

Anna Dłużewska, PhD on Geography – Warsaw University (book about social roles in Tunisia) – 1998; MA on sciences of culture – University of Silesia (1993). Researches made in: Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Dubai, Kenya, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Uzbekistan etc.

ANNA DŁUŻEWSKA  
Tourism Department SWPR, Warsaw (Poland)  
e-mail: a.dluzewska@chello.pl

## **The influence of islamisation on the tourism development in Malaysia / Wpływ islamizacji na rozwój turystyki w Malezji**

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The article is a contribution on the impact of tourism on developing countries. It is also an attempt to distinguish the dysfunctions which are indeed caused by tourists from the prejudice which are an effect of the war in Iraq, the colonial times or mass media activity. In order to amend this contribution with qualitative data the author conducted field studies performed in Malaysia in July 2001 and November 2003. The research was focused on the dialog of the culture of the Malay Population and Tourists, same as on the cultural shock related with the different type of religion. The conception of tourism fits into the conception of *tourism as the contact of cultures* [Przeclawski 1997].

### **Introduction**

Malaysia, after China, hosts more international tourists than any other Asian country (UN-WTO 2007). The most significant tourism attractions of Malaysia are its tropical islands and coral reefs, for instance the Langkawi Archipelago and islands such as Tioman, Pangkor and Sipadan, its protected areas, such as Taman Negara and Bako National Parks the iconic peak of Mt. Kinabalu, in Sabah; the modern architecture of Kuala Lumpur; colonial-era architecture in cities such as Malacca, Ipoh and Johor Bahru; also tourist products such as entertainment parks for families; shopping centres, the hill resort of the Cameron Highlands, and even clubs and discos [Cartier 1998; Ismail, Baum 2006; Opperman 1992]. For many visitors another important characteristic of Malaysia is its cultural and ethnic diversity, a factor used in promoting Malaysia abroad.

Since 1990 tourism to Malaysia has grown annually except in 2003, when many Asian countries suffered a decline in arrivals due to the SARS outbreak. According to the Immigration Department of Malaysia, Malaysia received 16.4 million visitors during 2005, an increase of 4.6 per cent compared to the previous year. A rise in the percentage share of income generated by tourism in comparison with the number of visits could be interpreted as an increase in the price of particular touristic products, which indicates a trend towards more upmarket tourism and, as a result, the category of tourists visiting the country changes.

The economical functions of tourism in Malaysia are obvious. Yet more and more often Malaysia has to incur social costs of tourism [Din 1982, 1993; Henderson 2003; Hong 1985; King 1993; Russel 2003] resulting from such behaviours of tourists as drinking alcohol, showing naked body parts in public, pairs expressing mutual affection in public, etc. which arise from the cultural differences between the receiving community and the sending community [Din 1982, 1989, 1993, 1997; Henderson 2003; King 1993; Russel 2003]. Breaking religious norms connected with Islam is particularly criticized by Hong [1985], K.H. Din [1982, 1989, 1993, 1997], J.C. Henderson [2003], V.T. King [1993] and R.V. Russel [2003]. Tourist behaviours perceived as negative can also be observed in hotel resorts (e.g. the availability of alcohol in the hotels).

Keeping Malaysia attractive for tourists and securing their complete adjustment to the norms of Islam, which is suggested by various milieus, seems to be a purely theoretic demand. It is also obvious that the authorities are not interested in a decrease of GDP generated by the tourism services sector. The problem of the influence of Islam on the perspectives of the development of tourism in Malaysia and the discussions concerning the prevention or minimization of the negative socio-cultural aspects of tourism becomes even more topical.

### Aim

The findings discussed in this article were obtained during field research conducted in Malaysia in 2001 and 2003. The research was carried out by a variety of methods designed to elicit qualitative information, including participant and non-participant observation, and interviews with locals and tourism personnel such as hotel managers [Hammersley, Atkinson 1995].

The aim of the research was to try to estimate the influence of Islam on the perspectives of the development of tourism in Malaysia. The research concerned the scope of cultural dialogues and the clash of cultural tradition of the Malays with the western model and therefore falls within the concept of *tourism as the contact of cultures* [Przeclawski 1997].

