

CHAPTER 1_INTRODUCTION

1.0. *Introduction*

The increasing recognition and acceptance of the gay community worldwide has, today, molded the tourism industry into a new direction. What was once a silent community has today become a new lucrative market segment to tap into. Within many countries, the relation between the gay community and tourism was often ignored. This view has significantly changed in the last years and now, the pink tourism dollar is seen as a highly profitable tourism market.

In many existing studies, it is found that those from within the gay community are mostly well-educated professionals with a high earning power (Stuber, 2002). They have also been regularly profiled as people who do not have the responsibility of raising children which means they are a community with added leisure time (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996). Having disposable income and free time enables them to explore the world and travel more as compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Roth & Luongo, 2002). This also means that they are willing to spend a great deal of money while on vacation (Stuber, 2002).

To date, it is practically impossible to calculate an approximate number of gay people worldwide. This is due to various reasons, particularly the fact that homosexuality is still stigmatized in many countries and some even consider it as a criminal offence with harsh consequences. As such, it prevents many people from expressing themselves openly which indirectly make them invisible. In Malaysia, homosexuality is considered to be illegal and is punishable by law. Therefore, the exact number of the gay community is unable to be determined.

Yet, the presence of the gay community in Malaysia can be seen by the increasing number of exclusively gay social venues and groups, especially within the major cities, such as the Klang Valley. There are many bars, clubs, fitness centers, and so on that are readily available today to cater to the gay clientele. One can also notice from the media where many gay related reports and concerns are frequently highlighted. An association such as the Pink Triangle (PT) Foundation further shows the growing number of those within the gay community being more open about on their sexuality. In view of the fact that HIV and AIDS has become a growing concern in Malaysia, the foundation has graciously engaged themselves into spreading the awareness to the citizens, especially so, to the LGBT community.

One of the main reasons why this particular market is interesting to study on is because it is, to date, an under tapped readily available lucrative market. Therefore, it seems appropriate that this market be further analyzed for the benefit of the tourism industry.

1.1. *Problem Statement & Purpose of the Study*

Each year, many studies are conducted to discover the travel habits of Malaysians belonging to various market segments. Lamentably, here in Malaysia, homosexuality is not recognized and is considered illegal. As such, this lucrative market segment (Stuber, 2002) has been understudied and practitioners from the tourism and travel industry have limited or no reference as a guide when developing tactical marketing strategies.

In order to tap into this readily available rewarding market, this study provides marketers from the tourism and travel industry with sufficient information and knowledge on the travel habits of the Malaysian gay travelers, particularly by the ethnicity profiles. With this, marketers would be able to ensure that niche products and services that are developed and marketed to this set of patrons would cater to their specific needs. It is therefore interesting to further explore and understand what Malaysian gay travelers seek when planning a vacation. This can be seen in four different aspects, namely, affect, cognition, behavior and the environment, which describes what consumer behavior is all about and the best marketing strategies to be implemented. (Peter & Olson, 2010)

Thus, this study aims to fill the gap on the lack of knowledge on the travel behavior within the Malaysian gay community and to profile them by ethnicity to further understand their needs.

1.2. *Research Objectives and Research Questions*

Owing to the afore-mentioned reasons, following are the objectives of this study:

- To examine the travel motivation of Malaysian gay travelers by ethnicity
- To explore their destination choices
- To examine their habitual activities while away on vacation
- To analyze their spending behavior when on vacation
- To examine their sexual behavior and health screening habits
- To create a profile by ethnicity, namely Malays, Indians and Chinese

The purpose of this study can be said as one that scrutinizes the travel motivations, destination choices and travel activities, and sexual behavior and health of Malaysian gay travelers. To follow through with the study, some research questions were developed as a guide to writing this piece. Below are the research questions:

- What are the travel motivations of Malaysian gay travelers by ethnicity?
- Which destinations do they choose? What are the contributing factors to them making this choice?
- What are the common activities they engage in when on vacation?
- How much are they willing to spend on their vacation? On average, how much would they spend purely on shopping?
- Are they sexually active while on vacation with new partners? To what extent would they engage in these activities which carry the risk of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV?

The implication of this study would be highly beneficial to those within the tourism industry, namely Tourism Boards, travel agents, airlines, and hotels, just to name a few, as well as those from within the fashion industry. Here, more than the traditional methods can be applied in order to tap this market by the marketers.

1.3. Scope of the Study

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a concrete and final conclusion to the aforementioned research questions. However, it explores the existing knowledge on travel motivations in the context of the Malaysian gays. Even though it would be appealing to include others from the minority group of the LGBT community, it may be too diverse in the needs and wants of this community overall. It is safe to assume that those within the bisexuals, lesbians and transgender community might have a slightly different approach to their vacation.

