

Tourist Expectations of Malaysian Shopping Mall Experiences

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Abstract

This paper reports on a qualitative research which was undertaken to explore tourists' expectations of shopping experiences in Malaysia. Knowledge regarding the elements of tourists' expectations about their shopping activity experiences in Malaysia is deficient amid the fact that shopping holds the second biggest share of tourist expenditure for Malaysia. Seven international tourists were intercepted in different shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur and responded to the questions, "what specific mall attributes do you desire when shopping?" and "what were your shopping expectations for the shopping experience that day?" Results from the research will be used to form items suggested for a quantitative survey which will be undertaken in a bigger study.

Keywords: Shopping and tourism; Interviews; Tourist expectations; Experience and expectations; Tourist behavior.



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1. Introduction

Tourism contributes to Malaysia's economic growth through foreign exchange earnings, creation of employment and earning opportunities and expansion of related sectors such as transportation, construction and retail. In 2016, total contribution of tourism to Malaysia's gross domestic production (GDP) and employment is USD40.4 billion and 1,701,000 respectively. Thus for that year, tourism contributes 13.7% in total to GDP and 12% of employment in Malaysia (Tourism, 2018).

Being responsible for the supply side of the market, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MOTAC) and the tourism industry players are always strategizing to make Malaysia as a top destination. As a top destination, Malaysia must strive to attract tourists not just by the numbers, but by their ability to spend while in Malaysia. On the demand side of the market, tourists will usually spend more if the destinations provide attractive and enjoyable activities that will then motivate the tourists to spend. One of the spending activities that tourists commonly engaged with is shopping. Enjoyment from shopping comes from its ability to make tourist become familiar with the local culture, being the main reason of travel, especially while they immerse themselves with others during the activity (Way and Robertson, 2013). Shopping generally provide pleasure to the tourists especially if they are involved in purchases that are rare, unique, and/or cheaper than the price they would have to pay in their own place of residence. In addition, tourists are usually in a special state of mind where they tend to do things that they do not usually do as a result from the desire for rest, deviation from routine. This state of mind is likely to motivate tourists to perform bungee jumping or impromptu shopping. Furthermore, most tourists love to bring home more than just photographs to their friends and family. Souvenirs are important culturally to some tourists. For instant, 'omiyage' is an important culture among Japanese just like 'sunmul' is important among Koreans (Coles, 2004). In some cases, shopping is the main motivation to visit whereby a destination is chosen because of shopping (Timothy, 2014). Thus, if it is marketed right, shopping can help the tourism authority and industry in their effort to increase tourism spending and tourist receipts.

In its effort to boost shopping in order to drive the growth of the country's tourism sector, MOTAC has formed Shopping Malaysia Secretariat in 2002 under the ambit of Tourism Malaysia (Tourism, 2014) (Tourism Malaysia, 2014). Shopping holds the second biggest share of tourist expenditure for Malaysia, the first is held by accommodation. The Secretariat implements many programs to sustain the growth of tourist spending in shopping, one of them is the Malaysia Mega Sale Carnival which was first launched in 2000. In 2000, shopping constituted 23.1% of the total expenditure but in 2013, the figure rose to 30.2% and MOTAC claims that the performance is contributed by the program (Tourism, 2016). Malaysia shopping icon named 'Miss SHOPhia' was launched in 2016 to promote Malaysia as a shopping heaven for tourists (Pegg and Patterson, 2010). In 2017, tourists spent RM26 billion on shopping overtaken accommodation as the number one revenue earner for the country.

Constant challenges faced by marketers are amassed competition and changing consumer tastes (Sfandla and Björk, 2013). Destination marketers all over the world strive to keep up with new and emerging destinations which are competing for the tourist money. In addition, the tourists and travelers becoming more knowledgeable information seekers. Thus, tourism businesses are at their toes to adopt new strategies to use their strength wisely

and take advantage of the opportunities by understanding and fulfilling the tourist needs. Tourism is all about experience business, which explains the importance of studies in the issue of experience and service quality offered to tourists (Pettersson and Getz, 2009a); (Sfandla and Björk, 2013). In order for destination tourism managers to provide satisfactory experience to the tourists, they first need to ascertain the experience expectations and then strive to fulfill this expectations satisfactorily. Satisfied tourists are usually willing to give good review about their sojourns through word-of-mouth and word-of-mouse and will usually revisit the destinations (Larsen, 2007).