### Discussion

Malaysia is a federation of thirteen states and three Federal Territories. The political system of Malaysia is described as: federational multi-party constitutional monarchy with a two-chamber parliament. The country's area amounts to 329 757 km<sup>2</sup>. The continental part, called Western Malaysia, lies on the Malay Peninsula, the part called Eastern Malaysia lies on the Borneo Island. Malaysia has 20 million citizens, 52% of which are Malays, 13% are other endogen groups, 25% are Chinese and 7% are Indians. The remaining 3% are Vietnamese, Filipinos and immigrants from Cambodia. In Malaysia we also find descendants of Malay-Portuguese and Malay-Spanish families, which are quoted in statistics usually as Malays. The official religion in Malaysia is Islam with around 60% of believers among the country's population. The remaining religions are Buddhism (around 19%), Christianity (around 9%), Hinduism (around 6%), Confucianism, Taoism and other Chinese religions (around 3%).

Malaysia is one of the richest and best developed countries in Asia. Its gross GDP per capita amounts to 8,750 USD (UNDP). The main economy branches are industry (25.3%), agriculture and fishery (20.5%), administration and defense (11.6%), trade (10.7%) and coal mining (10.1%). Travel and tourism in Malaysia was expected to generate US\$30,840 million in 2006, while the direct and indirect impact of the industry was expected to account for 14.6% of GDP and 1,345,000 jobs, equivalent to 12.6% of total employment (www.wttc.org 2006).

Education is free of charge and obligatory for children starting from the age of 7. Beside the state schools there are also private and Koran schools.

The two denominations of Islam in Malaysia are the Sunni Islam and the so called *Islam Hadhari*. The notion of *Islam Hadhari* was first introduced by the prime minister of Malaysia, Datuka Seri Abdullah Badawi, to stress the uniqueness of Malaysian Islam in comparison to other Muslim countries. Islam Hadhari puts emphasis on such factors as: acquiring religious knowledge, hard, honest work, good state administration and tolerance. Due to its doctrine *Islam Hadhari* is the most peace-loving and modern variants of Islam in the world, although the Sunni Islam doctrine is not infringed by Islam Hadhari.

The main principles of *Islam Hadhari* are:

1. Giving oneself to Allah and being religious.
2. Just and reliable government.
3. Free and independent society.
4. High level of education.
5. Balanced and humane economic development.
6. High life quality of all believers (Muslims).
7. Protection of the interest of ethnical minorities and women.
8. Cultural and moral integrity.

9. Care for natural environment.
10. Strong defense of the country.

The shape of Islam has changed significantly in the 70s, when the idea of the unity of Muslim countries started to spread. Hijabs and headscarfs called *tudung*, which were unknown in Malaysia before, started to be popular and were supposed to be a element joining all Muslim countries in the world. The superiority of Islam over other religions was stressed more and more often, radical behaviours in Malaysian government intensified.

According to the Constitution of Malaysia, every Malay is the follower of Islam and has the right to the highest social status of the *Bumiputra*. Believing in any other religion than Islam automatically deprives from the membership in the ethnical group and the privileges connected with it, such as additional points in exams to universities, advantageous scholarships, discounts for purchasing real properties and cars, etc. Muslims are judged in secular courts and religious courts respecting the *sharia* law (within the scope of family law and inheritance law).

In all states Islam is treated as an inherent part of the national identity of Malaysia. The law allows for adhering to other religions, but being a “real Malay” means being Muslim.

### Tourism in Malaysia

Due to the large area of the country the diversified character of the tourism advantages and different approaches to the development of tourism in the authorities of certain states, tourism is developing irregularly depending on the region.

The most intense development of tourism is observed in the Kedah Sultanate (Langkawi Archipelago), in the Terenggan Sultanate (Perhentian Islands), in the states Sarawak and Sabah on the Borneo Island, as well as in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, in the Malakka state, in the Palau Pinang (Penang) state and in the Djohor and Pahang sultanates.

