Evaluation of **urban tourism** products: **Kuala Lumpur** as a destination of choice

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Abstract | Urban tourism has emerged as a significant and distinctive form of tourism, yet it has received a disproportionately small amount of attention in tourism research. Research on urban tourism is rarely conducted among Asian countries such as Malaysia. Therefore, this research attempts to evaluate and investigate the development of urban tourism products in the biggest urban area in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur (KL), using a strategic planning method, namely, the SWOT analysis. Findings of this study will have implications toward the future planning, development, and management of tourism products and facilities.

Keywords Urban tourism, Tourism product, SWOT analysis, Malaysia.

Resumo O turismo urbano surgiu como uma forma distinta e significativa de turismo; no entanto, pouca atenção lhe tem sido dedicada nos estudos desenvolvidos no âmbito do turismo, quando comparado com outras formas de turismo. De entre os poucos estudos realizados, raros são os conduzidos em países asiáticos como a Malásia. Este estudo pretende, portanto, analisar e avaliar o desenvolvimento de produtos de turismo urbano na maior zona urbana da Malásia, Kuala Lumpur (KL), através de um método planeamento estratégico: a análise SWOT. Espera-se que as conclusões deste estudo tenham implicações no planeamento, desenvolvimento e gestão futuros de produtos e equipamentos turísticos neste tipo de destinos.

Palavras-chave Turismo urbano, Produto Turístico, Análise SWOT, Malásia.

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1. Introduction

Cities exist in a complex political environment formed by economic changes, national policies, and the actions of other cities (Judd, 1995). "Today close to half of the world's population lives in urban centers, and the proportion is expected to continue to grow as an increasing amount of the world's economic activities concentrate in urban centers" (McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2003, p. 44), including tourism. Therefore, the number of metropolitan cities (cities with populations over ten million) is projected to increase by the year 2015 from the current twenty to 26 (Ivanovic, 2008). Two factors, namely, advanced telecommunications and efficient transportation and communication infrastructure, have been identified as major influences of globalization and large growth (McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2003). In addition, by profiting from the air industry development, the investment in infrastructure, and the investment in iconic buildings, cities nowadays have become a key driver of growth in the tourism industry (Bremner, 2007). Various functions and activities have also become concentrated in towns and cities, making cities a central place to service the needs of visitors, such as for meeting places, tourist gateways, accommodation, and transportation hubs (Hall & Page, 2002) that link the region with arterial highways, ferries, fast train systems, and air transportation (Page, 1994).

However, good tourism management in metropolitan areas is necessary because it can generate various benefits to residents and the conditions within the city. McGranahan and Satterthwaite (2003) claimed that little discussion has been done on the role of urban policies and urban management in meeting sustainable development goals. Using a few examples, they found that most global reports on sustainable development produced by the international nongovernmental organizations or agencies of the United Nations (UN) did not seriously consider

the role of urban policies and urban governance structures in implementing sustainable development goals. These studies often give little attention to the scale of unmet needs in urban areas.

At the same time, urban tourism has a significant correlation with sustainable urban development in terms of economic benefits including improving the quality of living environment and sustaining the urban area as a tourist destination. The current conditions of tourism should be continuously monitored to prevent and reduce the negative impact of tourism, and to ensure that metropolitan areas do not lose or damage what originally promotes tourism in the city (Sun, 2007). Therefore, sustaining the natural capital, the elements of the core attractors, and the supporting factors besides managing and maintaining the infrastructure is crucial to sustain the market and ensure economic competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). For these reasons, "a thorough analysis of the city as a product is essential to develop a successful marketing strategy to attract tourists" (Bonita, 2006).

Therefore, this research attempts to evaluate and investigate the development of urban tourism products in the biggest urban area in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur (KL), using a strategic planning method, namely, the SWOT analysis.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of urban tourism

According to Edwards, Griffin and Hayllar (2008) urban can be defined as a place that possesses the following elements: a strong and broad economic base serviced from multiple cores for major business and professional activities, a significant public transport network that acts as a gateway to other areas, a significant population with a workforce that commutes to and from the multiple cores, and

long-term planned development. "This functional and physical environment is characterized by the perception that the urban landscape is a web in which many individuals and groups have social, cultural, political, and economic relationships" (Edwards et al. 2008, p. 1036).

