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**"Venturing Into New Tourism Research"**



# Art Tourism: The New Research Direction

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*Countries are distinguished by their cultural identity and this is normally expressed through their people, heritage, architecture and arts. These attributes have the ability to attract visitors to the country that has the sense of place and imprint the memories on the visitors while instilling pride to the local community. Arts or arts-based tourism experiences include, but not limited to theatre, dance, music, literature, cinema, visual arts and crafts, design and architecture, public art, photography and digital media. Malaysia in recent years have pushed the niche Art Tourism with the creation of Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourism Festival that sees art galleries and artists nationwide participating in promoting the Art sector. The year 2011 sees double participation from the previous year with more than 100 art galleries and more than 300 artists taking part of the festival indicating positive response in the recent development of the art sector. The positioning of Malaysia as a reputable destination for art sector hoped to attract high-yield tourists while intensifying the existing art sector for the desirable economic benefits. This paper is exploring the newly labelled art tourism niche in Malaysia and explore the direction of what research should be taken based on the current status of the sector combined with the aspiration of the tourism industry. The methodology of this study is exploratory with interview as the main data collection method and supplemented by secondary data. Respondent validation is used to triangulate the data to increase validity. The findings of the study suggested that the research direction should focus on the structure of the art sector in order to maximise the economic benefits and minimise the leakages. This is due to the nature of the art sector that has no geographical boundaries in terms of supply and demand. The study also suggests to explore the different types of art for this tourism niche and identifying those that should be continuously develop to ensure the art sector can be sustainable and constantly dynamic.*

**Key words:** art tourism, economic benefits, research direction, sustainable

## Introduction

In recent years, Malaysia has the intention to elevate the status of Malaysian art as an iconic product, which is desired, pursued and collected worldwide. Not many countries can claim that level of status yet. The usual European and American art has no doubt quite established and pursued. In Asia, Chinese paintings are sought after

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and in recent years, artwork from India and Vietnam gained prominence. Rather than focusing on the art sector itself, Malaysia decided that it should tie in with the tourism industry where the art community, such as the artists, art galleries owners or managers, art promoters, art critics, art lovers and collectors flocked to and around Malaysia buying collectible art, which is normally made by Malaysian artist. It is believed that the tourism industry has the potential to play a much more prominent role in elevating the Malaysian art and artists while simultaneously ensure the economic growth through the creation of this new, innovative and high-yield Art Tourism.

Malaysia is promoting the Art Tourism through Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourism (MCAT) event, which is now at its second year in 2011. MCAT is specialising in showcasing the art works and sculpture in the contemporary genre. This event is supplemented by the 'Tourism Art Trail' where tourists not only can visit the contemporary art galleries, but also attending art seminars and talks focusing on Malaysia's contemporary art scene. The number of the participation of art galleries and artists in Malaysia has increased tremendously in its second year therefore there is a need for the tourism scholars to start researching the Art Tourism, its aspiration and its direction. This paper will outline the understanding of contemporary art tourism and the various researches needed for Malaysia at this time.

## **Methodology**

In order to specify the type of art that involved in this research, there is a need to establish the operational definition of contemporary art. In general, the contemporary definitions are divided into two categories. The first one is distinctively modern, conventionalist and this definition focuses on art's institutional features, emphasizing the way art changes over time, modern works that appear to break radically with all traditional art, and the relational properties of artworks that depend on works' relations to art history, art genres, etc. The second category is the less conventionalist type of contemporary definition makes use of a broader, more traditional concept of aesthetic properties that includes more than art-relational ones, and focuses on art's pan-cultural and trans-historical characteristics (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2011). The understanding of contemporary art established the operational definition of art for this research that this is limited to contemporary art works and sculpture. In short, contemporary art denotes the art of the present day and relatively recent past. This type of art is usually avant-garde in nature. The operational definition is extended to the commercial side of art where the consumer views, hears and acquires a form of art works and sculpture or artistic expression in exchange of payment. This is to fit in to the view of Art tourism the promotion of art is tied in with the pursuit of economic benefits.

The approach of this research is qualitative and the methodology chosen is exploratory. This approach enables the researcher to build a strong and reliable foundation to uncover motivations, reasons, impressions, perceptions and ideas of individuals. The characteristics of qualitative research include extensive information from each respondent and a search for meaning, ideas and relevant issues. There data are gathered through primary and secondary data. The primary data gathered through interview with the local authority and local artists while the secondary data gathered through literature search. The data were triangulated through respondent's validation method.



## Research Findings

The research revealed that while Malaysia strived to promote Malaysian Art with 'museum-quality pieces' standard, the serious art business are still very much at its infancy. There is no large pool of art collector and buyer for Malaysian art and there is no art auction houses until very recently when Henry Butcher (Malaysia), a company that rather well known for property management, started one. Established international art auction houses such as Sotheby's (established in 1744) and Christie's (established in 1766) both are well known as a specialist in art auction based on their history and both have established their Asian base in Hong Kong (Sotheby's in 1973 and Christie's in 1986), attracting various art collectors from all around the world.