Tourism is also present in the Kelantan Sultanate, in Perak Sultanate, Selangor Sultanate, in Elective Monarchy Negri Sembilan and in the Perlis Kingdom, although to a smaller extent [Din 1997; Henderson 2003].

Due to the localization of the hotels on the islands (e.g. Pulau Tioman, Pulau Pangkor, Pulau Redang, Pulau Perhentian, Pulau Sipadan, Langkawi Archipelago) or in the virgin areas situated far away from the urban centres (e.g. in the Palau Pinang, Terengganu and Sabah states), the contact between tourists and natives not employed in the tourism sector in case of stationary, leisure tourism is quite occasional. Separating tourists from the native inhabitants has been criticized by Din [1997] and Henderson [2003] although paradoxically they consider the behaviour of tourists related to breaking cultural norms, which are witnessed by the representatives of the local community not employed in the tourism sector, as the most negative.

In case of sightseeing tourism, the aim of which is to visit national parks of various character, due to small population density of the visited areas, the contact between tourists and native inhabitants is also rather occasional.

The situation with urban tourism (Kuala Lumpur, Melakka) is quite different. Due to high population density the contacts are quite intense. In both cases we have to do with both short-term tourism (1 or 2 days) and trips (no overnight stays) [Government of Malaysia 1991].

Most of the tourists who visit Malaysia are inhabitants of Malaysia’s neighbouring countries. Statistical data show various types of tourist motivations. In case of countries with a lower GDP the main yet unofficial aim of visiting Malaysia is illegal work or small-scale trade.

**Table 1.** Tourism arrivals to Malaysia from selected markets / Przyjazdy turystyczne z wybranych krajów do Malezji

Country of origin	2004	2005	Change 2005/2004 (%)
1	2	3	4
Singapore	9,520,306	9,634,506	1.2
Thailand	1,518,452	1,900,839	25.2

1	2	3	4
Indonesia	789,925	962,957	21.9
China	550,241	352,089	-36.0
Brunei	453,664	486,344	7.2
Japan	301,429	340,027	12.8
United Kingdom	204,409	240,030	17.4
Australia	204,053	265,346	30
Taiwan	190,083	172,456	-9.3
India	172,966	225,789	30.5
U.S.A.	145,094	151,354	4.3
West Asia	126,050	147,646	17.1
South Korea	91,270	158,177	73.3
Hong Kong	80,326	77,528	-3.5
Germany	53,783	59,344	10.3
Saudi Arabia	39,432	53,682	36.1
Canada	32,822	31,167	-5.0
France	32,562	40,473	24.3
Sweden	25,960	32,408	24.8
UAE	21,161	29,606	39.9
Italy	20,036	21,561	7.6
South Africa	16,511	16,381	-0.8
Kuwait	12,063	11,506	-4.6
Denmark	11,884	11,681	-1.7
Finland	11,303	13,172	16.5
Lebanon	9,838	8,522	-13.4
Norway	9,437	9,823	4.1
Syria	8,367	5,613	-32.9
Oman	7,983	9,228	15.6
Russia	6,627	8,386	26.5
Turkey	6,127	6,673	8.9
Jordan	2,029	2,086	2.8
Others	1,134,208	1,071,571	-5.5
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>15,703,406</b>	<b>16,431,055</b>	<b>4.6</b>

Source: Immigration Department of Malaysia, data collected in 2006

Statistics prepared by the World Tourism Organization provide information which only seemingly differs from the statistics prepared by the Immigration Department of Malaysia. According to WTO most of the tourists who visit Malaysia are Europeans (56.5%) whereas the citizens of Asian countries (including Singapore) constitute 19.8% of all tourists. This surface difference can be explained with the fact that the WTO statistics are based on the nationality of tourists and the statistics of the Immigration Department of Malaysia are based on the "area the tourists originate from". A significant percentage of tourists visiting Malaysia are Europeans

living in Singapore and other Asian countries (Hong Kong, Japan, etc.). This information only proves the proposition that in case of Singapore we are dealing with a real tourist migration and not any other kind of migration.