Thus, there is a need to understand the experience expectation attributes in the shopping sub-sector of tourism in Malaysia as this has not been researched enough. This paper is based on a research which aimed to explore tourists' expectations of shopping experiences. Results from the research will be used to form items suggested for a quantitative survey which will be undertaken in a bigger study.

2. Shopping As Tourist Experience and Behavior

Liking what they experience while traveling is a part of tourist behavior. Larsen (Kastenholz and Lima (2013) explains that tourist behavior and experiences in stages, namely pre-trip, during-trip and post-trip. These stages of experience can also be used to explain their shopping experiences. On the pre-trip stage, tourists plan and anticipate the possible activities, including shopping, through expectations. According to Liebman-Parinello in Kastenholz & Lima (Sheng and Chen, 2013), tourists search for information while planning for their trips thus initiate their experience. Expectations before the trip are concluded from the information they gathered which become their pre-perceptions of travelling performance (Mossberg, 2007). During their travel, tourists generate their actual perceptions and assessments of the tourism services and attributes. Once they return, their experiences during the first two stages will lead them to react differently, they may decide to re-visit, tell their friends and relatives about their experiences or use social media to let others know the good and bad things about the destination.

Different researchers have explored the constructs affecting tourist experience. The dimensions are as follows:

Personnel: Personnel indicates the service staff or local human affairs and is closely related to the performance of tourism service delivery (Urry, 2002). In shopping, personnel are the sales staff who wait for the shoppers.

Other people: This dimension is based originally on the "collective gaze" of mass tourism put forward by Morgan (2007). Much later,

Ek *et al.* (2008) and Swanson and Horridge (2004) emphasizes that tourists share their experiences while interacting with others such as those traveling with them, other tourists and individuals from the host communities. Thus, these other people, especially other shoppers who can be other tourists or locals, may influence tourists shopping experience.

Products: According to Mossberg (2007) and Wong and Law (2003), the products or souvenirs in the destinations form a big part of authentic and distinctive local culture, and will influence tourist experience. A tourism-related product will make the tourist spend. Examples are accommodation, local event, retail merchandise and unique souvenirs. Kruger and Saayman (2012) found that quality of goods, variety of goods, and price of goods are important shopping attributes among tourists.

Physical environment: Physical environment includes the ambiance, spatial layout, signage, physical attractions, and facilities which contribute to the creation of atmosphere which is usually related to safety, comfort and pleasure (Reisinger and Turner, 2002). Heung and Cheng (2000) studied shopping attributes for Japanese tourists visiting Hawaii, US, and the Gold Coast, Australia and found that the first important dimension of satisfaction for the Japanese shopping in Hawaii and the Gold Coast is shop presentation (i.e. ease of access, appearance of sales people cleanliness, and convenience); the second is shop attractiveness (i.e. attractiveness and business hours). Nowadays, shopping malls add the element of entertainment to create a pleasurable atmosphere to the shoppers.

In terms of the area related to shopping in tourism, much attention has been projected on examining tourist satisfaction in shopping experiences during their travel. Most of the studies measured tourist preferences and satisfaction based on different lists of attributes (see for example (Liu *et al.*, 2008);(Tosun *et al.*, 2007);(Sangeeta and Victor, 2016); (Bosque *et al.*, 2009). This study attempts to understand tourist experience expectations with regard to shopping in popular malls in Kuala Lumpur.

Additionally, some academics have explored the pre-trip expectations of tourists in other tourism sub-sectors and concentrated on the formation of the relationships among expectation, satisfaction and loyalty (Andereck *et al.*, 2012). For instance, (Andereck *et al.*, 2012) implement the expectancy theory to study the pre-trip expectations of potential volunteer tourists, and found that different identities have different preferences. Forinash (2003) extract five expectations of museum tourism experience. Thus it will also be valuable to study the experience expectation in the context of shopping in tourism due to the research scarcity. Researchers can study the overall experience received by tourists at the destinations. However, the tourism industry consists of a variety of sub-sectors and each of them will usually strategize separately. Thus, it may be better if each sub-sector study tourist expectation of their experience in its specific sub-sector.