This study focuses solely on Malaysian gays comprising of the three main ethnicity of the country, namely Chinese, Indians and Malays. It shows the similarities and differences that exist amongst this community. The in-depth knowledge on their travel behavior may contribute, at a later point in time, in fulfilling the needs of the Malaysian gays.

1.4. Organization of the Study

This Master's thesis is divided, true to form, into five parts. Beginning with the basic Introduction of the topic, it follows with Literature Review, Methodology, Data Analysis and draws to a close with Conclusion and Recommendations.

Chapter 1 outlines the introduction of the topic in itself. It describes the reason and need for this topic to be pursued.

Chapter 2 discusses the existing studies that are available on the travel behavior of those from within the gay community. This includes studies done worldwide and is not limited to the context of Malaysia.

Chapter 3 shows the methodology chosen to conduct fresh data collection of the Malaysian gays. It further explains why and how this methodology suits the basis of the study.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the research. An in-depth analysis is presented based on the results.

Chapter 5 concludes this thesis with a thorough discussion on the findings from Chapter 4 and provides some recommendations. From this, an overall profile is created by ethnicity and finally put forward possible angle for further studies.

It is with hope that this outline would make it effortless and pleasant for the reader to join in discovering the travel habits of Malaysian gay travelers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. *Background*

To understand the travel habits of Malaysian gay travelers, many existing studies worldwide were referred to. Overall, studies relating to travel motivation, destination choice, activities, spending behavior and sexual health within the context of the gay community were looked upon in order to investigate similarities and patterns.

2.1. *Travel Motivation*

When deciding to take a vacation, the primary reason to do so is described as the main travel motivation. Many studies have been conducted to further understand the drive behind each vacation taken by gays worldwide. Researchers have associated the push and pull factor as one that influences people in general to choose and travel to a certain destination. Push factors are related to socio psychological aspects such as relaxation, the need to escape routine, and to interact socially while the pull factors are the charisma of a certain destination that draws them there (Law, Cheung, & Ada, 2004, p. 356). One study assumes that the destination image of a place is highly influenced by the motivation, which was understood as an attitude towards the traveled site (Bosque, Martín, Collado, & Salmones, 2009, p. 145).

Lück (2004) found that the main purpose for gays to travel was to go on vacations and to visit friends and family. When asked what motivates them to travel to a specific destination, he found that it was mainly for cultural reasons. This was followed by the nature and beauty of a city. Here, we can note that the primary motivation is somewhat similar to those who are heterosexual. A good nightlife and gay destinations were the least motivating factors as only two respondents gave the thumbs up. Most of them did not fancy gay destinations and it was not really a motivating factor (Lück, 2004). They do involve themselves in gay related activities while there, but it is not a main reason for them to make the trip in the first place.

Clift & Forrest (1999) on the hand established that there is little knowledge on the travel motivation and behavior amongst gays on vacation. This is similar to the struggles in studies on Malaysian gays. Most of the respondents in his study placed high value on comfort, relaxation, guaranteed sunshine and good food as the main motivation when planning a vacation. Only a small handful of respondent looked to adventure as a reason to travel (Clift & Forrest, Gay men and tourism: destinations and holiday motivations, 1999, p. 622).

A common pattern was found when exploring existing research on gay travelers travel motivation. According to Clift & Forrest (1999), Pritchard et al (2000) and Hughes (2002), they agree that the motivation to go on a vacation is the same for both gay travelers as well as heterosexual ones. Having said that, Pritchard (2000) found that while the push factor is similar to the heterosexuals' motivation, he found that the intrinsic motivation was purely to escape the heterosexual favored world and be with 'oneself' and to have a sense of belonging. This is further supported by other authors findings that gays have a feeling of being safe and accepted for who they are motivates them to take a vacation (Hughes, *Gay Men's Holiday Destination Choice: A Case of Risk and Avoidance*, 2002b).

When discussing travel habits of gays one study classifies gay tourists in two categories, namely one that goes on vacation specifically to seek gay social life while the other avoids any gay destination but prefers instead local cultures (Clift & Forrest, *Gay men and tourism: destinations and holiday motivations*, 1999).

A study done by Herrera and Scott (2005) showed that gays felt the need to travel out in order to feel free and express their sexuality. Escaping the heterosexual world was a main motivation for them to vacation especially at larger cities (Herrera & Scott, 2005). He went on to state that the act of travelling gave them new insights about themselves and it certainly paves way for a more positive self-conception.

