson and Boud-Bovy 1977). While Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) conclude that image is a perceptual phenomenon that formed through consumers reasoned and emotional interpretation and it has both cognitive (beliefs) and affective (feelings) components.

d. Visitors

World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines visitors as those tourists and excursionists (same-day visitors). A tourist is anyone who spends at least one night

away from home no matter what the purpose except on employment and not more than one year. If the travel is made within the country of residence (within the country's border) it is called domestic tourism.

1.7. LIMITATIONS

In the execution of this study, there are limitations that have to be observed: -

That the study is: -

1. only limited to the population and sample selected;
2. only limited to local theme parks in Malaysia;
3. only limited to any amusement parks that fall within the definition of theme park ;
4. does not attempt to determine the theme park strategies in depth, perhaps merely at glance;
5. does not evaluate the roles and responsibilities of the samples.

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