Expectation is the affirmation that a desired outcome will occur (Gnoth, 1997). When people spend money on a purchase including on traveling, they usually will spend on destinations or activities that they expect to give them good experiences. If tourist have low expectations toward a destination or an activity, it is less likely that they will go to that destination or participate in the activity. Managing the tourist's expectations especially through promotion is extremely important, since expectations can significantly influence tourist choice of destinations as well as the tourist satisfaction process through the formation of their perceptions toward their experiences (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000). Tourist satisfaction is the aim of destination marketing since it influences the choice of travelling destination, the consumption behaviour and intention to revisit (Pettersson and Getz, 2009b). The means to

this aim is to deliver what is expected by the tourists. If the overall performances of the service provider meets or exceeds initial expectations, the consumer is considered satisfied (Babbie, 2013); if the performances are below the initial expectations, satisfaction level is considered low or non-existent.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative/exploratory study whereby data is collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed by content analysis. This paper has the aim of understanding expectations of shopping activity experiences among tourists. Based on reviewing the literature, the researchers conclude that shopping experience expectations have not been clearly defined thus, according to Babbie (Shields and Rangarajan, 2013), exploratory research may be suitable to gather new insights. Additionally, exploratory research is suitable to help determine the next steps in examining the problem before a clear conceptual distinctions is made (Creswell and Clark, 2010) Knowledge regarding the elements of tourists' expectations about their shopping activity experiences in Malaysia is still deficient. Therefore the exploratory approach was conducted to disclose this area as a base for further study which may be done quantitatively as according to Creswell & Clark (Mayring, 2000a) "it is best to explore qualitatively when researchers may not know in advance the variables that need to be measured and follow up with a quantitative study to generalize the qualitative results".

This study is the beginning of the empirical research started with attempting to understand and identify the tourists' expectations of shopping experiences in Malaysia. Listing of the attributes from the literature were formed namely personnel (including efficient sales staff, family-friendly), other people (including not crowded, safety, friendly co-shoppers), products (including unique merchandise, wide merchandise selection, value-for-money), and physical environment (including accessible, safe, comfortable, not crowded, clean, pleasant, entertaining). The interviews were undertaken to explore if the expectations of Malaysian tourists in their shopping experiences are similar to the attributes in the list.

Seven international tourists were intercepted in different shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur and responded to the questions, "what specific mall attributes do you desire when shopping?" and "what were your shopping expectations for the shopping experience that day?" Interviewees were, in the very beginning, informed of the purpose and content of the interview. They gave consents to participate in the research and agreed on tape recording. The technique of probing (Silverman, 2013) was adopted, for example using follow-up questions to encourage the respondents to provide more information about their expectations. Plus, when the answers were contrast to or lacking of what has been defined in literature (such as they did not initially mention about value-for-money), interviewees would be given more questions and elicited to provide valuable and complete information. Each of the seven interviews lasted for approximately 40 minutes. The interviews were all recorded by a smart phone and then transcribed into texts. After finishing each interview, simple analysis was done. Preliminary overviews indicated that the received information started to replicate around the fifth and sixth interview; therefore it was reasonable to stop sampling.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Respondents' Profile

Seven (7) international tourists were interviewed in this study, consisting of four (4) males and three (3) females. Almost 72 percent of the respondents' age is between 30 to 40 years old. Most of them came to Kuala Lumpur for the purpose of leisure. Subjects who came to Kuala Lumpur for business claimed that shopping was their secondary activity while those who came to the city for leisure denoted shopping as an important part of their activities. The highest number of respondents are from Australia. The rest of the respondents are from India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Germany and Canada. The details of the respondents are listed in Table I.

Table-I. respondents' profile

Demographic		Number of respondents (%)
Gender	Male	4 (57%)
	Female	3 (43%)
Age	20-30	1 (14%)
	30-40	5 (72%)
	40-50	1 (14%)
Nationality	India	1 (14%)
	Pakistan	1 (14%)
	Uzbekistan	1 (14%)
	Australia	2 (28%)
	Germany	1 (14%)
	Canada	1 (14%)
Purpose of visit	Business	1 (14%)
	Leisure	6 (86%)

Source: Fieldwork

4.2. Tourist Shopping Experience Expectations

In total, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted as to get insights into people's experiences, opinions, values and attitudes and provide an inspiration on how people perceive things. Open-ended questions were used to collect the informants' opinions. A pilot study was conducted in the first place to see whether respondents could answer the questions and interpret question correctly (Mayring, 2000b).