**Table 2.** Tourists visiting Malaysia in 1990–2004, divided according to regions (in millions of USD) / Przyjazdy turystyczne do Malezji z wybranych regionów (w milionach USD)

	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Change in 2003/02 (in %)	Change in 2004/03 (in %)	Percentage of tourists from certain regions, 2004
<b>World</b>	<b>441,0</b>	<b>538,1</b>	<b>680,6</b>	<b>680,4</b>	<b>700,4</b>	<b>689,7</b>	<b>763,2</b>	<b>-1,5</b>	<b>10,7</b>	<b>100</b>
Europe	252,5	307,2	389,5	390,4	401,6	406,7	431,3	1,3	6,0	56,5
Asia and the Pacific region	59,8	88,8	118,3	120,6	130,8	120,6	151,2	-7,8	25,4	19,8
America	99,3	108,0	130,7	125,5	121,2	115,4	127,7	-4,8	10,6	16,7
<b>Middle East</b>	<b>8,5</b>	<b>10,4</b>	<b>15,2</b>	<b>16,3</b>	<b>18,3</b>	<b>17,9</b>	<b>22,0</b>	<b>-2,0</b>	<b>3,8</b>	<b>2,9</b>
Africa	9,9	13,0	16,5	16,5	17,6	17,6	18,2	-0,2	3,8	2,4
No data available	11,1	10,8	10,5	11,2	10,9	11,5	12,8			1,7

Source: World Tourism Organization 2005

The advantages of Malaysia concerning tourism (virgin beaches, tropical islands, hot climate) predispose this country for leisure, long-stay tourism, and indeed this kind of tourism dominates here. Long-term stays are the predominant form of tourism in Malaysia, with additional sightseeing trips as well as culture, ethnical and entertainment trips. Special tourism also occurs in Malaysia, like the active qualified and unqualified tourism (kanyoning, paragliding, trekking, climbing and other) as well as motivational tourism [Henderson 2003].

We can observe organized tourism, prepared by travel offices, as well as individual tourism.

The *type of tourism* depends to a large extent on the availability of communication with Malaysia – high costs of flights are a barrier in visiting the country for many tourists. Additionally the costs of stay and tourist services in Malaysia is much higher than the prices tourists have to pay to visit other Asian countries, such as Indonesia or Thailand, where they can find similar attractions to those available in Malaysia.

Concerning the standard of the stay, in Malaysia exclusive tourism is most popular and mass tourism occurs more rarely.

Malaysia is situated near Thailand, which is also the reason why many *back packers*, who visit all safe Asian countries, take a trip to Malaysia as well. *Back packers* do sightseeing and additionally participate in leisure, long-stay tourism, but because of the prices and the character of the offer, they stay in other regions than the participants of exclusive tourism and people who bought their stay through travel offices [Din 1993; Henderson 2003].

Tourists visiting Malaysia are in most cases familiar with the cultural uniqueness of Asia in general. Relatively high level of knowledge on cultural differences, including the norms of Islam<sup>1</sup>, was confirmed during field studies.

Leaving the hotel area and the tourist zone, tourists cover their bodies, do not drink alcohol outside the marked spaces, they rarely show each other affection in public, outside the tourist zones.

Nevertheless their behaviour comes in for criticism from researchers as well as from a large percentage of Malaysia's citizens. E. Hong [1985] stresses that socio-cultural dysfunctions of tourism (negative aspects of tourism) in Malaysia result mainly from the cultural differences of

<sup>1</sup> The level of knowledge of tourists on the norms of Islam is much higher than it is in the case of tourists visiting for example Tunisia, Turkey or Egypt.

the receiving community and the sending (tourist) community. K.H. Din [1982, 1989, 1993, 1997], J.C. Henderson [2003], V.T. King 1993 and R.V. Russel [2003] are of a similar opinion. They present behaviour observed in the hotel resorts as having negative overtones (for example the availability of alcohol in hotels). This kind of attitude among natives was proven also in the field studies conducted by the author of this article.

