

MALAYSIA AS A CULINARY TOURISM DESTINATION: INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' PERSPECTIVE

M. Shahrim Ab. Karim, Bee-Lia Chua
Department of Food Service and Management
Faculty of Food Science and Technology
University Putra Malaysia
E-mail: shahrimkarim2@gmail.com

And

Hamdin Salleh
Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Malaysia
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine Malaysia's current food image and food attribute satisfaction from international tourists' points of view and subsequently assess their overall satisfaction with the eating experience and behavioral intention. The results indicated that Malaysia possesses clear images of 'core food value', 'Malaysian food specialty', and 'Malaysian food uniqueness' but is rather unclear on the images of 'food and dining atmosphere' and 'features of Malaysian food'. Tourists' satisfaction with 'quality and value of food' and 'accessibility convenience' were relatively higher than 'dining atmosphere' and 'culinary tourism products'. Regression analyses revealed that food images and food attributes' satisfaction significantly predicted tourists' overall satisfaction, and the overall satisfaction revealed a significant relationship with tourists' behavioral intentions. Implications for managers who are involved in food tourism are posited.

Keywords: Food image; Food attribute satisfaction; Overall satisfaction; Behavioral intention; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is becoming one of the top tourist destinations in the world. Several decades of sustained economic growth and political stability have made it one of the most buoyant and wealthy countries in the region. The World Tourism Organization reported that Malaysian tourist arrivals had grown at a rate double the world average between 1995 and 2002 (WTO, 2002). In 2002 the WTO ranked Malaysia in the World's Top Fifteen Destinations. The tourism industry has become a major economic contributor to its economy and in 2002 Malaysia's earned

US\$6.8 billion from international tourism receipts (WTO 2003). Additionally, the tourist receipts have doubled in just one decade from 10 million to 20 million. Therefore, it is crucial to continue to promote and strengthen Malaysia's image as a travel destination.

Malaysia's Culinary Tourism

A unique nation in its own right, Malaysia is rich in culture and nature. With its diverse population and natural scenery, Malaysia is not only offering cultural attractions, but also a wide variety of beaches, mountain parks, and tropical rain forests. In addition, easy accessibility and the warm tropical climate make Malaysia a premier destination. Most importantly, Malaysia's diverse society comprises three main ethnicities: Malay, Chinese and Indians and many other ethnicities/races (the indigenous people) that live mainly in rural areas of the country, especially in the Borneo part of Malaysia. All of the races in Malaysia live in harmony, bringing their own unique identity to showcase Malaysia internationally. Owing to its ethnical diversity, Malaysia is also a melting pot of various culinary heritages that have become an invaluable part of a tourist experience that may contribute to the tourism sector. It also has the potential to entice international travellers seeking culinary pleasures.

Gastronomy or culinary tourism refers to a visit or travel that is motivated by an interest in food and drink. Thus, the main motivations for people to travel are to experience and taste the food and drink that can provide a lasting memory in their lifetime (Wolf, 2002). According to Wolf, in general, travellers spend more money when they are away from home. However, culinary travellers would look for a unique and different experience during their trip (Richards, 2002). Likewise, as culinary tourism grows, more food related products such as food and wine routes, literature on food and travel, and travel packages related to food will emerge as it becomes an essential experience for travellers (Wolf, 2002). Additionally, culinary tourism is not only associated with eating and drinking, but also with events ranging from food festivals to farm visits (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2002).

The distinctiveness of Malaysian food could be an opportunity for Malaysia to become a culinary tourism destination in Asia. However, a fundamental question remains puzzling: every tourist who comes to Malaysia will have to eat and possibly try the local foods, consequently, how do they view and evaluate Malaysian food and what are their behavioral intentions? Specific information about Malaysia's culinary offerings is important, however, tourists' comments and feedback are essential as well (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Previous studies elicited that image could influence tourists' repeat visitation (Rittichainuwant, Qu, and Brown, 2001) and willingness to recommend (Bigné, Sánchez, and Sánchez, 2001; Chen and Tsai, 2007). Empirical studies on tourism and gastronomy have been carried out comprehensively in other countries (Fox, 2007; Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000; Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Okumus, Okumus, and McKercher,

2007; Ryu and Jang, 2006); however, in Malaysia, this particular issue is taken for granted and not much attention has been given to it.