2.2. *Destination Choice*

The importance of understanding the choice of destination made by this select group is highlighted by many existing studies. Here, some measure the reasoning behind a choice, especially so to find out if it is motivated by the available sexual opportunities (Clift & Forrest, *Gay men and tourism: destinations and holiday motivations*, 1999, p. 616). According to Community Marketing Inc (2011), a destination's reputation for being gay-friendly, was by far the biggest reason for USA gays to choose a specific destination. This was followed by various other reasons including but not limited to gay bars, gay pride events, the influence of magazines & newspaper and so on.

Likewise, Pritchard et al. found that most respondents were uncomfortable with going to countries where homosexuality was illegal. However, those interviewed did not feel that their sexual orientation had any impact on their travel motivation or even the choice of destination. He concluded that the fear of being rejected played a bigger role when deciding a destination

for vacation as compared to their sexuality in itself. (Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgley, Khan, & Andrew, 2000, pp. 17-18).

This is further confirmed by another study done by Ballegaard & Chor (2009), which found that most of the respondents chose to vacation at a specific destination because of their personal interest and not due to their sexuality. They put a higher value towards non-gay activities as opposed to what is assumed generally. There are, however, a handful who think otherwise and travel primary to destinations where they can freely engage in gay related activities. Some even mentioned that they tend to travel to the same destinations over and over due to their positive experiences. While this study found that gays do not choose a particular destination because of their sexuality, they do, however, choose not to go to a certain destination because of this. They generally would prefer not to vacation at places where homosexuality is considered illegal. Unless the destination has something unique and piques their personal interest, then they would still choose to vacation at these places (Ballegaard & Chor, 2009).

Hughes (2002a) finds that gay travelers are likely to consider more factors when deciding a destination. Some of these factors are the presence of gay scenes as well as the prospect of socializing with others from within the community. He goes on to say that they also need to take into account the local juridical conditions since as many as 86 countries consider homosexuality illegal and treats it as a crime punishable by law. This means they have to reflect on the possibility that they would be unable to show affection openly and need to suppress their sexuality in order to protect themselves from destinations where homosexuality is banned (Hughes, *Gay Men's Holiday Destination Choice: A Case of Risk and Avoidance*, 2002b). Although, this thought process might sometimes be constant in their minds, as discrimination can be high in all other destinations too. As such, gay travelers may opt to visit gay friendly destinations instead (Hughes, *Gay Men's Holidays: Identity and Inhibitors*, 2002a). While there was little evidence to support the idea that gays travel to have more sexual encounter, he found that their sexuality does have a significant influence on the choice of destination.

Pritchard et al. (2000) also concluded that the sexual orientation of those interviewed does influence the booking plans and methods as well as the choice of accommodation, packages and destinations. Many gays for the most part refer to the internet, specifically gay travel sites to gather information on a particular destination (Bruce, 2007). As information is readily available twenty-four seven these days via the internet, they are comfortable getting the specific data required through this channel. Nevertheless, there are a few others who refer to gay guide books for these details too (Bruce, 2007).

2.3. *Travel Activities*

To a certain extent, travel activities and travel motivation are interlinked. Most respondents from previous studies show that the gay community loves to travel and the majority of them would travel with either their friends or make these trips alone (Lück, 2004). To tap into this market, it is important that their perception and type of travel activities are understood to allow destinations to plan and organize the gay tourist-preferred activities (Law, Cheung, & Ada, 2004).

In most cases, the activities they engage in are very much linked to the afore-mentioned travel motivations. This includes but is not limited to activities such as relaxing, sun tanning, sightseeing, visiting friends, enjoying the local cuisine and so on. Again, this is very much in line with the motive behind taking the vacation in the first place.

Bruce (2007) found that predominantly, the Irish gays from his study engage in cultural activities as opposed to sexual ones. They primarily look for cultural offering at their vacation destinations. Most commonly, these respondents were keen on visiting historical & archeological sites, museums as well as indulging in the architecture of each destination. His study further highlights the fact that destinations targeting this market segment should focus more on the cultural offerings instead of gay-themed offerings (Bruce, 2007).

Ballegaard & Chor (2009) on the other hand highlights that gay travelers do not go on one single kind of vacation. They often seek new experiences and these may not necessarily involve sexual activities or gay-specific ones either. They, similar to Bruce's (2007) study finds that cultural aspects are highly enjoyed by these individuals. More often than not, they tend to combine different experiences while on vacation. Commonly, they go for city breaks, sun & beach vacations, involving nature or adventures. Therefore, each time, they can engage in a combination of activities while at a specific destination (Ballegaard & Chor, 2009). Gay related activities are usually kept at a minimum level.

