

**TOURISM IN PENANG:
TRIP CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS**

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ABSTRACT

As tourism develops globally, the need to understand the reasons behind tourists' behaviours and characteristics is of fundamental importance. Strategic management of tourist destinations stems from the development of travellers' characteristics from which understanding and prediction of tourist choice is a challenge towards excellence.

The study approaches is to assign consumers into groups based on geographical and demographic distribution; and then the similarities and differences between the matching groups are analyzed. A comprehensive 55-item survey is developed that solicited data in three major areas: respondents demographics, trip characteristics and preferred activities, as well as evaluation on the level of satisfaction.

Of those surveyed, there were an increase proportion of women who involve themselves with travel and recreational activities. In addition, there was reasonably higher percentage of single visitors compared to married visitors. International visitors recorded the highest percentage of mid age visitors aged 25 to 45 and most of them were university educated. Majority were first time travelling to Penang, had no children travelling with them and did not participate in local tour. There were a decline in the proportion of groups of friends travelling together; on the other hand, there is an increase in the proportion of groups composed of friends and family members travelling together. Most of the tourists from Europe, Oceanic, and North America preferred leisure activities, the Middle East tourists preferred adventure activities, while the Asian tourists preferred to enjoy the various cuisines in Penang.

Frequency analysis is used to determine the dominance of each characteristic based on their percentage performance. The percentage is obtained through comparison with characteristics within the same group. The questionnaire assessed tourists' perceived important activities and satisfaction level concerning a list of destination attributes. Importance-Performance Analysis is applied to investigate tourists' attitude towards salient service attributes and determine the most appropriate marketing as well as development strategies that should be applied to various distinct groups.