

Tourist perception towards Kelantanese food image

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Abstract

Food tourism is not a new phenomenon or trend that promotes the tourism products in Malaysia. The unique combination of multiple ethnicities and cultures influence the taste of the food that is served. Some of the food have been influenced by the other cultures based on the geographical elements where the region is related to other strong cultural regions. For example, Kelantan food have been influenced by Thai food where both destinations are next to each other. However, the slogan of the tourism promotion in Kelantan is the 'cradle of Malay culture' where it shows Kelantan itself has a strong image of Malays which includes the food. The slogan tells that Kelantan food image is the real Malay food image that has been preserved from generation to generation but in reality, the geographical and other cultural influences are also the important elements that need to be considered in measuring the food image of the region. Thus, this paper will explain and expand on the food tourism element and the destination and food image that influence visitors visiting the tourism destination of Kelantan.

Keywords:

Food tourism, destination image, food image, tourism

1 Introduction

Tourism industry is one of the major contributors to the Malaysian economy. In 2016, Malaysia received 26.8 million tourists compared to 25.7 million tourists in 2015 (Tourism Malaysia, 2017). Total tourist receipts in 2015 are MYR69.1 billion (Jala, 2016). In 2016, tourist receipts increased by 18.8% which contribute RM82.1 billion to the country's revenue compared to RM69.1 billion in 2015 (Tourism Malaysia, 2017). In order to attract more tourists to visit Malaysia, Ministry of Tourism and Culture has created the tagline, "Malaysia Truly Asia" which focuses on promoting famous tourist sites, food, shopping places and modern and traditional Malaysian festivals (Tourism Malaysia, 2015). The tagline "Malaysia Truly Asia" was created to attract international tourists to visit the country while "Cuti-Cuti 1 Malaysia Dekat Je" had been launched on 17 June 2015 to inspire more domestic tourists to travel to nearby tourist destinations in the country for their weekend escape (Tourism Malaysia, 2015). Both marketing taglines promote famous mass tourism destinations that could attract many tourists to visit the destination and for the niche tourist segmentation, the tourists need to find the location which will fulfil their motivation to travel such as an eco-tourist who would prefer to travel to an eco-tourism destination in the country.

Tourism Malaysia not only gives the information on the tourism destination located at the capital city of Malaysia but also famous destinations in each state in Malaysia including Kelantan. Kelantan is a state in Malaysia that is located on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia, which is well-known for its cultural heritage and natural environment that contribute to the tourism industry development of the state (Marzuki, Hussin, Mohamed, Othman & Som, 2011). Tourism in Kelantan continuously contributes to the state's economy through an increased number of tourists' arrival. For example, in 1996, there were 1,668,155 domestic and 357,797 international arrivals (Awang, Radam & Yacob, 2010) and according to Kelantan Tourist Information Center (2017), the number of tourist arrival were 4,432,911 for domestic tourist and 1,369,082 for international tourists. Sufahani et al. (2016) stated that majority of the Europeans visited Kelantan due to its nature resources such as the beaches, waterfalls and the highland areas. Previous research also supported the notion of tourists being attracted to events based on several elements that are interesting and somewhat exotic in nature (Quinn, 2010). As a result, most events organized in this state were culturally rooted, labelling Kelantan as the 'Cradle of Malay Culture'.

Despite the growing number of visitors visiting tourist destinations in Kelantan, there is still minimal research and data on the cultural representation of Kelantan that is inclusive of both destination and food image. The trademark of promoting tourism destinations in Kelantan as the 'cradle of Malay culture' creates it as the representation of this state. Hunt (1975) defined 'destination image' as visitors' perceptions about a destination. Research on destination image most likely focus on traveller satisfaction, traveller buying behaviour, change of destination image, modification and formation of destination image through cross-national and cross-cultural contact, destination image

assessment and measures and the role of destination image and tourism development (Chon, 1990). The food image study done by Chi, Chua, Othman and Karim (2013) focused only on the food image, food satisfaction, culinary quality and behavioural intention of tourists in Malaysia, but did not specifically focus on the image and satisfaction of tourists by measuring it as the attraction towards the visitation of the destination. Research on food in Kelantan concentrates more on the marketing of local cuisine (Hassan, 2008) which leads to the question of why visitors keep visiting the destination. Thus, this paper explains the effect of food image of Kelantan influencing the intentions to revisit the destination.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Food tourism

Food tourism can be defined as visiting primary and secondary food producers, restaurants, food festivals and specific locations to experience and taste the foods that belong to specific food production regions as a primary motivation factor for travel (Hall et al, 2001: 2003). Gastronomic tourism explains the bigger picture of food tourism. Gastronomic tourism can be defined as a form of tourism focuses on food and drink, gastronomic specialties, which consist of food and drinks particular to a country, a region, a restaurant or a particular cook (Santich, 2004). Santich (2004) also said that gastronomic tourism, or food and wine tourism, refers to travel and tourism motivations, at least in part, by the interest in particular food and drinks, eating and drinking. With that statement, it can be defined as 'travel to search for, enjoy, prepared food and drinks' that includes 'all memorable and unique gastronomic experience' (Wolf, 2002: Santich, 2004).