In other words, food tourism in Malaysia is rather unclear and uncommon (Mohamed, 1994) compared to that in its neighbors especially Thailand and Singapore. The linking of food and tourism is common among other countries such as Hong Kong as people travel there especially for gastronomy reasons, possibly to try dim sum or other Cantonese specialities. Similarly, when Tom Yam is mentioned, people certainly link this classical soup to Thailand. Malaysian food is expected to provide the identity and perhaps to reflect the culture of the nation, as a way to attract tourists and influence their subsequent evaluation and future intention (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Indeed, the investigation into perceived food image and satisfaction is crucial to explore the behaviour of the tourists and perhaps aid with food marketing aspects. To fill the gap in the tourism literature, this study was designed to:

1. Identify the underlying dimensions of Malaysian food images.
2. Ascertain the relationship between tourists' perceptions of images of Malaysian food and overall satisfaction with the food experience in Malaysia.
3. Determine the relationship between tourists' evaluation of food attribute satisfaction and overall satisfaction with the food experience in Malaysia.
4. Assess the relationship between tourists' overall satisfaction with the food experience and behavioral intentions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design. A questionnaire was developed for this study and comprises five sections. The first sections were designed to measure food images with 19 attributes developed based on past literature on destination image, and the attributes were modified to suit the context of this study. The respondents were asked to rate on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The second section was aimed at measuring food attribute satisfaction with 18 attributes created. Here again respondents were to rate the items on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely dissatisfied) to 5 (completely satisfied). The third section requested the respondents' overall satisfaction with the food experiences, which was measured by a single-item asking: "How satisfied were you with the food experience in Malaysia?" Respondents were to tick the overall satisfaction on five-point scale scores for a third time, 1 (completely dissatisfied) to 5 (completely satisfied). A number of tourism studies used a single-item measuring overall satisfaction (Bigné et al., 2001; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Chi

and Qu, 2008; Nield, Kozak, and LeGrys, 2000) and it has proven reliable. The fourth section was to analyze tourists' behavioral intentions pertaining to 8 items adapted from González, Comesaña, and Brea's (2007) study, by using a five-point Likert scale. Finally, in section 5, the respondents' demographic profiles were asked for.

A pilot test, using 70 tourists at KLIA was conducted to ensure the reliability of the scales. Several modifications were made based on the feedback from the pilot test. Before the questionnaire was finalized, several tourism experts and two faculty members further reviewed the questionnaire and small revisions in wording were made based on their suggestions.

The target population for this study was tourists who were departing Malaysia at the time of the survey. The respondents were selected by applying convenience sampling. A total of 278 tourists were chosen at the departure hall and the satellite building at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in December 2007. To avoid selection biases, the survey was administered in the morning, afternoon, evening, and night continuously during the survey period.

An exploratory factor analysis was utilized to determine the food image and food attribute satisfaction. The relationship of Malaysian food images and overall satisfaction with the food experience in Malaysia was empirically tested by a multiple regression analysis, as well as the relationship between satisfaction with Malaysian food attributes and overall satisfaction. On the other hand, the relationship between overall satisfaction and behavioral intentions was investigated using a simple linear regression analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Profiles

A total of 278 questionnaires were distributed at the airport, of which 245 usable questionnaires were obtained, resulting in a response rate of 88.13%. 33 questionnaires were unusable for data analysis due to incomplete information. Table 1 depicts the respondents' demographic profiles. There were 68.6% male and 30.2% female respondents. The majority of the respondents were in the age group of 21-35 (44.5%). Approximately 43.3% of the respondents held professional positions and a large proportion of respondents originated from Asia (40.0%). Almost 23 % of the respondents stayed in Malaysia for 3 - 5 days and 20.4% for one week. Holiday/pleasure was chosen as the main purpose for visiting Malaysia with 40.4%. During the trip to Malaysia, more than half of the respondents (64.9%) indicated that they had tried Malaysian food before, while 34.7% responded that it was their first time tasting Malaysian food. A great majority of the respondents (82.0%) agreed that they enjoyed eating Malaysian foods.