Among the behaviours of tourists drinking alcohol, showing each other affection in public and showing naked body parts was mostly criticized (around 48% of the answers given by the interviewees). The interviewees did not differentiate the behaviour shown within the tourist zone from the behaviour observed in the areas inhabited by natives. They assumed that *Allah sees everywhere* therefore the same (Muslim) rules should apply everywhere.

Nearly half of the respondents stated that they were irritated by the free behaviour of tourists, even though it is hard to admit that tourists behave ostentatiously. The interviewees claimed that what happens in hotel resorts (e.g. wearing bikini) offends Allah. An argument indicating that one can rest at the beach and abide by the rules of Islam at the same time, was the behaviour of tourists from Muslim countries (women from the countries of the Persian Gulf were swimming and bathing in chadors).

Beside profiting from the tourism sector the most important differentiating factors were education and sex of the interviewees. Educated women showed a quite radical attitude, and had a lot of reservations towards the behaviour of tourists inside the hotel resorts. "You think that if someone works at the hotel people are free to humiliate him or her?! Good Muslims should not watch it idly. If we ourselves and even some tourists [Arab women – authors note, A. Dłużewska] know how to behave, it means that others can do it to. Only that they don't respect God, they don't respect us. Why should we allow for that?"

The interviewees who criticized the promiscuity of tourists shown in the hotel area most usually did not have the opportunity to visit such place personally. They also admitted that they have never seen a "naked tourist". It is puzzling that two interviewees who criticized the behaviour of tourists worked in the tourism sector voluntarily. They claimed that they have the right to choose any profession they like and that it is the tourists who should adjust their behaviour so that it does not interfere with Islam.

More than half of the interviewees expressed their contentment about the development of international tourism in Malaysia. They did not have any reservations concerning the behaviour of tourists.

According to K.H. Din [1993, 1997], J.C. Henderson [2003], V.T. King 1993 and R.V. Russel [2003] the best way to avoid negative effects of tourism caused by breaking the norms of Islam is directing the promotion of the country to Muslim countries. The change of the category of tourists from Western Europe tourists to Muslims is supposed to eliminate the most drastic behaviours such as drinking alcohol, showing naked body parts in public, showing each other affection in public (couples), etc. The promotion campaign of Malaysia tends to this kind of change.

The research [Dłużewska 2006, 2007] showed, however, that the possibility to choose the norms of behaviour, e.g. availability of casinos and alcohol, is for many Muslims an important argument in concerning the decision on the holiday destination. It does not mean that Muslims use the entertainment opportunities forbidden by Islam while being on holiday (although it does happen sometimes), but the "theoretical" possibility of slackening religious norms is highly appreciated.

The promotional campaign for Malaysia, lead by the Ministry of Tourism and other relevant authorities, is one of the most professional and effective campaigns in the world [Hashim, Murphy and Hashim 2007; Henderson]. As a result, despite numerous events which in recent years have unsettled tourism in Muslim countries (9/11, the war in Iraq) and tourism in Asia (the occurrence of SARS and Avian 'flu, the 2004 tsunami), the number of visits in Malaysia is constantly and consistently growing. The main campaign slogan and the image concept focus on the rich diversity of Malaysia's touristic advantages. It is claimed that Malaysia possesses features

of such variety that *'having visited one country, tourists feel as if they have visited the whole of Asia'*<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the same slogan *'Malaysia – truly Asia'* being used in the promotional campaign in all countries, the image of Malaysia created for Europe and the USA is very different from the one used in Muslim countries. The diversity of Malaysia emphasized in Persian Gulf countries concerns architecture, leisure and entertainment. According to the commercial message the cultural background of Malaysia is indisputable – the prevailing religion is Islam, therefore visitors may expect that all aspects of Muslim culture will be respected [Hashim, Murphy and Hashim 2007]. They can *'feel at home'*. No one is going to be surprised that women cover their faces (even though they are allowed to uncover their faces in a situation of holiday relaxation if they wish to do so)<sup>3</sup>.