Food can be categorized under culture when someone chooses to eat his or her food of choice during the festival based on certain criteria such as food being a symbol of the economy, the value and nutritional digestion of gesture (Montanari, 2004). Choosing the best food or travelling for food is a normal practice that has been applied by humans since ancient times until now (Hanan & Aminuddin, 2012). According to DuRand and Heath (2006), food has been the symbol of the culture of a country and its citizens. This means that food can be the image of ethnicity in that particular place. For example, Tom Yam which refers to the Thai people living in Thailand is the main image of a Thai person and Thailand as a country.

Based on the definition given by Hall (2001), it can be said that food is the main contribution that creates the demand among the domestic and international tourists to visit a particular place (Hanan & Aminuddin, 2012). The great success of the food tourism initiative will be measured and influenced by the total population of internal and external factors, which may be different over time (Sharples, 2003). Therefore, measurement of the total amount of visitors visiting the place for food as the main attraction is influenced by motivational factors which are push and pull factors.

Food tourism can be the catalyst that promotes tourist destinations and can also create the image for the destination itself. Henderson (2009) described that food tourism is a core element and a possible competitive advantage in the branding of a destination or country by marketers. In order to see the contribution of food tourism towards the destination image of the destination, several factors should be highlighted. Atlas, Hanan and Wasilan (2012) stated that there are two processes of a destination image. These processes are the individuals who can have an image of a destination even if they have never visited that place and the separate of images of those who have visited and those who have not.

The image of the destination comes from the generated images in the minds of visitors based on previous visits or suggestions from third parties on the quality of food that had been served at the tourist destination. According to Quan and Wang (2004), tourists increasingly demand on the highest quality of services especially for quality food and hospitality. Thus, food providers should practice the international standards in order to entertain their target market to promote their food as a whole.

2.2 Destination image and food image

Destination image focuses more on the uniqueness and attraction of the destination and what the place can offer or provide for its visitors (Hanan & Aminudin, 2012). The uniqueness of a destination includes the nature and geographical condition of the place including the nature formation that influences the structure of mountain and beach areas. Destination image can be defined as a concept that combines the belief, ideas and impression that are held by the visitor and tourist towards the destination (Crompton, 1979; Hosany, Ekinici & Uysal, 2006). In other words, Hanan and Aminudin (2012) stated that the combination between belief, ideas and impression from tourists and visitors can affect the perception of tourists toward a destination.

The creation of image starts from the individual views on the destination or place which then leads into the next phase that is the transformation of views toward the perception of the image which influence behaviour that will occur during that process. Reynold (1965) stated that the image is created by the development of a mental concept based on a few impressions that are chosen from the flood of information. In this case of destination image, the floods of information are the marketing tools that information has been gathered including the opinion from friends and relatives on the destination. Echtner and Rithie (1991) stated that the image of the destination has been affected and modified based on the first information and experience faced during the actual visitation to the destination. In other words, the first impressions of the destination lead to the creation of the destination image of the destination.

Image theory by Beach and Mitchell (1987) has been proposed as the descriptive theory to measure or investigate the issues of how people make decisions, especially personal or individual decisions of more than repetitive importance are made personally, independently decision makers. The image theory by Beach and Mitchell

(1987) suggests 4 elements in measuring the image such as self (principles), trajectory (goals - strategic agenda of events & states), and action (plans and their component tactics) and projected (anticipated events & states). The existence of this theory answers the question on how people make conclusions based on the image that they received and translate it into action. Atlas, Hanan and Wasilan (2012) stated that there are two process of destination image which are of individuals who can have an image of a destination even if they have never visited that place and to separate the images of those individuals who have visited and those who have not.

Destination image cannot be the only measure when using the image theory but other supporting theories can be the basis of the purpose of the research. Examining the motivation leads towards the formation of the destination image using the push and pull elements in the motivation theory (Lopes, 2011). Kim, Holland and Han (2013) stated that most of the studies focus on the importance of tourists' motivation based on the element of psychological need (push motivation) and the attraction of the destination (pull motivation) in measuring the decision making among tourists visiting the destination. The elements of the destination image can be measured in the pull motivation due to it being one of the elements attracting tourists to visit the destination. The formation of image is based on two motivation factors which had been introduced by Lubbe (1998) and Lopes (2011). The requirement for a travel (push factor) and travel attraction (pull factor) are the motivation elements that lead to the destination image of the tourism destination. Based on the model of both scholars, Madden et al. (2016) suggested another model to measure the destination image which were the internal motivations of tourists (push factors), external motivations from destinations (pull factors), word of mouth from trusted sources and perceived risks of travel.

The image theory by Beach and Mitchell (1987) and other image formation theories have influenced the study on destination image and include the formation of food image among the public. Food is usually observed as one element of destination image (Govers & Go, 2003). It is shown that food plays a major role in promoting the culture of a tourist destination. In the case of Malaysia, the federal government agency (Tourism Malaysia) had launch the campaign of "Malaysia Truly Asia" to promote the image of Malaysia as a place with ethnic diversity.