Interviews recordings were first transcribed into texts then a content analysis was applied to deal with the interview data. Content analysis was preceded as summary, explication and step-by-step reduction (Berg, 2001). The first step was to highlight in the margin (Weber, 1990) where relevant information about participants' experiences, participant's opinions on shopping attributes and other attributes was found. Sentences directly related to shopping attributes are underlined. Some answers given by the informants, although using different terms and phrases, were expressing the same meaning.

Reliability of content analysis is a great issue for both quantitative and qualitative research. According to Weber, since different qualitative researchers may have different ways of categorizing the same text, it makes the difficulty of result replication. One way to ensure the reliability of data is to have another researcher repeat the same procedure. Following this suggestion, the interview data was analyzed by researcher 1 in April, 2018 and by researcher 2 in May, 2018 so to ensure there is no significant difference between the results.

The next step was classifying the recognized information into categories. Since the literature review has identified a list of shopping attributes, the list serves as the criterion for sorting information. The answers given by informants were then synthesized and categorized in Table II.

Table-II.categorization through content analysis

<p><u>Attribute 1: personnel (including efficient sales staff, family-friendly)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I expect the sales person are kind and helpful. Sales person (at Pavillion) they all are kind.</i> - <i>They (salesperson in KLCC) can communicate very well.</i> - <i>When I do my shopping, I expect the sales person can explain the thing that I want to buy because I usually buy a branded things. I like when they focus on me when I select the thing.</i> - <i>In Malaysia, the sales person have a good communication skill. They can communicate well when I have something to ask.</i> - <i>I expect the salespersons ... they can help me to find the thing if I want to buy, for example, I like to buy a t-shirt, maybe the size that I want not there. So I am very happy if the sales person are willing help to find it.</i>
<p><u>Attribute 2: Other people (including not crowded, safety, friendly co-shoppers)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I expect the mall not crowded. Actually I like the mall that no crowded. Do not have a lot people. Sometimes, Sunway Putra mall like that. There (are) not a lot of people, so you can walk around to the shop, see what you want. You don't have to queue up in the counter to pay. In Bukit Bintang, if you go to brands outlet right. There a lot of people, it is crowded. Sometimes in during the holiday, you have to queue up, line up on the counter. You will spend 10 to 15 minutes to pay.</i> - <i>I like the place not to crowd because if I want to buy the thing, I want to be relax and I like sales person entertain me when I do my shopping.</i> - <i>The mall or shop that I want to go must have a crowd. Because, I very enjoyed to shopping with a crowded. I like the environment when shopping mall do a sales.</i> - <i>For example, sometimes I also affected by others people doing, if to many people go in one shop, I also want to get into the shop...then its not good.</i> - <i>I like the mall not to crowded, but the pavilion is too crowded. But, it is okay for me because I enjoyed in here with my friend and I like to look other people in here.</i> - <i>I do not like to buy in crowded, but if the shop has a big space it does not matter to me. As long the place is comfortable to walk. I also do not like to queue when paying.</i>
<p><u>Attribute 3: Products (including unique merchandise, wide merchandise selection, value-for-money)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I expect the variety of product, the price is affordable. The best mall a Sunway Putra Mall. I like this mall. I can buy everything there. I can buy things in Pavillion too, the price is affordable. It is not too high. The product is cheaper and (a) lot. That's mean lots of alternatives.</i> - <i>I like the pavilion mall because there a lot of brands and it easy to find any brands.</i> - <i>When I have been in Dubai, Dubai is more better in the shopping sense.</i>

Because, they have the huge variety of brands and the pricing is also Malaysia big more expensive. Price in Dubai is more better and you can get more quality. The have the whole brands, and we can get any brands.

