An Appraisal of Family-Friendly Tourism in Malaysia

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Abstract: Family tourism is a growing market even though it is understudied and unexplored in Malaysia. Given the rising purchasing power and quality of life among families and the fact that not much work has been done on exploring these family-friendly policies and their implementation, this study aims to uncover the extent to which these family-friendly policies are implemented in Malaysia. This study utilised a descriptive method using qualitative data from historical writings, tourism reports and studies that mentioned the participation of family tourists. This study revealed that while limitations on implementations and policies with regard to family tourism exist many of the tourism policies are directly facilitating this segment, especially at the national level, the tourism providers' level and the family unit. It is imperative that the setting up of a comprehensive guideline on family-friendly destination be realized to ensure the sustainability of family tourism and to create real meaning for family vacation.

Key words: Family-friendly destination, family tourism, tourism providers, commoditization, consuming family

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is competitive in nature and is changing rapidly in both the developed and developing countries. Due to these circumstances of the changing taste among new tourists and the increase in quality of life, both the private and public tourism destinations and providers have responsively and innovatively attended to product development and the needs of these market segments (Cook, 1996; Beirne, 1999; Decrop and Snelders, 2005; Yeoman, 2012). One of these growing segments is family tourism and it has been argued that providing a family-friendly destination will guarantee their visitations (Bery and Lehto, 2008; Coates, 1996). Moreover as the family tourists are changing dramatically in terms of their travel demand, style and taste (Cohen and Harris, 1998), a holistic understanding of what constitutes a friendly tourism destination is therefore pertinent (Bery and Lehto, 2008; Kang et al., 2003; Goldscheider, 2000). This trend is apparently creating competing destinations, including those in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore and Thailand (Kang et al., 2003; Beioley, 2004; Gardyn, 2001; Beirne, 1999; Yeoman, 2012). However, among family vacation sites and destinations

that are popular, one of the selling points in marketing and branding of the tourism site or destination is still having a friendly destination.

In Malaysia, family tourism is also becoming a growing market for both the domestic and international segments. However, both the domestic and international tourism providers still lack a clear practice in meeting the needs of the family market. In terms of the domestic market, factors of increased quality time, changing family characteristics and spending capability have provided a strong basis for a better approach in conceptualizing and designing a family-oriented tourism destination. On the other hand, in terms of the international market, the family market in Malaysia has been interpreted as tourists who are mostly 'of the Middle East origins' (Yusoff and Abdullah, 2011; Ariffin and Hasim, 2009). This situation reveals that very little attempt has been made in exploring family tourism and that no attempt has been made to uncover the real meaning of family-friendly policy and implementation. To date, no comprehensive study has been explicitly conducted on this; hence, there still exists confusion over what tourism-friendly destination should be among those in the tourism business and those in charge of tourism governance. For this reason, there is an urgency to examine and uncover what is of importance in

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family tourism, since the family-friendly policy and practices in Malaysia are crucial and are definitely supported by a strong basis. Even though tourism has been significantly contributing to the country's economy through the large percentage of income generated from international tourists as well as ranked fourth as the source of national income, attempts toward strengthening the country's capability in harnessing the potentials of family tourism is still far from making, it the key strategies in the tourism development policies.

Although, there were several domestic tourism surveys carried out in the 1980s and early 1990s (TDC, 1988, 1991), it has been only quite recently that domestic tourism has been extensively researched; among others, these studies involved the profiling of domestic tourism (Badaruddin and Omar, 2005; Leong, 1997), domestic tourist and lifestyle (Gilbert and Abdullah, 2004) and vacation among urban Malay families. However, tourism is one of the key sectors that are spearheading the country in achieving high economic growth through high-yield tourism spending. In fact, tourism is one of the key sectors in the economic transformation plan toward achieving a developed nation in 2020. However, the family orientation policy seems to be understated and has only been emphasized recently in which it is, generally, stated as a fun family destination for domestic tourists, or more specifically to attract and cater for the growing international markets (Malaysia, 2010).

Considering that tourism-friendly destination has now become the selling point, it can be claimed that Malaysian tourism providers have yet to take full advantage of this niche. Therefore, this study aims to identify the family-friendly policies at three levels of implementations, namely at the national level, the tourism production system and the consuming family.

Literature review of family-friendly tourism: Conceptualizing family tourism: There is no one complete and mutually agreed definition of family tourism among practitioners and tourism scholars (Kelly, 1997; Gardyn, 2001; Chesworth, 2003; Rugh, 2008; Schanze, 2010). Taking into account that family tourism is mostly positioned in tourism studies compared to family studies, the following perspectives should become the basis in reconceptualising family tourism.