According to Law (1992, p. 599), urban tourism is "the phenomenon of tourism in older industrial (or non-tourist) cities". Two years later, Law (1994, p. 14) stated that "urban tourism is a complex of activities which are interlinked in a particular milieu and enable cities to attract visitors". However, the definition is not totally based on visits to wellknown urban destinations such as Paris, London, and New York (Ivanovic, 2008). On the other hand. urban tourism as defined by Voultsaki (2000, p. 2) is a "tourism activity developed in an urban centre with the appropriate tourism infrastructure and hyper-structure, and natural, historical, and cultural elements that render it an attraction pole for tourists by supplying the possibility for production and consumption of products and services". In general, urban can be defined as typically designated areas with a certain population size or population density. In 2005, the UN Statistics Division compiled various definitions of 'urban' from each country in the world (Table 1)

2.2. Demand and supply of urban tourism

According to Ashworth (1989), tourism supply and demand are directly related with other urban facilities and activities. The demand for urban tourism can be evaluated through the identification of tourist profiles, motivation factors, and preferred activities (Sharpley, 2006). Focusing on European cities, Burtenshaw, Bateman and Ashworth (1991) mentioned that the functional areas within tourists' city are related to the demand side (tourists) and supply side of resources for urban facilities and services. Consumer demand can be divided into city residents, city-region residents, tourists (pleasure visitors), conference visitors, and people working in the city.

Usually, competition of demand for urban tourism development occurs at the planning stage, particularly for prime areas such as hotels, offices,

Table 1 | Definition of urban tourism.

N°	Author	Definition
1	Ashworth (1989)	"Urban tourism is not merely tourist activities that occur in cities. It is both a particular sort of tourism as well as an integral, traditional and proper part of urban life." (p. 50).
2	Law (1992)	"The phenomenon of tourism in older industrial (or non-tourist) cities has been termed urban tourism." (p. 599).
3	Law (1994)	"Urban tourism is a complex of activities which are interlinked in a particular milieu and enable cities to attract visitors." (p. 14).
4	Vighetti (1994, cited by European Commission, 2000)	"A broad definition suggests that urban tourism is the set of tourist resources or activities located in towns and cities and offered to visitors from elsewhere." (p. 21).
5	Voultsaki (2000)	"Tourism activity developed in an urban center which has the appropriate tourism infrastructure and hyper-structure and those natural, historical and cultural elements that render it an attraction pole for tourists, by supplying the possibility for production and consumption of products and services." (p. 2).
6	Law (2002)	Tourism in urban areas.
7	Ashworth (2009)	"The overlap area between a numbers of adjectival tourisms." (p. 208).

Source: Own construction

retail, residential developments, and so on (Inskeep, 1991). In-depth analysis from various perspectives – ecological, political, social, cultural, and other factors in external and internal environments – is therefore required (Jamieson, 2002). However, as cities and towns are multifunctional and purposes of visit vary, analyzing the demand of urban tourism is difficult (Sharpley, 2006). Moreover, identifying the range of city dimensions with tourism potential is one of the great challenges in urban tourism development (Jamieson, 2002). Thus, a comprehensive urban tourism plan should be prepared to achieve maximum integration of tourism development and rational decision regarding any land use conflict (Inskeep, 1991). The procedure should begin with survey, land use mapping, evaluation of primary and secondary tourist attractions, market analysis, and identification of necessary improvements (Inskeep, 1991).

Crouch and Ritchie (2006) classified tourism supply components into four categories: natural resources and environment, built environment, operating sector, spirit of hospitality, and cultural resources. In particular, the supply of urban tourism can be classified into three main elements: primary, secondary, and additional (Sharpley, 2006). The primary element covers a wide range of cultural, sports, and amusement facilities besides leisure settings such as physical and socio-cultural characteristics. The secondary element includes market, shopping, hotel, and catering facilities. The additional element consists of accessibility, parking facilities, information services, and other tourist facilities (Sharpley, 2006).