Food image in relation to destinations has become one of the unique concepts in branding destinations with food being seen as part of the culture and people in the destinations themselves. Basic dimensions and components of food images need to be identified to gain a better understanding of the use of food images in destination marketing (Huang, 2009). In Malaysia, the research in food image seems very young and the information of the topic is particularly limited even though several researchers have produced research in this particular area such as Karim et al. (2010) and Chi et al. (2013). Chi et al. (2013) referred Malaysia as a place to find a variety of culinary heritages and food that have become an invaluable part of a tourists' experiences that may contribute to the tourism sector. However, it seems that the food image of Malaysia itself is not in

a stronger position in the eyes of the tourist when it comes to eco-tourism as compared to Thailand where their food image is more familiar in the eyes of people around the world. The research done in Thailand regarding Thai foods seems to be one of the factors that influence the positioning process of the food. A study by Lertputtarak (2012) on the food image of Thailand revealed that tourists know about the country’s food very well. The study, however, only focused on the general Thai foods without considering regional foods that are more valuable among tourists who are eager to search and travel for food.

Kelantan is famous for its distinctive cultural heritage, natural environments and unparalleled hospitality of the locals including the unique food that influence the tourism development in the state (Syahida & Zainal, 2014). Kelantan has been focused less, even though it has a wide variety of traditional heritage food that still sustains until now. The research on food image and food tourism seems to be ignored and considered unimportant by researchers. According to Ismail (2016), the image of Kelantan is still the eco-tourism destination even though the promotion has been done to promote and attract more people to visit Kelantan for the purpose of promoting cultural tourism including food tourism. The study by Syahida and Zainal (2014) is one example of food tourism research in Kelantan where the researchers focused on the marketing and satisfaction of the food in Kelantan but the findings lacked details in explaining the marketing factors influencing the tourist expectation where only one dimension had been the measure, with that measure being experiential marketing and tourist satisfaction relationship only. Muhammad and Chan (2011) study meanwhile focused on the perception, belief and values of authentic Malay, Kelantan among the visitors of the selected restaurants but not necessarily tourists themselves.

In measuring the food image of the destination, previous scholars used several elements to predict the best food image. Table 1 shows the researchers and the elements they used to measure the food image.

Table 1: Element of food image by previous researcher

Researcher	Elements of food image
Lertputtarak (2012)	Taste Nutrition Variety of choice Image of restaurant Culture influences
Wang (2015)	Image of cuisine Image of restaurant Image of food related activities
Leong et al., (2010)	Price Taste Service

	Location
	Hygiene
Karim et al., (2009)	Food and dining atmosphere Features of Malaysian food Core food value Malaysian food specialty Malaysian food uniqueness
Karim et al., (2011)	Quality and variety Authenticity
Lin (2006)	The value of food (dining experience, social and cultural experience, sensory quality and promise quality of food) The marker of food (as symbol of culture, as an indicator of society and as a reflection of natural environment Attributes of food service
Almli et al., (2011)	Quality of food Taste Hygiene and nutrition Environment

Influence of local culture seems to be significantly related in the formation of the food image of a destination. Ferrante (2014) stated that all people are consuming the food but the principles of motivating and satisfying appetite depend on the culture of that person. The taste of food comes from the perception of people consuming the food which the culture will play its role in measuring the tastiness of the food. For example, the use of chilies and hot spices in Southeast Asia create difficulties for Europeans to consume the food.

3 Methodology

This study is a quantitative research in nature. The sampling technique will be judgmental sampling thus tourists with Kelantan food experiences will be selected as the respondents based on the specific characteristics that the researcher want to investigate (Babin et al., 2012). From the sample, it is apparent that the population for the study will be the tourists who have completed their visits to the tourist destinations in Kelantan. The tourists should be able to give good responses on the elements based on their present and past visitation to Kelantan. Empirical analysis is proposed to confirm the research propositions.

4 Conclusion

Food image is not a new issue in academic research but several points need to be figured out to understand the perception of local and international tourists on the image of regional food. Unique regional foods can attract food lovers who crave and search new foods, with tourism being an attraction for them to try unique and authentic foods

served by restaurants or stalls in various food festivals. The use of word-of-mouth without scientific research does not accurately provide the exact picture of the demand from the tourist perspective. This conceptual paper throws the idea in measuring the perception of tourists on regional food that makes food image of the destination lead into successful tourism development. Once completed, this study may provide additional knowledge or literature that can be used by future researchers in the same research interest.

5 About the author

Hanif Hanan has a concentrated background in the tourism management field where he obtained his diploma, bachelor degree and master degree at Universiti Teknologi MARA. He is currently pursuing his doctorate in hospitality and tourism management while also working as a lecturer at the School of Maritime Business and Management, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. His research interest is more into measuring the tourism destination image and the influence of social media on tourist desire to travel.

Zuliah Ab Hamid has vast experience in the Tourism and Management industry for over 25 years. She has been living abroad for the past 15 years in countries such as France, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, and the United States. She has a Master Degree in Tourism Management and currently holds the position of senior lecturer at the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus. The author has several winning innovation awards related to tourism services and products as well.

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