Family tourism from the perspective of the family tourists is simply a travel with several members or all the members in a family unit to a chosen destination. Even though the relevancy of this definition has been challenged as the characteristics of families have changed in the last two decades, the following characteristics should, however, become the tenet of family tourism

(Brown, 1995). Although, the purpose of family travel varies, it is mainly concerned with social bonding, inter-generation interest and family reunion (Yeoman, 2012; Schanze, 2010; Kluin and Lehto, 2012). The changing concept of family means that recent family tourism is no longer a travel of the nuclear family. It currently extends beyond the nature of family units and to certain circumstances, it is bounded to the definition of a family commonly applied to the country. In recent developments, studies on family tourism have highlighted the importance of exogenous and endogenous factors, including changes in travelling mode and increase of quality of life (Cook and McCleary, 1983; Makens, 1992; Gilbert and Abdullah, 2004).

On the other hand, family tourism from the perspective of tourism providers means the provision of facilities for the family at the destination or at the tourism providers' premises. As such, most providers will ensure the provision of family facilities within the context of their services, their business premises and at the site or destination (Brey and Lehto, 2008). A hotel or resort for example, will ensure that the family room, stay, food and services fit the needs of the family during their vacation. The shopping sector, on the other hand, will facilitate the shopping experiences of the family members and ensure all their needs and those of interrelated services such as dining; baby care and mother's feeding room are provided under one roof. Theme parks will definitely be designed to transform the concept of 'family fun', 'play' and 'togetherness' at their modern re (created) leisure-scape. Family tourism, in terms of knowledge, is not a new agenda in developed countries (Krippendorf, 1987; Goodrich, 2000; Yeoman, 2012; Obrador, 2012). Drawing upon the voluminous amount of literature in the early 50s and 60s until recently, four major themes can be summarized. The first is the decision making of family tourism, which mostly focuses on the processes of decision making. The majority of the studies have operationally viewed family decision making as being one of three categories: husband-dominant, wife-dominant or joint decision between husband and wife (Nichols and Snepenger, 1988). The second stage concentrates on the family tourism dynamics according to the life cycle of the family (Cosenza and Davis, 1981; Fodness, 1992; Belch and Willis, 2002; Bojanic, 1992) while the third theme tends to look at the production of more specialized products for family tourism, including theme parks, zoo, resort, sport, beach and cruise vacation (Brown, 1995; Milman, 1997; Carpenter, 1999; Lockstone and Baum, 2008, Staines and Ozanne-Smith, 2002). Studies grouped under the fourth theme tend to concentrate on the role of family tourism in generating value chain for the economy,

either locally or regionally and quality of life (Gilbert and Abdullah, 2004; Brey and Lehto, 2008; Schanze, 2010), including the Visit Family and Friend (VFR) and Visit Relatives and Friends (VRF) in their home country or country of origin (Cohen and Harris, 1998; Moscardo *et al.*, 2000). Studies that add to the importance of family segmentation according to vacation decision making (Kang *et al.*, 2003; Moscardo *et al.*, 2000), impacts of year-round holidays on family vacation (Peercy, 2007) and decision making are still expanding (Belch and Willis, 2002; Bronner and de Hoog, 2008; Obrador, 2012).

Family tourist: The family is a fundamental building block in a society, a business and consumerism and therefore, unravelling their characteristics and needs to spur family tourism is essential. Several initiatives in typologising the family tourist can be tracked in developed nations (Gardner, 1995). Historically, in the 1930s or in the golden age, Rugh (2008) categorized the American family tourists into four, comprising of the 'heritage travel', 'vacation out West', 'back to nature' and 'resting in the countryside'. Mintel (2009) on the other hand, identified seven categories that ranged from single to silver-haired families, in which their demand on family-friendly facilities and services is central to most of these segments. Yeoman (2012) asserts that as family characteristics have changed, so has the behaviour of the family tourists. Besides the conventional role of the husband-wife or father-mother on vacation, travels with

kids are growing significantly (Cullingford, 1995; Thornton *et al.*, 1997; Lohmann and Danielsson, 2004). The intergenerational vacation is seemingly dominating the Visit Family and Friend (VFR) segment while the concept of fatherhood is also attracting the family tourist (Moscardo *et al.*, 2000, Seaton and Palmer, 1997; Poel *et al.*, 2004; Schanze and Smith, 2011). Above all, several recent studies as shown in Table 1, have revealed that the family tourists or the family market is those tourists who undertake travelling with all the members or only selected members of the family unit or families with the purpose of vacation and fulfilling the family's leisure needs at either domestic or international destinations.