Goeldner and Ritchie (2006) further claimed that the quality and quantity of supply components are critical factors in determining the success of tourism. Therefore, the supply side of tourism requires a deep understanding of the demand, which, in turn, requires an understanding of tourists' characteristics to develop new tourist areas inside cities and focus on how to invest in new attractions to enhance cities and benefit visitors (Maitland, 2007). Although demand and supply are interrelated with the urban tourism product, a lack of discussion still persists about tourists specifically, and what they seek, enjoy, and use in visiting the city (Maitland & Newman, 2004). Many tourist cities both large and small fail to understand a few elements such as the reasons of visit, the links between various motivations. and the deeper reasons that tourists are attracted to the cities (Hall & Page, 2002), elements which are significantly important in the evaluation of the demand and supply of urban tourism (Sharpley, 2006: Suh & McAvov. 2003).

2.3. Urban tourism product

Cities offer substantial amounts of space to be consumed by tourists who visit urban destinations (Gospodini, 2001). Besides serving as gateways and staging areas to a region or country, cities like Paris, London, and Tokyo offer a wide range of attractions (Inskeep, 1991). A city can be considered as having a core product (Bonita, 2006) and different products for its visitors, including a variety of activities and experiences (England Research, 2005) like museums, theaters, historic places, architecture, and shopping (Inskeep, 1991; Gospodini, 2001). Meanwhile, as cited from Valdez (2000), the urban tourist products as defined by Jansen-Verbeke (1988) are historic buildings, urban landscapes, museums and art galleries, theaters, sports, and events. She classified the elements of urban tourism as 'primary elements' such as cultural facilities, physical characteristics, sports and amusement facilities, and socio-cultural features; 'secondary elements' such as hotel and catering facilities and markets; and 'additional elements' including accessibility, parking, information offices, signposts guides, maps, and others (Figure 1).

However, a city also contains physical goods such as buildings (with their architecture), parks, streets, monuments, and even transportation systems. These physical goods will be an important component in developing the image of the city, whether as a

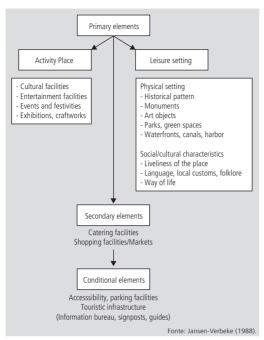


Figura 1 Urban tourism and leisure settings.

historical, traditional, or modern city. Being located by a river, ocean, or mountain adds to the value of experiencing the city. "The cultural facilities and religious buildings are also an important component of the physical product" (Bonita, 2006, p. 10).

2.4. Urban tourism in Malaysia

The tourism industry in Malaysia has been traditionally concentrated and promoted toward international markets since its infancy stage in the 1960s (Mohamed, 2005). Malaysia is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the ASEAN region as well. Despite the global economic slowdown, Malaysia received around 24.6 million international tourists in 2010. Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand are important sources of visitors for the country. Malaysia has never had a deliberate urban development strategy to manage urban growth. Within this context, a National Urbanisation Policy was initiated in the early 1980s (Cho, 1980). In Malaysia, only three conurbations (KL, Penang, and

Johor Bahru) are expected to compete against other international city regions such as Shanghai, Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Singapore, Bangkok, and so on (Department of Town and Country Planning, 2000).

In general, cities and towns in Malaysia have been developed based on their function, potential, and special features, which can be classified into five categories: Border Town, Tourism Town, Special Role Center, Special Industrial Center, and Transportation and Communication Node (Department of Town and Country Planning, 2000, 2006). Towns with special features shall also be identified and developed accordingly by concentrating on different packages of tourist products to maximize their resource and location advantages, besides being supported with the appropriate infrastructure (Department of Town and Country Planning, 2000). As Wong (2008) stated, a city should differentiate itself from its competing destinations through branding. For example, a tourist can easily memorize the images of Paris through the Eiffel Tower, New York City with Times Square, Wall Street, and the Empire State Building, and so on (Judd, 1995).

As the capital city of Malaysia, KL is home to a population of over 1.3 million and is by far the largest city in Malaysia. KL is designated as an international shopping hub to maximize the economic benefits as well as the number of tourists and excursionists. Parks and recreational facilities have also been promoted to attract tourists from the recreational and leisure segments. Moreover, the contribution of Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) is also used to promote KL as the primary meeting and event site in the country (Department of Town and Country Planning, 2000). The number of international arrivals has increased since the execution of the first campaign promoting Malaysia globally in 1990, a trend which shows the importance of marketing and promotion in tourism development. However, comprehensive marketing and promotions should begin with creating a strong image of the tourist destination, which will be a platform to attract more tourists and sustain the area as a tourist destination.

