



# **TOURISM IN MALAYSIA:**

**AN EMPIRICAL STUDY  
ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

**A.H.M. Zehadul Karim**

As a pluralistic nation, Malaysia consists of diverse ethnic groups of people with various cultures that integrate harmonious and peaceful living in a politically stable and wonderfully rich eco-environmental setting. Due to such unique features, people from abroad become largely attracted to this land and thus, frequently arrive here as visitors and tourists. There are tremendous amounts of attraction for the visitors and tourists where people from various backgrounds arrive to stay here temporarily, generating around RM65 billion foreign earnings adding to its national coffer every year. Nevertheless, tourism also causes a major negative effect in which the local culture may be assimilated into the alien norms and behaviours through the continuous process of acculturation. Due to day-to-day interactions with the tourists and visitors, many socio-cultural impacts have affected local values which contextually require to be redefined. This book analyses critically the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in Malaysia, having collected both qualitative and quantitative data at the empirical level of investigation.



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PARTRIDGE

ISBN 978-1-4828-7996-4



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ISBN:           Softcover               978-1-4828-7996-4  
                  eBook                         978-1-4828-7995-7

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## **Acknowledgement And The Prologue**

Being strategically located at the gateway of global routes with an impressive eco-environmental setting, Malaysia attracts a huge number of tourists and visitors every year from abroad who arrive in this country most frequently with modest expectations and aspirations. For that reason, tourism has been identified as one of the largest service-oriented industry in Malaysia, contributing to at least 10% of the country's GDP and providing employment to millions of people. In this context, if we consider tourism positively it can be said to be a good source of income, creating job opportunities for a huge number of local people and positioning them as economically competent individuals in the community. Nevertheless, tourism may also cause a negative effect in which the local culture may be assimilated into the alien norms and behaviours through a continuous process of acculturation. It is also learned that due to day-to-day interactions with the tourists and visitors, there occurs tremendous socio-cultural impact on local values which contextually requires to be redefined. Furthermore, from the ecological perspective, tourism accelerates expansion of the urban settlement causing damages to the natural eco-system by replacing the natural habitats with pavement and unprecedented urban settlement. From this perspective, this research is designed to examine people's perceptions and feelings about the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in Malaysia by conducting an empirical research in Klang Valley, adjoining Kuala Lumpur city.

This book is the outcome of a concerted research effort which has been conducted on tourism in Klang Valley, Malaysia, between 2012-2014 to proliferate its empirical viewpoints in regard to the impacts of tourism in the community. As a product of group research, this volume owes much to its co-researchers and colleagues in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) who have remained committed to this research in all phases. I owe a great debt to these colleagues of mine and other faculty and staff members who have been supportive in various ways to complete this empirical research and finally get it published in the form of a book.

If we carefully look at the shelves in the library, it is distinctively clear that there has been numerous books and literatures which have been published on tourism since the beginning of the 1960s. Most of these remarkable books and literatures on tourism (e.g., Theobald, 1994; Tisdell, 2004) are compiled as edited volumes providing us with valuable theoretical basis and framework on the subject, but many of these however, do not consider focusing on the empirical aspects of tourism. While there is general consensus that many of these books on tourism contain very valuable articles, there is no denying the fact that the empirical aspect of the issues remains fully ignored. Although there has been a valuable addition by Tisdell who in fact, compiled a number of articles, of which many have emphasized on tourism from the empiricist viewpoint, most of them however, have not elaborated their discussion from a holistic perspective. As a matter of fact, being inspired by Tisdell and a few of his collaborative researchers, we venture to write this book on tourism in the Malaysian context. With the paucity of empirical investigation, this book is an introduction to assess the views of community people in the Klang Valley areas of Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

One article from this research was presented at an international conference in Tokyo (IUAES 2014) and another has been published in *South Asian Anthropologist* (Serials Publications) in 2014. These two brief articles were later elaborated and expanded to be included as part of chapters in this book. It must be admitted here that in no way are these the same writings; rather, they are expanded, modified and rewritten for inclusion into this book. Apart from this, we have also given proper references of those writings so as to make it clear and evidential. The article published in the *South Asian Anthropologist* (see Karim *et al.*, 2014) also received an IRRIE award in 2015 for its credibility and recognition of merit from International Islamic University Malaysia for which we are grateful to the Research Management Centre (RMC) of IIUM and the university itself.

When people move from one place to another with a desire to get some recreation, this movement then may be regarded as part of tourism<sup>1</sup>. Malaysia is rich with natural resources which attract many tourists to come and view its beauty. Being strategically located at the gateway of global routes with an impressive eco-environmental setting, Malaysia attracts a huge number of tourists and visitors from abroad who arrive in this country most frequently with certain expectations and aspirations. For that reason, tourism has been identified as one of the largest service-oriented industries in Malaysia, contributing to at least 10% of the country's GDP and providing employment to millions of people. There was about 16.43 million tourists arrived in Malaysia by the year 2005, adding an amount of 32 billion ringgit in the national coffers, principally through foreign earnings which sharply increased to 65 billion in 2013 with the increase of 25.72 billion foreign tourists visiting the country (see Table 1, p-10). In this context, if we consider tourism positively, it can be said to be a good source of income, creating job opportunities for a huge number of locals and positioning them as economically competitive individuals in the community. Nevertheless, tourism may also cause a negative effect in which the local culture may be influenced and the alien norms and behaviours assimilated into it through a continuous process of acculturation. Russel (2003), for that reason, aptly mentioned that tourists may come and go but their presence may have some permanent impact of it which might bring some irreparable loss to the nation from socio-cultural and environmental points of views. It is also learned that due to day-to-day interactions with tourists and visitors, there occurs tremendous socio-cultural impact on local values which contextually requires to be redefined. Furthermore, from an ecological perspective, tourism accelerates expansion of the urban settlements causing damages to the natural eco-system by replacing the natural habitats with pavement and unprecedented urban settlements. From this perspective, this research is designed to examine people's perceptions and feelings about the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in Malaysia through an empirical investigation of Klang Valley, adjoining Kuala Lumpur City.

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