Even though the literature on family tourism emphasizes on the family members' characteristics, as part of tourism studies, one cannot overlook the categorization of tourists who is often referred to, especially the conventional Cohen's typology in the tourism bubble and Plog's motivational studies. In Malaysia, the market segmentation divides tourists into five groups, namely "the Satisfiers", "the Dreamers", "the Indoors", "the Achievers" and "the Escapists" with five major motives of pleasure travel which are "nature", "culture", "budget", "adventure" and "freedom" respectively (Abd Aziz and Ariffin, 2009). These labels provide a general idea of lifestyle and travel motivations of pleasure tourists. However, this classification fails to distinguish where family tourists lie as the key player in pleasure travel.

Table 1: Definition of family tourist

Scholars	Locality and segments	Family tourist characteristics
Gonzalez and Molina (2009)	Spanish family tourist	The second largest segment of Spanish tourist. Travel in private vehicles compared to using the coach or train. The sun and sea is the most important motivation even though VFR accounts for a large percentage of the trips. Private residences are preferred, followed by apartments (25.1%). The majority travelled in family groups, followed by couples
Mintel (2009)	US family travel market	The family leisure market is challenged by demographic trends including a rise in single-parent families and rising socioeconomic inequalities. There is a growing demand for grandparent/ grandchildren and multi-generational family leisure. Leisure products for younger families are likely to experience greater growth
Yeoman (2012)	Australian families	Family holidays are opportunities for 'quality family time', allow bonding and ensure happiness and togetherness of the family, away from the distractions of everyday life. The reasons families go on holiday then differ from those of the general holidaying individuals. Family holidays are less about an escape or break 'from' home routines and more about spending time 'with' the family (including extended family), doing novel activities and creating positive memories. For children, family holidays involve social fun, (re) connecting people and social practices.
Lohmann and Danielsson (2004)	German family	Family is the "new" trend affecting tourism. One-child family and seniors travelling with children create implications for product design
Carr (2012)	Global trend	Family and multigenerational travels are the luxury that consumers are seeking for. Top reasons for travels are "seeking authentic experiences in new destinations," "rest and relaxation" and "personal enrichment". Luxury travel utilizes storytelling in its marketing campaigns
	Asia Pacific	Asia Pacific Family Travel 2012 survey found that families on vacation spend even more than they already do. Survey of key cities in seven Asia Pacific markets estimated that 44 million people travel on family holidays every year-chalking up an annual spending of US$29 billion. 51 million trips are made each year of which the length of stay for domestic in comparison to international family travel is 4 days and 8 days respectively

Gonzalez and Molina (2009); Mintel (2009); Yeoman (2012); Lohmann and Danielsson (2004) and Carr (2012)

Family-friendly destination, policies and implementation in tourism: According to the United States market studies, family-friendly destination is quite a recent phenomenon. In translating, this concept into the premises or localities of tourism many tourism businesses are being inspired to create their environment in favour of the family tourists. Based on the existing practices undertaken in several selective markets, for example Singapore, the UK and other tourism sub-sectors, a family-friendly destination comprises of facilities that meet and satisfy each of the family members' needs. Table 2 shows some of the criteria chosen to represent a family-friendly destination. One significant practice is the priority given to the growing kids as the determinant of travel. Apart from children, family-friendly destination comprises facilities centred on family safety and leisure. Meanwhile, family-friendly theme parks

are moving toward the concept of engaging family tourists with animals and education. This is indeed an important change because considerable attention is given to the individual's time, parent's vacation time and environmentally-friendly practices.

Similar to family-friendly destinations, family-friendly policies and implementations are rarely established explicitly in tourism studies even though these practices have been employed and accomplished implicitly. However, recent studies on shopping, accommodation, gastronomy and theme parks demonstrate the stakeholders' commitments in fulfilling the family's needs during vacation. Some examples are presented below.

In Singapore, since family-friendly destination is considered a newly growing concept, the three levels of tourism providers, namely the government, business community and the public are given full responsibility to