Table 1: Respondents' demographic profiles

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	168	68.6
Female	74	30.2
Total	242	98.8
Missing	3	1.2
Total	245	100.0
Age		
Under 21	24	9.8
21-35	109	44.5
36-50	64	26.1
51-65	43	17.6
Over 65	4	1.6
Total	244	99.6
Missing	1	0.4
Total	245	100.0
Occupation		
Professional	106	43.3
Managerial	37	15.1
Production/clerical	7	2.9
Technical/sales	15	6.1
Self-employed	19	7.8
Housewives	4	1.6
Students	44	18.0
Unemployed/retired	7	2.9
Others	5	2.0
Total	244	99.6
Missing	1	0.4
Total	245	100.0
Region of Residence		
Asia	98	40.0
Australia	62	25.3
America	18	7.3
Africa	6	2.4
Europe	54	22.0
Total	238	97.1
Missing	7	2.9
Total	245	100.0
Length of Stay in Malaysia		
Less than 1 day	39	15.9
1-2 days	29	11.8

3-5 days	56	22.9
1 week	50	20.4
About 2 weeks	18	7.3
About 3 weeks	8	3.3
About 1 month	9	3.7
More than 1 month	35	14.3
Total	244	99.6
Missing	1	0.4
Total	245	100.0

Main Purpose for Visiting Malaysia

Holiday/pleasure	99	40.4
Business/meeting	57	23.3
Convention/exhibition	8	3.3
Visiting friends/relatives	16	6.5
Wedding/honeymoon	6	2.4
Others	58	23.7
Total	244	99.6
Missing	1	0.4
Total	245	100.0

First Time Tasting Malaysian Food

Yes	85	34.7
No	159	64.9
Total	244	99.6
Missing	1	0.4
Total	245	100.0

Enjoyed Malaysian Food

Yes	201	82.0
No	10	4.1
Not sure	25	10.2
Total	236	96.3
Missing	9	3.7
Total	245	100.0

Underlying Dimensions of Malaysian food images

The data set was examined to ensure if all assumptions were met. Factor analysis of the Malaysian food image showed that the Bartlett's Test was significant at 0.00 and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.84, signifying that the data was appropriate for factor analysis. Items with a factor loading of 0.4 and higher were retained for further analysis.

The 19 attributes associated with the Malaysian food image were explored by principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation. The internal consistency of the 19 items was examined by Cronbach's Alpha analysis. The Cronbach's Alpha was 0.87. The factor analysis compiled a five-factor solution as shown in Table 2 and each of the factors was labelled based on the items that constituted it. **FACTOR 1** with six items related to 'food and dining atmosphere' ($\alpha = 0.80$). **FACTOR 2** consisting of five items covered 'features of Malaysian food' ($\alpha = 0.72$). **FACTOR 3** was made up of four features relating to 'core food value' ($\alpha = 0.79$). **FACTOR 4** comprised two elements of 'Malaysian food specialty' ($\alpha = 0.82$) while **FACTOR 5** comprised two parts relating to 'Malaysian food uniqueness' ($\alpha = 0.67$). The five factors were generated with Eigenvalue above 1.0, which is about 62% of the total variance.

The summated means of all factors were above 3.0. Specifically, tourists seem to agree with the image of 'core food value', as reflected by the highest mean score ($\chi = 3.87$) compared with other images, followed by the tourists' image of 'Malaysian food specialty' which had a mean score of 3.77 and 'Malaysian food uniqueness' with a mean score of 3.75. However, the images of 'food and dining atmosphere' and 'features of Malaysian food' were relatively low, with mean scores of 3.46 and 3.56 respectively.

Table 2: Factor Analysis of Malaysian Food Images

Cronbach's Factor and attribute	Mean	Factor loading	Eigen value (%)	Variance explained	alpha
FACTOR 1: Food and Dining Atmosphere	3.46	5.79		30.46	0.80
Malaysian food is well-presented	3.58	0.67			
Malaysian food is nutritious	3.41	0.49			
Quality food service	3.60	0.73			
Attractive eating surroundings	3.36	0.71			
Clean and safe to consume	3.38	0.78			
Quality ingredients	3.45	0.65			
FACTOR 2: Features of Malaysian Food	3.56		2.30	12.10	0.72
Variety of food choices	3.84	0.55			
Variety of cooking methods	3.46	0.78			
Variety of ethnic foods	3.73	0.69			
Much information on local food	2.95	0.55			
Easy to access the eating outlets	3.80	0.48			

FACTOR 3: Core Food Value	3.87		1.52	7.98	0.79
Adds to my visiting enjoyment	3.75	0.58			
Value for money	3.86	0.83			
Reasonable price	3.99	0.83			
Malaysian food is delicious	3.88	0.60			
FACTOR 4: Malaysian Food Specialty	3.77		1.17	6.17	0.82
A lot of traditional foods	3.83	0.79			
A lot of local food specialties	3.72	0.82			
FACTOR 5: Malaysian Food Uniqueness	3.75		1.03	5.40	0.67
Malaysian food is hot and spicy	3.76	0.86			
Malaysian food is original and exotic	3.73	0.71			