- *For shopping... I do not need the entertainment in shopping mall not important to me, I (more) concerned about the price and product.*
- *About the product, I expect the branded shop will provide the latest design. I believe Malaysia will offer because you have the big shopping mall like Pavillion, KLCC. But If I want to buy the branded thing at the cheap price, I prefer go to premium outlet like Genting Highland.*
- *The product that I want to buy have many choice and offer a cheap price. I like to collect a collection of women's accessories like a fancy earrings, bracelets and hair clips. Sometimes the things like this I will buy and bring back to my country and make as a souvenir.*
- *The shop must have the variety of product. So I do not need to go another mall to find it. I like to go to Brands Outlet because they offer the variety design of shirt. I have many choice. All the design are up to date and suitable with the young people.*
- *I hope that, if the shop sells something at cheap prices, they can provide enough stock.*
- *I expect, they arrange the items nicely to make it easy to choose. I am always affected to see the goods in a well-organized, I would probably buy the item.*
- *I also prefer if they have the variety of payment method.*

Attribute 4: Physical environment (including accessible, safe, comfortable, not crowded, clean, pleasant, entertaining)

- *I expect the mall have the nice decoration, all the facilities, decoration provided. I also like the mall to provide more entertainment. In Sunway Putra, the decoration is also nice. Sometimes the like to organizing different environment. They decorate the Sunway Putra Mall according the holiday mood in Malaysia.*
- *I think shopping mall must provide more entertainment. You can entertain the tourist, showing and organizing let's say kind of event that show illustrate demonstrate Malaysia culture. For me it is really interesting to know any other culture. Sunway Putra mall really did well, this week they have Korean culture week. Korean stuff and selling, you can try the Korean kimono.*
- *The mall must provide the food stall, cinema, something that we can do other than shopping.*
- *Actually, shopping mall must provide what you looking for, no need the unique product. When we go to shopping mall, we already have the target to buy. Good music, people can enjoyed.*
- *I expect the mall to be organized to make it easier to shop. I like the pavilion mall because it easy to find any brands. If you go to KLCC, it is not easy to find the brands because it's mixed some other brands but most of the famous brands, Pavillion is easy to find.*
- *Facilities In mall is good, you can get the food, and get so many other things, have groceries stall. It easy to parking.*
- *For me, if the mall do not have the entertainment like cinema, mall is bored.*
- *I like the place not to crowd because if I want to buy the thing, I want to be relax and I like sales person entertain me when I do my shopping.*
- *For branded shop, I expect the place is quite, has a good smell and they always welcoming customer.*
- *The mall must clean and comfortable to walk even the mall is crowded. Sometimes I like to take picture in the mall, so I expect the mall have the nice decoration. For example, if we see at the outside Pavillion, the mall have the nice view to take a picture. It is very interesting to come here. Also in KLCC, I like to sitting in front of the fountain in the evening.*
- *And the important things, the mall must have the variety of the restaurant. So, If I do not shop, I can walk around in the mall and go to find something to eat.*
- *But I really like to go to the mall when I travelling because, all the facilities that I want in there for example ATM machine, food court, money changer and easy to get public transport. It will save you time if you go one place, but the place have many service. If I had no activity on that day, I love to walk in the mall with the condition it is easy to come by public transport.*
- *I also like if the mall provide the nice music. Sometimes, we go to the mall for relaxing and the music really help to make I enjoyed when I go to walk around in the mall.*

5. Conclusions

This study has discovered the experience expectation attributes in the shopping sub-sector of tourism in Malaysia. The attributes discovered for the dimension of product are unique merchandise, wide merchandise selection, prices (value-for-money), the quality and variety of products, payment methods, merchandise layout. The attributes for the personnel dimension are their ability to communicate, their friendliness and courtesy, their knowledge about the product, and their effort to help in purchases. The attributes for physical environment are fun and beautiful decorations that are worthy of photo-takings, safety, cleanliness, crowd control (although one respondent expressed that he like the crowd and another mentioned her interest in watching other people in the mall), availability of entertainment, availability of food outlets, and availability of other facilities and activities such as cinemas, money changes, and accessibility facilities.

The above discovery regarding the dimensions and attributes of tourists' shopping experience expectations in Malaysian shopping malls are crucial as it becomes an important basis for further studies in the issue of shopping experience and service quality offered to tourists. As discussed earlier in this paper, service quality in shopping consists of many attributes of which the perception of shopping experience expectations is the most important. In order for Malaysia destination tourism managers to provide satisfactory shopping experience to the tourists, they first need to ascertain the shopping experience expectations.

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