Table 2: Criteria chosen for family-friendly destination on various sectors

Countries	Sectors	Criteria chosen
Singapore	Shopping	i) The established family-friendly environment according to the Code on Barrier Free Accessibility in Buildings, especially in meeting the needs of families with children. ii) The provision of family rooms, diaper changing stations, child-friendly toilets, children's play areas, lockers for prams and other heavy belongings, pram and child buggy rental facilities, flexible arrangement of tables and chairs in eating places and the provision of baby chairs in eating places (Anonymous, 2012)
Hong Kong	Theme parks	A theme park is a destination in its own right, which combines entertainment, food and beverage and shops and an environment that is different from that found outside its gates. A theme is used to provide a focus for the design, development and operation of such a park. In order to attract new and repeat visitors, a theme park must: I) Create a family atmosphere, ii) Be clean and visually pleasing, iii) Provide a wide variety of rides such as roller coasters, water rides, iv) Provide a wide variety of shows and activities
Spain	Family friendly beaches	Family beach users are provided with information relating to the suitability of services and activities levels. Service Levels: i) Beaches with numerous services, ii) Beaches with basic services, iii) Natural beaches, with very little landscape transformations and minimum services, iv) Other places of interest away from the shoreline. Activities: i) For young excursionists who love serenity and scuba diving, ii) For people searching for tranquillity without a variety of amenities; iii) For young people or families looking for sports facilities and amenities and iv) For people looking for comfort and a wide range of services
Australia	Family friendly beaches	Family friendly beaches are rated with the following criteria; Low hazard rating e.g.: ABSAMP hazard rating; 3 or less if beach is not patrolled by lifeguard service; 6 or less if beach is patrolled by lifeguards, Other hazards: e.g., injury, crime. Auditing, risk management practices in place for: Signage, Bathing hazards, Pollution and litter control, Safety-including access; activity zoning, Security-personal and property, Ecological and cultural, Shelter and shade and information nodes-safety, local knowledge, environmental, historical, cultural. Public amenities: Toilets, Changing rooms, Public telephone, Drinking water, Showers, BBQ and picnic facilities, Playground, Recreational activities, Kiosk and/or café, Car parking and Public transport
Germany	Family friendly hotel	"Family friendly hotel", hotels must meet a set of requirements, as specified in the GC-Mark standard: Childcare: Multilingual staff, Required skills & qualifications defined, Availability for families; Service: Kids buffet, Availability of doctor, Baby-corner, mini-, junior-club, Sports- and leisure time; Security: Barrier-free walkways, Non-slip shower areas, Signs about areas, Playing grounds and equipment; Room facility: Spacious family rooms, Availability of cribs, Child lock; Hygiene: Room serviceBeach-&pool areas, Restaurants; Location: Close to beach and airport, Beach & Pool Bar
South Maryland	Family friendly trails	A compelling 20 TRAILS of landscapes for family activities; hiking, biking and sightseeing pleasure in dense forests, sandy beaches, mysterious swamp areas, lazy rivers, historic pine plantations and well-stocked fishing ponds. Details of location, description, activities and amenities, seasons, surface, additional opportunities and contact provide families with ample choices of trail experiences. Recommended activities and amenities are walking, running, rollerblading, hiking, biking, snowshoeing/skiing, wildlife and nature viewing, horseback riding, historic sites, wheelchair accessible (portions), pets welcome, on leash, drinking water, restrooms, canoeing, kayaking or john-boating

Researchers analysis on various online information, 2014

refurbish their premises or areas of public interest. The industries and business entities are encouraged to establish family-friendly environment according to the Code on Barrier Free Accessibility in Buildings, especially in meeting the needs of families with children. These guidelines include the provision of family rooms, diaper changing stations, child-friendly toilets, children's play areas, lockers for prams and other heavy belongings, pram and child buggy rental facilities, flexible arrangement of tables and chairs in eating places and the provision of baby chairs in eating places (Anonymous, 2012).

Another example is the establishment of Family Tourism Destination (FTD) in Salou of Catalonia. The family-friendly practices are managed as follows: firstly, a special FTD seal of approval is given to municipalities and tourist areas in recognition of their especially family-oriented facilities and high quality services. This requires them to offer family-friendly accommodation and catering facilities and to have a wide range of entertainment and leisure options. The introduction of the FTD brand is a gradual process. During the first year, the municipality or area has a minimum of 15% of its tourist facilities certified as Family Tourism Destinations, rising to 35% over the years. Secondly, safety, communication and family-friendliness are aspects of concern in both the public and private space including tourist accommodation. A wide range of services for children can be found, ranging from high chairs, nappy changing areas, babysitting services, nurseries, beach play areas, children's water sport equipment for hire, adventure sports for all ages to activities for children to discover the culture and history of the municipality and the parks, children's guide to the municipality, as well as easy access to information and tourist offices (Banyeres, 2008).

Thus, based on the above mentioned literature, the authors in this study have identified several components that may determine the extent of family-friendly policy and implementation in tourism which can be seen at the three levels, namely the national level, the tourism business initiatives and the family tourist.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data collection and analysis: Utilising the qualitative method, this study was conducted in three phases. Phase one drew upon the existing literature on family tourism, especially from tourism scholars and experts on family studies. Based on the literature on family tourism, the researchers concentrated on several aspects of family-friendly components comprising of the family as the key actor, diversity of family attractions, cultural factors, pricing, accessibility, image, political

stability, safety and health. These have assisted the researchers to identify the family-friendly entities in both the tangible and intangible products as well as family experiences.