Underlying Dimensions of Malaysian Food Attribute Satisfaction

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the underlying structure of food attribute satisfaction. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of 0.89 and the significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p = 0.00$) suggested that the data was suitable for factor analysis. The principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to examine the likelihood of the underlying factors being correlated with each other. Items with a factor loading below 0.4 were eliminated. Four-factor solutions with 18 items were retained as displayed in Table 3. The internal consistency of the 18 items was found to be highly reliable with 0.91 Cronbach's Alpha.

All the factors were named according to the items grouped under them. **FACTOR A** had five items relating to satisfaction with the 'dining atmosphere' ($\alpha = 0.86$). **FACTOR B** consisted of four elements related to 'accessibility convenience' ($\alpha = 0.80$). **FACTOR 3** comprised four items related to 'quality and value of food' ($\alpha = 0.81$). Finally **FACTOR 4** was made up of five items associated with 'culinary tourism products' ($\alpha = 0.76$). Approximately 63% of the total variance was achieved by the factors and all the four factors had a Eigenvalue greater than 1.0, suggesting that a four-factor solution was appropriate.

The 'Quality and Value of Food' had the highest mean score with 3.95, indicating that the tourists seem to be satisfied with the food quality, food variety, price, and meal experience in Malaysia. In addition, place accessibility, variety of ethnic eating places, local food availability, and food vendors, which were associated with 'accessibility convenience' received the second highest mean score of 3.87 for tourists' satisfaction. Meanwhile, satisfaction with the 'dining atmosphere' ($\chi = 3.58$) and 'culinary tourism products' ($\chi = 3.56$) were found to be rather low.

Table 3: Factor Analysis of Malaysian Food Satisfaction

Cronbach's Factor and Attribute	Mean	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance explained (%)	alpha
FACTOR A: Dining Atmosphere	3.58		7.29	40.51	0.86
Food presentation			3.67	0.68	
Food service	3.62	0.74			
Service personnel	3.58	0.66			
Eating surroundings	3.52	0.76			
Restaurant variety	3.50	0.77			
FACTOR B: Accessibility Convenience	3.87		1.66	9.22	0.80
Accessibility of places	3.94	0.71			
Variety of ethnic eating places	3.90	0.77			
Availability of local food	3.86	0.76			
Food vendors	3.76	0.55			
FACTOR C: Quality and Value of the Food	3.95		1.37	7.60	0.81
Food quality	3.85	0.69			
Food variety	3.92	0.73			
Prices	4.05	0.74			
Meal experiences	3.92	0.67			
FACTOR D: Culinary Tourism Products	3.56		1.07	5.97	0.76
Malaysian culture	3.85	0.51			
Food festivals	3.50	0.70			
Cooking methods	3.59	0.59			
Food information	3.09	0.61			
Menus in English	3.75	0.62			

Perception of Malaysian Food Images and Overall Satisfaction

Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between tourists' perception of Malaysian food images and their overall satisfaction with the food experiences in Malaysia. It was used to estimate the coefficients of the linear equation involving five factors of Malaysian food images (independent variable) that best predict the value of overall satisfaction (dependent variable). Table 4 shows the significant variables that remained in the equation and which explain the tourists' overall satisfaction based on standardized Beta coefficient values. The standardized beta coefficients reflect the importance of each independent variable on a dependent variable. The results presented in Table 4 indicated that the most influential food image on the tourists' overall satisfaction was 'core food value' ($\beta = 0.23$), followed by 'features of Malaysian food' ($\beta = 0.22$), 'Malaysian

specialty’ ($\beta = 0.19$), and ‘food and dining atmosphere’ ($\beta = 0.15$). The image of ‘Malaysian food uniqueness’ was found to be insignificant ($p = 0.84$) and did not influence the overall food satisfaction. This finding may reflect the lack of awareness and image of Malaysian food.

The significant F of 0.00 indicated that the regression model fit the data. About 34% of variance in overall satisfaction was explained by food images. There was a positive and moderate correlation between food images and overall satisfaction (Multiple R = 0.59). All coefficients used in the model were statistically significant at the 95% level of confidence.