The research also revealed that there is a need to explore the different types of art for this tourism niche and identifying those that should be continuously develop to ensure the art sector can be sustainable and constantly dynamic. Little has been written on art works in Malaysia before the World War II. Artistic pursuits for Malaysians in a traditional sense are more known in sculpture such as carvings. Sculpture, in a general sense has long been one of the most popular forms of fine arts. In actual fact, sculpture was considered an art form long before patrons of the art saw the value and the beauty in the other types of arts. There are many types of art that can be considered to be push as contemporary Malaysian art such as photography and comic book art to expand the niche market in Art tourism.

Understanding the art business structure and the various types of art and its marketability is essential in Art Tourism. Tarlow (2011) suggested that art tourism will attract tourists that willing to spend money based from numerous studies that indicated that the tourists that include arts in their travel plans usually have higher income level than other tourist at the same destination. They also have a greater likelihood of staying in local hotel, take longer trips and shop more. This is inline with the vision of the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia that targeting high-yield tourist that can increase the economic benefit from the tourism industry. This called for a research on the profile of Art Tourists and their behaviour such as intention to purchase and willingness to pay.

Kolb (2005) has suggested a model for developing the arts as a tourism product. The model suggested is used for a city to identify its products and services and linked it with the analysis of cultural product. The mapping of the art and culture is done next, which enables the tourism marketer to design the appropriate marketing strategy. The model is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Model of the City and Arts as a Cultural Product.

City	Service	Art Experience
Architecture	Hotel Rooms	Festivals
Street Patterns	Dinning	Music
Public Parks	Entertainment	Plays
Historic Buildings	Shopping	Cinema
Ocean	Transportation	Ethnic
Mountains	Historic Tours	Public Art

Source (Kolb, 2005)

She suggested that the traditional marketing process and the marketing process for the arts, as a tourist product may be similar but their differences are crucial. The traditional marketing process starts with identifying the factors for external



environment and decided if forces such as social, political, legal and technological changes have indicated a potential consumer market. The distinctive difference to the arts as a tourist product is the departure point of the marketing process where it starts with product analysis. This enables the art product to be able to reposition as a tourist activity. She further suggested that the tourism marketer can develop and package the city and its art together and brand it as an experience to the intended target market.

The model requires the product audit to be thorough and honest in analysing what both the city and the arts can offer. The uniqueness and attractiveness of the physical infrastructure of the city must be analyzed to determine what needs to be improved. A survey of both the local businesses and nonprofit arts organisations should be conducted to determine the type of services that can be offered to the potential tourist. This is also an area of research that would be an interest to Malaysia where each city developed its own art as tourism product, therefore creating the variety and availability where it is possible as Kolb (2005) has suggested where the complete package of a city, services and its arts is then branded and promoted to potential tourists.

While Malaysia is charging ahead with the Art Tourism, the issue of the art identity is something that needs to have more in-depth understanding. The art identity has been questioned by Mohamed (2008) in a cultural sense as he suggested that Malaysia have been emphasising on its cultural vibrancy with the successful tourism campaign "Malaysia: Truly Asia". The vibrancy is due to the various ethnic groups i.e. Malay, Chinese, Indian, Indigenous People, Serani etc. and the Bumiputeras of Sabah and Sarawak that have more ethnic groups under this category. All of the races made up the population of Malaysia now and each usually keep their own ethnic identity while being Malaysian through the integration process rather than assimilation process. Mohamed questions the ownership of culture as he noted the multiculturalism in Malaysia has become the foundation of Malaysia's tourism and he raise an important question on whose culture should be promoted to represent Malaysia. This raised a simple but important question, which is 'what is Malaysian art?' Since Malaysia population have strong identity that linked back to their culture, there is an issue of the object and expression of the art that made in Malaysia or any other art made in country of origin of the artist's forefathers for example Malaysian artist of Chinese ethnic group that specialises in Chinese ink-art or calligraphy. The research on identity that linked to the marketability of the art would be useful in having a greater understanding of Malaysian art and promoting it.

## **Conclusion**

The pursuit of Art Tourism by Malaysia will not only yield economic spin-off but also set the path in discovering its cultural identity through the expression of Malaysian arts. The identity of the art will determine the ability to attract visitors to the country that has the sense of place and imprint the memories on the visitors while instilling pride to the locals. Arts or arts-based tourism experiences that are being promoted in Malaysia currently through MCAT only includes contemporary Art works and sculpture but there are other types of contemporary art that can be promoted such as theatre, dance, music, literature, cinema, visual arts and crafts, design and architecture, public art, photography and digital media. It is suggested that the new research direction for Art Tourism now in Malaysia should emphasise on exploring



the structure of the art sector including the profile of the art tourists, the different types of art and also the identity of Malaysian art.

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