The second phase of this study concentrated on family tourism and tourism studies in the Malaysian context. In deriving 'who are the actors' 'what elements are they representing' and 'where are the localities of the activities/experience', sources of data were divided into several categories, which included the documents of national plans such as the 5 year plans as well as tourism documents produced by the Ministry of Tourism and Tourism Malaysia. The 5 year plan documents in fact, provided an overview at the national, local and industrial level. The researchers also looked into various reports on domestic tourists and recreational activities.

Taking into account that family tourists and family tourism are often discussed as part of the social-dimensions of tourist profiling in the Malaysian context, hence the third phase involved the analysis of the descriptive illustration of the family tourists while they had their vacation. Specifically, the domestic tourists' survey by Tourism Malaysia was used to gauge the patterns of family tourism.

Based on the above mentioned phases and particularly with the data collected, this study used the qualitative method to examine the family-friendly initiatives at the three institutional levels of family tourism and family tourists which were: the national level, the tourism providers and the family as the tourist. All of these procedures provided evidence of the family-friendly policies and implementations in the Malaysian context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The family-friendly initiatives were examined at three institutional levels of family tourism and family tourists, namely:

- The national tourism organization
- The tourism providers
- The family as the tourist

Institutionalization of family tourism at the national level: Being regarded as a consumer-oriented product that is in favour of the family segment, family characteristics and images should be ideally represented and portrayed in family tourism. Hence, in attracting both the international and domestic tourists, needs of the family play an integral part at all levels of production be it at the policy, planning or product development stage which covers the promotion, marketing and services that it has to provide. Is this scenario visibly taking place in the country's tourism development so far?

On the national level, tourism is governed by the Ministry of Tourism who is responsible to the policy, infrastructure improvement, beautification, environmental protection and new investment and in providing promotion both locally and internationally. Besides the Ministry, several ministries also lend their hands in organising tourism-related events, especially the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage. However, after >40 years of being involved in tourism since hosting the PATA meeting in 1972, the country's tourism policy, planning and development are still considered to be at the periphery of the development stage. At this juncture, it seems uncertain whether tourism has been successfully implemented, especially in terms of domestic tourism. Looking at the tourism policy, it appears that the international market has been given more priority instead, with the majority of the policies being an "elite driven policy" as Richter (1999) asserts:

> Tourism policy in most countries has been an elite-driven policy, chosen by the powerful for political and economic advantage on both personal and regimen levels. It is characteristically at the beginning a chosen policy, something governments choose to embark upon, not something forced on them

Domestic tourism was not given much attention in the early decades of the country's participation in the 1970s and 1980s. However, during those two decades, masses of families were significantly involved in domestic tourism, flocking into a cluster of tourist areas such as beaches, hill stations and cities for a short break or holidays. Additionally, during those days, most of the travels were influenced by leisure and escape from work as well as visiting friends and relatives. Even though accessibility to destinations was moderate, many still pursued it with personal transportation.

It was, in fact, only during the Visit Malaysia Year 1990 that more efforts were introduced to ensure continuous progression in domestic tourism. Following this, even though the Seventh and Eighth Malaysia Plan had introduced customer and tactical-based product development, family-friendly tourism was not listed as one of the key products. Instead, the senior citizen, student, honeymooners, shopping tourism, Malaysia my second home and theme park tourist segments were given wide coverage and promotion (Malaysia, 2003, 2006). From such scenario, it can be summed up that family tourism is yet to be infused in tourism Malaysia only generally, not at the exclusion dimensions as what have been stressed in other products in the international promotion and

marketing wise. Spatially, more destinations are dispersed in the West Coast compared to the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (Shahwahid *et al.*, 1991). Even though the National Tourism Master Plan was launched in 1975 and has been implemented since then, family tourism was not exclusively focused on as the key actors within the tourism market.

Nevertheless, in the present-day era, vigorous efforts were made in portraying the significance of family on vacation or holidaying together with family members in particular at the national level, especially when these activities are associated with fostering a caring family as well as community and societal bonding. Promotions were not only focused on urban citizens in major cities such as Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru but were also extended to the medium-sized towns and tourist destinations, including Seremban, Melaka, Shah Alam and Genting Highlands.