Table 4: Multiple regression analysis of the perception of Malaysian food images with overall satisfaction

Variables entered	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig. t
Food and Dining Atmosphere	0.15	2.52	0.01
Features of Malaysian Food	0.22	3.08	0.00
Core Food Value	0.23	3.83	0.00
Malaysian Food Specialty	0.19	2.99	0.00
Malaysian Food Uniqueness	-0.12	-0.20	0.84
Multiple R = 0.59	R square = 0.34	Adjusted R square = 0.33	Standard error = 0.67
F = 24.82	Sig. = 0.00		

Food Attributes’ Satisfaction with Overall Satisfaction

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relationship between food attribute satisfaction and tourists’ overall satisfaction with the food experience in Malaysia. As revealed in Table 5, the Beta coefficients indicated that satisfaction with the ‘quality and value of food’ was the most prominent variable affecting overall food satisfaction ($\beta = 0.63$) and was followed by ‘dining atmosphere’ ($\beta = 0.17$). In other words, ‘quality and value of food’ is likely to exert a greater influence on the overall satisfaction than ‘dining atmosphere’. However, satisfaction with ‘accessibility convenience’ and ‘culinary tourism products’ did not contribute to the overall food satisfaction.

The results indicated that the regression model fit the data well ($F = 98.01$, $p = 0.00$). About 62% of the variance in overall satisfaction was explained by food attribute satisfaction. There was a positive and high correlation between food attribute satisfaction and overall satisfaction (Multiple R = 0.79).

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis of food attribute satisfaction with overall satisfaction

Variables entered	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig. t
Dining Atmosphere	0.17	3.23	0.00
Accessibility and Convenience	-0.02	-0.31	0.75
Quality and Value of Food	0.63	12.02	0.00
Culinary tourism products	0.10	1.79	0.08
Multiple R = 0.79	R square = 0.62	Adjusted R square = 0.61	Standard error = 0.51
F = 98.01	Sig. = 0.00		

Behavioral Intentions

The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient reached 0.91 for behavioral intentions, indicating high internal reliability within each item, because it exceeded the minimum standard which is 0.70 as suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). The summated mean of all the behavioral intention items was 3.49 as indicated in Table 6. Specifically, tourists would like to try other types of Malaysian food, which was reflected by the highest mean score ($\chi = 4.00$). Surprisingly, they did not intend to consider Malaysia as the first on their list of culinary destinations as reflected by the lowest mean score ($\chi = 2.85$). Perhaps Malaysian foods have not been promoted aggressively to attract tourists to visit the country.

Table 6: Behavioral Intentions

Intentions	Mean
Behavioral intentions	3.49
I have the intention of returning to Malaysia to savor the food	3.39
I will give a positive recommendation of the culinary experience in Malaysia to my family/friends	3.84
I would like to try other types of Malaysian food	4.00
I consider Malaysia the first on my list of culinary destinations	2.85
I would continue to come to Malaysia even if the prices of the food were higher	3.25
I will encourage my family/friends to come to visit Malaysia (based on food experience)	3.45
I will highly recommend Malaysian food to others	3.67
Your likelihood of visiting Malaysia in the future (based on food experience)	3.5
Cronbach’s alpha coefficient = 0.91	

Overall Satisfaction with Behavioral Intentions

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between tourists' overall satisfaction with the food experience in Malaysia and their behavioral intentions. Results from Table 7 shows that overall satisfaction ($\beta = 0.60$) significantly affected tourists' behavioral intentions ($p = 0.00$).

The analysis indicated that there was a significant model which had fit the data ($F = 139.89$, $p = 0.00$). About 37% of variance in behavioral intentions was explained by overall satisfaction with the food experience in Malaysia. There was a positive and moderate correlation between overall satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Multiple $R = 0.60$).

Table 7: A simple linear regression analysis of overall satisfaction with behavioral intentions

Variables entered	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig. t
Overall satisfaction	0.60	11.83	0.00
Multiple R = 0.60	R square = 0.37	Adjusted R square = 0.36	Standard error = 0.63
F = 139.89	Sig. = 0.00		

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Malaysian food is renowned for its multiple combinations of flavours and sheer variety. It is a great challenge to stimulate international tourists to enjoy the food and to strengthen Malaysia's position as a world class food tourism destination. This paper aims to examine the Malaysian food image and food attribute satisfaction from international tourists' perspectives, and subsequently assess their overall satisfaction with the eating experience and behavioral intention. The results of this study could help food managers to better understand the factors contributing to tourists' behavioral intentions so that they are able to project appropriate products that accommodate tourists' needs and wants.