In Europe and the USA, Malaysia has created an image of a multicultural country with Islam as one of its religions. Potential visitors are invited by beautifully dressed girls in Malay, Indian, Chinese and Thai national costumes, and the slogan *'Malaysia – truly Asia'* is supposed to emphasise the diversity of Malaysian cultures. The description of Malaysia on the Tourism Malaysia websites is an example of the image mentioned above:

*'In the heart of Asia lies a land of many cultures, wonders and attractions. It's a bubbling, bustling melting pot of races and religions where Malays, Indians, Chinese and many other people live together in peace and harmony. It is also a land of fascinating extremes, where towering skyscrapers look down upon primitive longhouses. Blessed with natural wonders galore, it is perfect for a memorable eco-holiday. With some of the best beaches and diving spots in the world, it is ideal for island getaways. Experience Asia in Malaysia [www.tourism.gov.my, 2006].*

There were also two different commercials: one for Europe, and a different one for the Middle East (2003–2005). In the one made for Muslim countries visitors are welcomed by Muslim girls dressed in *hijab*, instead of a smiling Hindu girl with bare belly.

In recent years Malaysia's advertising campaign has been particularly professional and intense in Muslim countries, as Malaysia assumes – rightly – that great touristic possibilities lie in cultivating solidarity between Muslims. So, for example, a two-week long trade mission from Malaysia to the Gulf states visited Yemen, the UAE, Oman and Bahrain to promote Malaysia and launch *'Visit Malaysia Year 2007'* in the region.

## CONCLUSIONS

The attitude of Malays towards tourism as such is usually positive, more than half of the interviewees expressed their contentment about the development of international tourism in Malaysia. Nevertheless one can observe in this matter some incoherent expectations, such as propositions of *'no alcohol'* in the hotel area with the desire of growing GDP from tourism sector.

We can also talk about a *"religious evolution"* causing hypersensitive reactions to deviant norms, values and behaviour, leading to islamocentric prejudices based on incidents, represented by almost a half of respondents.

The change of the category of tourists from Western Europe tourists to Muslims, supposed to eliminate the most drastic behaviours such as drinking alcohol, according to the authoress would be not a best solution. As it was told, the research [Dłużewska 2006, 2007] showed that the possibility to choose the norms of behaviour, e.g. availability of casinos and alcohol, is for many Muslims an important argument in concerning the decision on the holiday destination.

The open question is then, how to deal with inavoided intercultural shocks? The proposition to transform the behaviours of tourist into a muslim ones, except of being an unrealistic one, could even make the islamisations of Malaysia society stronger.

<sup>2</sup> Malaysia promotional conference held in Palac Kultury i Nauki, Warsaw, Poland, December 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Advertising posters for Malaysia issued for the UAE show a smiling four-member family from the UAE in a Malaysian entertainment park. Their origin is signified by a form of women's clothing worn only in this region.

According to the authoress the only solution to change the attitude of locals *versus* tourist into a more positive and realistic one (as it was before 1970s), is that government authorities should inform the local population about the economical and other benefits of Western Tourism in Malaysia, in the more efficient way.

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**Słowa kluczowe: społeczny aspekt turystyki, funkcje i dysfunkcje turystyki, Malezja**

### **STRESZCZENIE**

Artykuł jest głosem w dyskusji na temat skutków turystyki w krajach, w których religia i kultura ludności autochtonicznej różnią się od religii i kultury dominującej grupy turystów. Podjęta została próba wyodrębnienia dysfunkcji turystycznych rzeczywiście powodowanych przez turystów od uprzedzeń będących wynikiem np. działalności mass mediów, wojny w Iraku i innych, po prostu łączonych ze skutkami turystyki. W celu uzupełnienia materiału o dane o charakterze jakościowym autorka przeprowadziła w Malezji badania terenowe (lipiec 2001, listopad 2003). Badania dotyczyły obszaru dialogów kulturowych oraz zderzenia tradycji religijnej Malajów z zachodnim modelem. Mieszczą się więc w koncepcji *turystyki jako kontaktu kulturowego* [Przeclawski 1997].