However, the underlying reason for the enhancement of promotions in Cuti-cuti Malaysia in the four major segments, including those classified as the inactive family segment was quite misleading and this occurred because of the limitation in understanding what matters in family tourism. The intensification of promotion among the Malay families was mainly with the aim of enhancing 'the correct ways of spending holidays' rather than only 'spending vacation as balik kampung (going back to their home town)'. The families are encouraged to travel, share and experience many activities as well as consume the facilities at tourism destinations. In fact, in one of the tourism ministry initiatives in Cuti-cuti Malaysia, a similar emphasis was made:

> Planned holidays among families and friends are a necessity in life, he said when launching the "Cuti Cuti Malaysia Train. Go on holidays with your families and friends so that your productivity will increase, your quality of life will improve and last but not least you can strengthen that special link. By touring the country and shopping together with the family; you will be helping the country also in promoting domestic tourism (Utusan Express 31 October 2000)

Although, it is not a conflicting issue, it still indicates disagreements in understanding, practices and interests between families, business or tourism providers and the government. Meanwhile, the various ministries and agencies, including the ministry of women, family and community development and ministry of culture, art and heritage are lending their hands in organizing programmes

that encourage and promote tourism. Some of these programmes are the 'Domestic Tourism Campaign' and 'Happy Family' that demonstrated family tourism coexists with other programmes and strategies (Anonymous, 2012).

Commoditization of families as tourism product: The private sector, in general, is likely to initiate a more family-oriented tourism compared to the public sector whose initiatives normally emphasise on all products and segments. Historically, the role of the private sector can be seen in the early 1960s. These recent days, the modern economic sector has created a leisure-based market demand-supply which includes a working system that separates the formal working hours, break hours and paid-day-off. Through, the International Labour and National Labour Law, each employee in the public or private sector is eligible for paid-vacation-leave. The regulation indicates the complexity of the production system which allows the intervention of tourism providers at various levels and sectors. However, besides providing vacation opportunities for the employees, it also has widened the segmentation in the marketplace in terms of accommodation, landscape, food, music, home, leisure activities and sports.

Marketing mechanism: As a consumer-oriented product, competitive pricing and accessibility to marketing channels to all family segments, regardless of their region, race, socioeconomic and cultural background are some of the key conditions for family tourism business expansion. In simple words, all family segments have an equal opportunity to consume family tourism and therefore, tourism providers at all levels should attempt these markets.

In Malaysia, marketing tourism is undertaken at various stages and mechanisms. At the national level, most of the strategic and direct marketing programmes are implemented by the government or the related stakeholders. Through, Tourism Malaysia, the marketing network and promotion maintained its priority in developing the international tourist sector compared to the domestic sector. This can be seen in the programmes that are strategically aimed at increasing the number of tourism offices abroad from 30-40, compared to the tourist information centres throughout the country which is not only small in numbers but limited in its facilities and located only in major destinations. Nevertheless, at the state level, the pro-active roles are reflected in the domestic marketing campaigns. This initiative was, in fact, a shift from the conventional campaign for international markets often organised in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s (Malaysia, 2010).

At the core of the private sector marketing, tactical approaches are more preferred as these allow widening of the market segmentation. However, family segmentation is not explicitly portrayed. Among the travel agencies, for example, packaging of the product to the urban population and international markets is significantly attempted. Data derived from 1970-2000 implied that more sales were focused on the overseas market and these were mostly operating in major cities. It was only in the early 2000 that marketing was widened and strategically included all segments within the population to fly for domestic destination. Packaging of the cheapest travel mode was due to mass marketing, in which MATTA, MAS, AirAsia and FireFly were among the providers who have materialised to increase domestic tourists or travellers. This has directly reduced discrimination and segregation between the elites and the masses and between the major and remote destinations. Based on these channels, not only the major urban centres Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru and Georgetown are given access to potential segments, similar promotional campaigns in secondary cities-Ipoh and Kuantan and surrounding towns are capable of capturing the family segment as well.

Another successful strategy is the Matta International Travel Fair (MITF), which was first organized in 1991. During the MITF 1991, only 9,000 visitors attended the fair, while during the MITF 2005 and 2006, the crowds reached up to 60,000 and 90,000 visitors respectively. While, the MITF22 was organised in Kuala Lumpur, similar smaller exhibitions were conducted in other destinations, namely in Sabah, Perak and Sarawak, thus, providing more chances for families at different levels of accessibility to consume or engage in family tourism. Added to this, smart partnerships between the aviation, transportation and communication agencies in packaging family-oriented packages also provided family tourists a wide range of choices; some of the smart partnerships included collaborative network between Air Asia and POS Malaysia and networking between PLUS with some of the theme parks.