3. Method

Data collected in this study is a combination of primary data and secondary data. The secondary data were obtained from books, journals, magazines, and published materials or reports from authorized agencies and departments like Tourism Malaysia, Local Authority, Department of Statistics, and Town and Country Planning Department. The primary data were collected through onsite observation and evaluation.

3.1. Observation

This study selected the Urban Tourism System in the KL city center as the most developed and important example of an urban tourism area in Malaysia to evaluate the development of urban tourism in Malaysia. Observation and documentary reviews were adopted to capture and analyze the available data. The assessment of tourism products in KL covers major tourist areas such as the Golden Triangle of Kuala Lumpur, KLCC, Jalan Tun Razak, and a few satellite cities like Putrajaya, Cyberjaya, and Petaling Jaya. The assessment of urban tourism products was divided into two categories, the core product and the supporting product, in order to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of tourism development in KL. The core products consist of tourist attractions, historical sites, entertainment venues, sports, and shopping hubs. Meanwhile, the supporting product consists of three major elements: transportation, restaurants, and lodging.

4. Results

4.1. Key SWOT findings

The primary finding of this study discusses the results of the SWOT analysis on the evaluation of

urban tourism in the KL city center. The SWOT analysis highlights the major constraints to development, and identifies key stages for future delivery and suitable prospects where KL can achieve a competitive advantage. A summary of the SWOT analysis is given below (Tables 2 and 3).

KL Structure Plan 2020 outlined policies and proposals for the development of this city toward achieving a World Class City status. The Plan includes the demand and supply of tourism on land development, urban design, tourist infrastructure, facilities, and so on. However, an inventory of city tourist resources including its potential should be conducted first before planning tourist strategies (André Romero & Artís Ortuño, 1998). As suggested by Inskeep (1991), a comprehensive urban tourism plan should begin with a survey, land use mapping, evaluation of tourist attraction, market analysis, and identification of necessary improvements. As a result, this analysis has been conducted toward enhancing tourism development in KL, focusing on the tourism product.

4.1.1. SWOT of core product

i) Tourist attraction: KL has diversified tourism products and attractions such as skyscrapers, landmarks, museums, art galleries, memorials, theme parks, and many more. It has thus become a great destination for family vacations, business, education, leisure activities, and others. The entrance fee for each attraction is also reasonable. In addition, proactive event marketing strategies contribute in promoting KL as a great urban destination to organize worldclass events.

A different market segment in KL brings opportunities for various tourism investors and operators to do their business. For example, food operators can sell a variety of food products from various parts of the world to cater to both international and domestic demands. Although KL has a variety of attractions, most of them are

quite similar to other urban destinations. Besides, previous incidents such as the flash flood after a heavy downpour completely disrupted the image of KL as a world-class city. The flash flood trapped thousands of KL citizens and tourists in massive traffic congestions and necessitated a major cleanup. The issues of safety, crime, cleanliness, and foreign workers also contributed to downgrading the city image. For instance, piles of garbage consisting of plastics, cans, food containers, or wrappers were scattered by visitors and locals or revellers after National Day, Christmas, or New Year celebrations especially at Independent Square and other streets.

- ii) Historical sites and buildings: KL has many valuable buildings showcasing various impressive feats of architecture, such as Moorish, Moghul, and Tudor, and most of them are well preserved by a heritage management authority. Among the well-known historical buildings in KL are the Sultan Abdul Samad Building, Masjid Jamek, and KL Railway Station. Although many old buildings are not listed as historical sites or buildings, they have a certain value that should be preserved and utilized accordingly. However, development pressure has brought in urban renewal projects that resulted in the demolition of valuable old buildings. Uncontrolled demolition of historical or valuable old buildings will lead to the loss of the KL's identity.
- iii) Entertainment: The city has a variety of entertainment venues to cater to both day and nightlife activities, and most of them are well equipped with modern facilities. These venues include trendy nightclubs, bars, lounges, and chic restaurants. Cultural entertainment such as cultural dance performances should be promoted at those areas for added identity. Sex tourism and serious crime at nightclubs or discos, like gangsterism, will create a negative image of KL among tourists.