Some studies highlight the role of gay pride events in relation to their travel motivation. There is a variety of events all over the world today that is held for the LGBT community to celebrate their sexuality. These include events like Mardi Gras Parades, Gay Games, and Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, to name a few. According to one study in USA, 24% of the surveyed respondents confirmed to travel to a particular destination, purely to attend LGBT events (Community Marketing, Inc., 2011). Here again one may note, how some gays who travel out to escape the heterosexual world would prefer to participate in these gay-pride events just so they are able to

feel comfortable, and feel a strong level of community and solidarity. This also enables them to show affection to their partners publicly.

2.4. *Spending Behavior*

In general, higher income has been associated with greater vacation experience. In one literature, homosexual travelers were described as well-educated professionals with high incomes, without offspring and therefore, said to have more spare time (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996). As a consequence, this group of people are said to be one that travels more (Roth & Luongo, 2002) and money usually is not a constraint (Stuber, 2002). Those with incomes levels that fall into the upper bracket often traveled more, further and spent extra as compared to those with a lower income (Clift & Forrest, Gay men and tourism: destinations and holiday motivations, 1999) . In their study, Cliff & Forrest (1999) confirmed this as they found that those with higher income had traveled to thirteen out of the sixteen places that were listed in their questionnaire.

Lück goes on to elaborate the various aspects of their expenditure. He states that the frequency of vacation taken by gay travelers range between 1 to 10 trips in a year. The bulk of travelers tend to book their flights and find information online. The only time they book through a travel agent, which is only the minority of the respondents, it was purely to get better deals. On average, the respondents surveyed spent around USD2,430 per trip (Lück, 2004).

Community Marketing (2011) revealed that 35% of USA gay travelers chose to stay in mid-range hotels while only 8.3% stayed in rented apartments or condominiums. 23.8% of those surveyed stayed with friends or family for free (Community Marketing, Inc., 2011).

2.5. *Sexual Behavior & Health Issues*

The number of individuals travelling abroad has increased tremendously over the last couple of decades. As such, the rise in the spread of diseases has been associated with the travel behavior of people around the world. This also includes the distribution of sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) (Vivancos, Abubakar, & Hunter, 2010). Two clinical studies also found that MSM have a higher tendency to engage in casual travel sex as compared to heterosexual men. They are also said to be more prone to have multiple sexual partners while abroad (Vivancos, Abubakar, & Hunter, 2010). It is therefore important to understand the travel habits of gays to establish the level of contacts between them and the locals and to evaluate if there is a connection to the number of sexually transmitted diseases while on vacation (Poria, 2008, p. 71).

Clift and Wilkins' study stated that in general gay tourism is often associated with sex and that many of them engage in sexual activities at gay bars, saunas and so on (Clift & Wilkins, *Travel, sexual behaviour and gay men*, 1995). He went on to state that some of them also travel specifically to engage in sexual activities with male prostitutes.

Another study related that the pursuit of sexual encounters is not an important reason or motivation for gay travelers to go on vacation (Clift & Forrest, *Gay men and tourism: destinations and holiday motivations*, 1999). This is in line with the fact that sexual health is a serious and important factor to those who were surveyed. Only a third of their sample seeks an opportunity to have sex while on holiday and the number of partners ranged from one to two hundred. The opportunity to engage in sexual activities rated lower than other motivations. A study by Hughes found that those within his sample had the same sexual behavior while at home or away on vacation (Hughes, *Gay Men's Holiday Destination Choice: A Case of Risk and Avoidance*, 2002b). This was regardless if they were travelling alone, with a partner or in groups.

One of an earlier study on gay travel amongst German male tourist indicated that they travelled to Thailand specifically as "sex tourist". These trips were made purely to engage in sexual activities with the local Thai men and boys (Clift & Wilkins, *Travel, sexual behaviour and gay men*, 1995). Similarly, another study conducted amongst southern England gays found approximately half of the 562 respondents was sexually active with new partners. These men were reported to have usually travelled in groups or alone and always carried condoms with them. They also travel with the expectation of being sexually active and engage in gay-related activity while on holiday (Clift & Forrest, *Gay men and tourism: destinations and holiday motivations*, 1999).

Clift and Forrest (1999) also go on to report that gay travelers are far likely to engage in protected sex while on vacation. The most worrying finding though was the uncertainty about their HIV status as there was a small group of people who engaged in unprotected sex.

Another study was done at a destination where the nude beach was an attraction. Here, the beach was divided by homosexual and heterosexual parts. The study found that many gay men travel here specifically to engage in casual anonymous sexual activities. No details were acquired about unsafe sex although commercial sex was apparent whereby the study found that some acted as 'predators' focusing on gay youths (Monterrubio, Hughes, Miller, & Mason, 2007).