Other than encouraging vacation, creating the family image is also crucial in dealing with what families want when they are at the destinations. This is clearly demonstrated in some of the private initiatives. 'Jalan-jalan cari makan', 'destinasi pelancongan' and 'Breakaway Destination' are some of the initiatives that encouraged the local family to vacate locally-nationwide while the Discovery Channel and Travel Channel approached families toward their participation in international travels. By using media approaches, these domestic and international family images are directing vacationers to choose both local and international destinations.

The recent trend is the use of websites and tourism portals which are often operationalised in improving channels as well as dimensions of product image. Based on the promotional network analysis, efforts in creating and improving family vacation images in this country are still far behind in comparison to the initiatives taken by developed countries. Family images can be viewed from various perspectives, especially 'who should be there' and 'what facilities' or 'which activities fit and are enjoyed the most' by family vacationers. To date, there is no single local website that provides comprehensive knowledge regarding family vacation activities in Malaysia. In contrast, international tourism website agencies such as 'Expedia.com', 'travel with kids', 'Family Travel Engine' and 'all travelling kids family vacations' provide comprehensive information and knowledge on family tourism.

Added to this, various segments with respect to family life cycle, needs, motivations and experiences as well as tips for success are also well informed on these sites.

In fact, an initiative of a German private TV to record a holiday-themed family vacation, nature Adventure in Sarawak clearly shows that the international agency is promoting family vacation more than the local agencies. It was only in conjunction with Visit Malaysia Year 2007 that one of the television reality shows Cuti-cuti Famili recorded the fun and uniqueness of family vacation, thus paving the involvements of local family as a host in order to develop a family vacation image in promoting tourism in Malaysia. From the marketing wise of the private-led initiatives, families began to be dealt exclusively as a prospective tourist segment.

Initiatives of the tourism sub-sectors: This study also carried out an overview of the initiatives by tourism sub-sectors in providing what has been commoditised as family tourism. Taking into consideration that accommodation or the hotel sector, shopping and food and gastronomic tourism are among the highest spending sectors in tourism receipts, this study explored how these sub-sectors generate innovative commoditisation of 'family faces' for both the domestic as well as the international markets.

The hotel sector is one of the examples where innovative initiatives in packaging to the family tourists are generated. Simply put, families are commodities in various forms of sales and packages and these can be seen in Table 3. Ranging from the conventional room offerings-family room, family hours, family games both indoors and outdoors, the recent offerings are more innovative that transcend the family's needs for family food, family day and family gatherings.

In fact, customer-oriented services tackle the keen interests and the family members' needs, especially the children and the elderly, generating substantial amounts of business during peak seasons. However, the local news still reported that family segments had only received little attention from the hoteliers as mentioned below:

Table 3: Diversifying family needs in the accommodation sector

Facilities or services	Commoditisation of family segment
Rooms-various types	Various offer from time to time and season to season
	Extra charge according to season, peak and super peak season
	Family room, available for family with small kids at least 2 adults and 2 children
Baby needs and kids needs	Children's bed available with extra charge
Baby sitters	Charge with services provided and services provided apart from the room
Swimming pool for kids and family	Free with parent guardian
	Only in house guests can use these facilities while visitors of the guest are not allowed
Kids club and games for family	Need entry fees or member fees during stay in
	Facilities and game room-indoor and outdoor provided, some are free of charge with only some facilities requiring a small fee-bicycle, kayak and woodball
Restaurant, café, breakfast and menu.	Complimentary in family room, breakfast provided for two adults and two kids
	Family areas and kids' menu in selective café and restaurant. Kids' hour
	Food for kids and kids' areas. Charges on perusal.
Leisure and Recreation	Family leisure and Family recreation-Karaoke for family
	Play with pets, Rabbit Park, birding, flora and fauna, bicycle and horse riding provided where a small fee is charged
	Children's program-cartoons
Guest room/family areas	Provided in family room, normally in resort and holiday villas
Kids' games indoor and outdoor	Not provided in room, only at games or kids' room. Kids' TV channels not provided to all
Golf	Provided to members only
Decoration	Does not provide decoration concept for children, only in international hotels that collaborate with international providers of kids' games in this initiative such as Barbie

Many hotels make the mistake of not offering more than the staple television or swimming pool for their guests' recreation. So, a hotel with more varied diversions-such as children's playground, telematches and volleyball games-will certainly draw repeat visitors. Managing a resort or hotel recreation programme requires loads of energy and creativity. Immediate focus is to make the Children's Programme the regional market leader. The resort also offers facilities such as water sports, tennis, basketball, archery, volleyball and scheduled games and lessons such as aerobics, water aerobics, cooking and carving classes, tai chi and yoga (The Star 2003, 12 January)

Various special occasions related to families such as celebrating a family member's birthday, anniversary, mother's day father's day as well as family day are commodities as family products available in the accommodation sector. The accommodation or hotel sector does indeed create suitable menus in meeting the needs of the celebration of ethnic festivals such as Makan Besar which is normally practiced during the Chinese New Year and the Breaking of Fast during the Ramadan month. Therefore, whatever opportunities of social fabrications of the modern family lifestyles can be translated into family tourism be they, the economy or the five-star hotel offerings. Moreover, taking the special incentive of RM3,000 spending for such activities, intensification of family day among corporate and business organisations had helped to double the demand of family tourists as the guest of the hotel sector.