- iv) Sports: Many venues for indoor and outdoor sports are available within and surrounding the city center, such as KL Tower, Sunway Lagoon, Bukit Jalil Sports Complex, Sepang International Circuit, and others. Cycling and jogging at two lake gardens are relaxing sport activities for tourists. Moreover, golfing is another sport that can be done by international tourists while visiting KL. However, promotion of sports activities in KL is relatively rare in tourism brochures or websites.
- v) Shopping: KL is also known as a shopping paradise with the existence of world-class and exclusive shopping malls and business outlets. Community-based shopping areas also exist with Chinese, Malay, and Indian goods. In addition, a few projects have been done to upgrade and improve the old shopping areas by installing roofs and pavements. The provision of cover in between the old shops enables the shoppers to shop well protected from the weather. However, the old shops are well hidden from the shoppers due to the permanent stalls built in front of old buildings. The essence of shopping in an open area is lost because the wind that can naturally cool the old shops is blocked by those permanent stalls.

4.1.2. SWOT of supporting products

i) Transportation: In general, the road and rail networks in KL are integrated with each other through the provision of highways as well as rail services such as Light Rapid Train, Express Rail Link, KTM commuter, monorail, and public buses. The route covers many places of attractions throughout the city. In addition, the exclusive bus for tourists is available for a city tour. However, the use of public buses and trains is not very convenient for tourists during peak hours, starting from 7 am to 9 am and 5 pm until 8 pm. At these times, the use of public and private transport is very high among KL citizens.

Table 2 | Evaluation of core product in Kuala Lumpur city centre

Core product	S	W	0	Т
Tourist attraction	Diversify of tourism products and attractions Great destination for family vacation, business activities, education and so on. World class events/ Proactive events strategy and marketing	Relatively similar product with other urban destinations Cleanliness after major events / celebration in KL is very bad	Different market segment in Kuala Lumpur brings opportunities for various tourism investors, operators	Flash Flood Crime at tourist attraction The existence of inappropriate hawker locations
Historical sites	Most of the heritage buildings are well preserved Existence of heritage management authority to preserve the historical buildings	Under utilize of historical buildings.	Reuse of historical buildings for various activities including tourism	Demolition of old buildings due to development pressure
Entertainment venues	Variety entertainment venues for day and nightlife activities, party or celebrations	Rubbish left by revelers after party/ celebration	Local culture or dance performance should be promoted at entertainment venues	Crime at night clubs, discos etc Sex tourism, gangsterism
Sports (leisure)	Indoor and outdoor sports available within and surrounding city centre	Less promotion on sports activities on tourism brochure or websites	Many sports activities can be done and promoted in few places of KL	Less consideration on safety elements
Shopping	Upgrading projects at old shopping area like Petaling Street and Masjid India	Upgrading projects without considering the nature of the area	KL fashion week, Shoe Festival, Citrawarna, Floral Festival	Competition with foreign operators

Source: Own construction.

Meanwhile, the occurrence of flash floods after heavy downpours in KL worsens the situation. The location of the intercity bus terminal in the city center disrupts traffic movement especially during peak hours. The noise production from cars and buses in the city center is also very high at that time. In comparison, the production of noise in other urban destinations in the world is lower and more manageable.

Furthermore, tourists prefer to move around by walking or riding a train or taxi instead of the Intra (inner) city bus, which is highly occupied by local people. Unauthorized taxi or bus operations (especially express buses) will also give a bad experience or impression among international tourists especially for first-timers. Tourists are charged a higher price, or worse, be

cheated with an invalid ticket. In addition, using a bicycle in the city center is not safe because no bicycle lane is provided. The aggressive driving behavior among drivers and motorists in KL also threatens not only pedestrians but also other road users. However, few measures have been executed to control and manage the traffic in KL. These measures include the one-way street system, reversible lanes to increase lane capacity during morning peak hours, exclusive bus or taxi lanes, penalties for illegal on-street parking, and regulations controlling heavyvehicle entry into the city center during peak hours (KL Structure Plan 2020). Traffic signage, barriers, pavement line marking, and pedestrian bridges are supplementary measures for road safety. Moreover, the introduction of road pricing