The results of this study suggested that tourists have better images of 'core food value' (add to visiting enjoyment, value for money, reasonable price, and delicious), 'Malaysian food specialty' (a lot of traditional food and local food specialties), and 'Malaysian food uniqueness' (Malaysian food is associated with hot and spicy, originality and exoticism). At the same time, tourists were rather unclear on the images of 'food and dining atmosphere' (food presentation, nutritional value, food service, eating surroundings, cleanliness and safety, and ingredients), and 'features of Malaysian food' (food choices, cooking methods, ethnic foods, food information, and accessibility). Projecting and constructing a

positive food image for tourists' mind is viewed as crucial in promoting Malaysian food worldwide and generating their behaviors, because image has been shown to be an important influence in the selection of a destination (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004). Since tourists are likely to rely on image, all effective marketing strategies should be aimed at improving the Malaysian food image in the minds of tourists. Some of the elements used to form the food image such as media advertising, travel agents, and promotional tools should be fully utilized. Also, word-of-mouth from one's experience is most essential in forming an image. At the same time, authorities need to acknowledge the drawbacks that may restrain efforts aimed at improving the image, especially the ambient features of Malaysian food.

Tourists' satisfaction with the 'quality and value of food' (food quality, food variety, price, and meal experience), and 'accessibility convenience' (place accessibility, ethnic eating place variety, local food availability, and food vendors) were relatively high. Analysis also revealed that tourists rated their satisfaction level on 'dining atmosphere' (food presentation, food service, service personnel, eating surroundings, and restaurant variety) and 'culinary tourism products' (portraying Malaysian culture, food festivals cooking methods, food information, and menus in English) lower than the other factors. Food managers should take a special interest in improving the attributes. Specifically, private and public agents should intervene and work together in the configuration of this experience. No doubt, it has created a new challenge for Malaysia to position a desirable image in tourists' minds, and, on the other hand, to increase the satisfaction with Malaysian food attributes among tourists.

Tourist satisfaction is a result of comparing tourists' experiences at the destination visited and expectations about the destination (Pizam, Neumann, and Reichel, 1978). The impact of Malaysian food images on tourists' overall satisfaction with food experiences was significantly different. The relationship between satisfaction with food attributes and overall satisfaction also was significant. The influence of overall satisfaction has an important effect on tourists' behavioral intentions. It has been generally accepted in the literature that intention to revisit has a strong relationship with overall satisfaction with the perceived food experience during visiting (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Ryu and Jang, 2006). According to Fox (2007), a unique and memorable culinary identity was an indispensable asset for any successful tourist destination. Once the tourists have a good culinary experience, especially satisfaction level, the likelihood of revisiting is high. It is suggested that food managers pay attention to the essential variables of food image and food attribute satisfaction, which could enhance tourists' overall satisfaction and promote positive behavioural intentions. Moreover, the significant relationships suggest that food image and food attribute satisfaction are to be the key factor in heightening tourists' behavioural intentions. This suggests that Malaysian food can serve as an attraction for tourists. Thus, to enhance positive images and tourists' satisfaction, it is essential for Malaysia to exert an effective marketing strategy to promote its food worldwide. Food managers must strive to

develop and improve the Malaysian food image of tourists if they are to compete successfully in the competitive destination market. In conclusion, attentiveness and collaboration among all those involved in eliciting a positive food image and increasing levels of satisfaction are essential in triggering favorable intentions among international tourists to recommend the food and revisit the country in the future.

There were several limitations discovered in this study. The application of convenience sampling cannot be used to represent all tourists in Malaysia. Moreover, the sample used in this study consisted of tourists at the airport. Additionally, the tourists' reasons for visiting Malaysia and the period of stay in Malaysia probably vary and are not totally focused on food. Future research needs to examine a wider sample of foreign tourists in different locations such as Malacca, Penang and Terengganu. In relation to the instrumentation of this study, the utilization of structured questions to measure the variables has a common disadvantage in that the researcher might neglect the salient attribute(s). Thus, future research should advocate the use of triangulation "multiple operationism" methods. This form of strategy, that is conducting focus group discussions and personal interviews, is suggested to capture the important attributes or points that complement the strengths and weaknesses found in single method designs. In addition, the investigation of differences of perception across various groups or countries of tourists is recommended as tourists from different cultures may have different points of view regarding Malaysian food that enhance the analysis of this study.

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