Shopping is another proactive sector accommodating the family's needs in tourism. During the early years of tourism development throughout the country (in the 1970s), shopping malls are not considered as tourism products. However, as tourism began to flourish and is defined as an amalgam of activities, including shopping, it is therefore, unsurprising that many shopping malls have explored into providing family enjoyment, fun and experiences. In the late 1990s, especially, shopping is themed in the promotional campaigns for both domestic and international markets. Due to the increased number of families favouring shopping as a major activity during vacation many premises and outlets have intensified their indoor ambiances with family facilities, catering to family needs and characteristics, including baby's changing room and baby sitters facilities. Besides the seasonal offerings to all family members, they collaborate with other sectors, i.e., transportation, hotels as well as theme

parks in packaging family tourism experiences. The current trend is the offering of free holiday packages as a way of appreciation to the family shoppers.

The theme parks, normally perceived as postmodern tourism development also adopted a customer-oriented approach in designing their landscape exclusively for family fun and recreation. Although, this sector is considered a late comer in the Malaysian tourism landscape, almost every state currently offers theme parks for family fun and excitement as their unique selling point. The promotional campaigns often demonstrate the unforgettable moments of family members having fun at the water parks, indoor games as well as the enduring adventure experiences.

The consuming family: One significant factor that eventually influences the rising number of family tourists is the changing lifestyles of the Malaysian families. As the country is heading toward becoming a high income nation, families with increasing household income tend to acquire higher purchasing power. In short, the rising number of families with purchasing power have helped to move these families toward purchasing of non-basic goods and services especially, leisure and tour packages. The existence of dual family income in the country where mothers are now playing significant role in family spending has also impacted the family holiday's consumption. The mothers often do not determine the choices of vacation but their influence is often extended to what and where to spend and the length of stay. More importantly while earlier motives for vacation seem to be linked to escaping from the home environment, the recent trend of consuming families is associated with 'home away from home'. This theme has eventually had more impact on the comfort, safety and leisure of the family.

In addition, women's involvement in the formal employment sector has boosted the leisure needs among dual-income families. Their involvements have not only contributed to the rising of the women, mother and family's purchasing power but it has also increased the desire of having quality time with family members. Realizing the changes in lifestyle and the desire of the mothers having a "break" from the household routine without sacrificing the needs of the family, the entrepreneurs are seen to provide a variety of vacation products according to the current needs of the family.

Furthermore, the changing style of purchasing power because of the extensive usage of credit cards has also influenced vacation purchases among those in the family segment. It is estimated that by 2013, household income will increase to RM47,400.00 with the high and middle income group serving as the most important consumer

groups particularly in transportation, communication, recreational and educational expenses. Recreational expenditure is forecasted to increase to 6.4% of household spending, compared with 5.8% a decade earlier. This certainly enhances the families' ability to go for a vacation, locally or abroad.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed the family-friendly policy and its implementation in Malaysia which was dealt with at the three institutional levels of tourism, namely the national, the state and private-led tourism providers and the consuming families. Although, diverse approaches have been attempted in the commoditization of family tourism, as yet there is no guideline, framework and indicators on what signifies a family-friendly destination. In terms of implementation, the family-friendly concepts have been interpreted and developed to increase the number of family tourists. At the national level, attempts were made to link these with the national policies, aiming at achieving social and caring societies. At the tourism providers' level, initiatives were associated with being friendly and caring to the families to ensure the market's sustainability. At the family level, however, family vacation is undertaken by the families because of the extensive promotional campaigns from both the national and private entities as well as the increasing awareness on the need to take more vacations to have better family quality time. Therefore, at these three tiers of policies and implementation, interpretation of what signifies family-friendly destination depends on the mechanism, creativity and knowledge of the stakeholders be they the governance, tourism providers or the family unit itself. It is imperative that a guideline of family-friendly destination to be established and implemented to ensure the sustainability of family tourism and family practices of vacationing as one of the basic needs of the high income citizenry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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