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TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

Ghazali Musa & Thinaranjeney Thirumoorthi

Introduction

Malaysia, formerly known as the Federation of Malaya, covers a land area of 329,847 km², excluding Singapore, Thailand, Brunei and Indonesia, all of whose economies have been growing intensely in the recent decades. Its two main regions, Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, consist of 13 states and three federal territories: Wilayah Persekutuan, Putrajaya and Labuan. A total of 29.8 million people live in Malaysia, represented by Malays (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and others (0.7%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2011). Although Malay is the country’s official language, English is widely used in daily life, especially in business communications, along with some Chinese and Indian dialects. Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy headed by the chief of state (the king) while the prime minister is the head of the ruling government.

The tourism industry is not only one of the biggest contributors to the country’s economy, but also the second largest source of foreign exchange (Ismail & Lai 2015). Pemandu (2013) forecast that the industry would contribute MYR103.6 billion in gross national income (GNI) by 2020. Tourism National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) defined tourism as leisure and tourism businesses which include the sub-sectors of accommodation, shopping, tourism products (i.e. ecotourism, cruise tourism and other related activities such as spa and wellness), food and beverage and inbound and domestic transportation (Pemandu 2013: 317). Under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, the promotion board, which is widely known as Tourism Malaysia, promotes the country’s tourism activities using the successful tagline of ‘Malaysia Truly Asia’.

Malaysia recorded 25.7 million tourist arrivals in 2013, with the total receipt of MYR65.4 billion (Tourism Malaysia 2015). There was a 10.3% increase in tourist arrivals from January to August 2014, compared to the same period in 2013 (Arukesamy 2015). Despite facing major challenges, which will be discussed in detail later, the tourism industry continues to grow at a rapid pace, hosting 27.4 million tourists in 2014. Euromonitor International (2014b) ranked Kuala Lumpur as the sixth top city destination in 2012. The country was also ranked fourth for the World’s Top Retirement Havens in 2015 (International Living 2015). Crescent Rating (2014) ranked Malaysia as a top halal-friendly destination ahead of the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia.


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