- as practiced in Singapore will limit the number of vehicles in the city center and hopefully reduce traffic congestion, resulting in smoother traffic flow. This change will help reduce carbon emission and create a healthy environment for all.
- ii) Restaurants: KL also offers a unique dining experience, with a variety of high-quality cuisine from all over the world easily found. The existence of certification for Halal outlets given by the Malaysian Authority is also an advantage that attracts more Muslim tourists all over the world to come to Malavsia. Nevertheless, a clearly identifiable dining area in the city center is still required (KL Structure Plan 2020). Most marketing and promotion of restaurants in KL stand alone on an individual basis. Thus, a comprehensive website on the gastronomy in KL should be developed to assist tourists in fulfilling their needs and tastes. Moreover, the existence of inappropriate hawker locations with poorly designed stalls, inadequate basic amenities,
- poor management, and lack of enforcement gives a negative image to the city as a whole (Henderson in Poh & Birchenough, 2000). Dirty restaurants or hawker stalls reflect the dirty and low-quality of living among locals and an unhealthy image of KL as an urban destination. Finally, the use of plastic for food packaging among the majority of food operators especially hawkers should be replaced with the use of better packaging, similar to the practice of other appropriate food operators.
- iii) Lodging: The emerging sectors of the economy, including MICE, education, and health, are significant for the development of hotels in the city. Delegates and business operators prefer to stay in highly rated hotels equipped with various facilities like a fitness center, spa treatment, and others. Meanwhile, backpackers or tourists who want to stay longer in KL can choose either budget hotels or serviced apartments. However, many prostitution activities take place in budget

Table 3 | Evaluation of supporting product in Kuala Lumpur city centre.

Supporting product	S	W	0	Т
Transportation	Easy accessibility Integrated public transportation system (Availability of rail, road and air based transports) Exclusive bus for tourist is available	Air, noise pollution No bicycle lane City tour during peak hours is not convenient as travel demand is very high during the time	Effective measures to control and manage the traffic in KL To introduce road pricing system to control the numbers of private vehicles in city centre	Aggressive driving behaviour Unauthorized taxi or bus operations Improper prevention to reduce carbon emission would create a unhealthy environment for all
Restaurants	Variety of restaurants and dining areas The information are available online Certification for Halal outlets	A lack of a clearly identifiable dining and entertainment area Stand alone or individual based marketing &promotion	To develop a comprehensive website on gastronomy	Dirty restaurants or hawker stalls The use of plastics for food packaging
Lodging	Diversify of accommodation (high rating hotels to budget hotels) Interesting package for various activities (honeymoon, wedding, conference, etc)	Short average length of stay of tourists (KLSP)	Online reservation and effective marketing and promotion would increase the occupancy rate MM2H program	Prostitution and crimes in budget hotels

Source: Own construction.

lodging, which is illegal in Malaysia. Prostitutes can also be found in major tourist places or near budget hotels at night. The prostitutes might disturb the hotel guests by knocking on their door to offer their services. Although some actions and programs have been implemented to prevent this activity, the operation now feigns legitimacy under other business operations, especially spas, body massage, or karaoke outlets.

contribution of MICE also actively promotes KL as the primary venue for international delegates. This move is in line with the national plan to develop KL as a world-class city. Gazetted as one of the major conurbations in Malaysia, KL is expected to compete with other international city regions like Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, and others (Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005).

5. Conclusion

The results of this study provide a picture of urban tourism products in KL, the most urbanized tourist destination in Malaysia. The result indicates that KL has enduring tourism potential, which should be developed to shape the basis of its distinctive nature as a tourist destination. Exceptional opportunities are also present to classify challenges that need to be tackled and conquered to guarantee the powerful development of urban tourism areas in the country. KL has a growing reputation as an international destination. However, the city should implement an innovative market, infrastructure, product, people, and information technology development vision and approach to compete effectively against other destinations. This result provides several implications for the urban tourism areas in Malaysia. The results offer a basis for improving the understanding and strength of urban tourism development to provide some justification for tourism development policy. The results also help in understanding the ability of the country to be a tourism generator and to exert effort in attracting tourists to urban areas within the country.

This study identified KL as the top destination among the international tourist destinations in Malaysia. High accessibility and an efficient transportation system were found to be the keys to encourage multicity trips among international tourists and to lengthen their stay in Malaysia. The

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