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## What Women Want: Hotel Characteristics Preferences of Women Travellers

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### 1. Introduction

The tourism industry depends by and large on travellers and tourists. While it has become a practical precept that most travel decisions are made by males, women travellers of late, have become a very important consumer segment within the tourism industry. As recent as 2005, women travellers accounted for approximately 43% of the business travellers worldwide and are seen as a growing lucrative demographic by industry experts. Marketing experts opine that 85 % of all buying decisions are made by the fairer sex. In addition to this, the majority of corporate purchasing agents and managers are women. This translates to the fact that women make approximately 70% of travel decisions for the family as well as for other people, for instance employers or employees. With the inherent distinctiveness of the female psyche, there is bound to be a rather specific preference or inclination on accommodation characteristics that these women travellers would look for. Women travellers are perceived to be especially interested in security, cleanliness, communication facilities, style and ambience of space, smooth check-in/check-out procedures as well as in comfortable access and/or transfers.

Waters (1988) concluded from a study in the United States, that even though men still dominate the business travel market, women have been progressively taking as many and sometimes even more holidays than men in the leisure market. However, women travellers have different expectations for travel, different attitudes toward travel and play active roles in decision making compared to men (Baraban, 1986; DeLuca, 1986; Hawes, 1988). The assumption that tourism marketing is consumed identically by all tourists regardless of gender is critically flawed (Wearing & Wearing, 1996) as preferences for travel experiences differ by gender. In terms of lodging preferences, women focus mostly on criteria regarding security, personal services and low prices during hotel selection while men consider business services and facilities as being more important than those criteria selected by women (McCleary *et al.*, 1994). A latter research by Sammons *et al.*, (1999) investigated the differences in female business travellers' selection of lodging accommodations. In the survey, over 90% of the respondents rated these following characteristics as being important to very important: cleanliness of hotel, comfortable mattress and pillows, individual room smoke detector, dead bolt door locks, chain locks/latches and parking area lighting. Ten different factor-dimensions were found through factor analysis and denominated as: 'Comfort', 'Parking', 'Security', 'Services', 'Complimentary', 'Price-sensitive', 'Safety',

'Single-sensitive', 'Lounge', and 'Fire safety'. The results revealed that the comfort factor was the most significant factor affecting female business travellers' lodging selection. The comfort factor included characteristics such as cleanliness of hotel, well-maintained furnishings, comfortable mattress and pillows as well as friendly service of hotel staff. Other characteristics in this factor were good lighting to read/work, reputation of hotel, and convenience of meeting site and hotel location. The results also indicated that travellers' selections differed on socio-demographic and travel-related variables as they related to the factor dimensions

Unfortunately, marketers and practitioners were too slow in recognising gender-based preferences and this has undoubtedly led to gender blindness in designing and marketing tourism products. It has taken a long time for the players within the tourism industry to realise their mistakes. In order to subjectively target the women travellers' market segment, a formative and structured study must be conducted to identify the hotel features and services desired by this category of travellers. Nevertheless, there have been several studies conducted over the last two decades, most of them using female business travellers as their study population, but the sample populations that were studied were rather restrictive (Lutz & Ryan, 1993; Howell *et al.*, 1993; McCleary *et al.*, 1994). According to Lin and Kao (2001), gender-based travel research has focused on the business-travel needs of women, and only few empirical studies have been conducted to examine the preferences of women travellers. The review of previous studies shows that there are still a number of lingering questions concerning this gender specific group.

In examining the hotel amenities and services desired by women business travellers, there have been several studies conducted, both by institutions as well as researchers. For example, Lutz and Ryan (1993) studied about businesswomen's perception of hotel services, while Sammons *et al.*, (1999) examined female business travellers' selection of lodging and accommodation. These related studies will be discussed further in the subsequent sections of this chapter. Since times have evidently changed, evaluation of a segmented market's needs and wants must be constantly updated (Baines *et al.*, 2008). As an instance, the clothing preferences of women in their forties in the 1980s are very much different from those of the same age category today. In other words, there is a dearth of research looking specifically on women travellers in the new decade to examine the changes in their desires and preferences.

Nevertheless, as the hotel industry begins to accept the economic opportunities that this growing segment brings, fundamental changes have or should be made within the service industry. For example, some hotels now offer a separate floor for female executives or travellers. Hotels that often perceive their customers as only men could be on the losing end if their practices or facilities are not changed or tailored to suit female travellers. Items that may seem trivial such as the choice of magazines for the lobby, lack of skirt hangers or number and logical placement of electrical plugs may undoubtedly put off potential women travellers. These are the issues which this chapter intends to elaborate on with the aim of identifying the preferences of these women travellers.

As the tourism industry becomes more and more competitive, hoteliers have to introduce various strategies focused on niche market segmentations, (i.e., women travellers) in order to attract their potential customers. Hoteliers have indeed become aware of the potential of

this niche market and are seen to begin to address the needs of this significant category of tourists. Nevertheless, hoteliers need to have an insight as well as an understanding of the desire of women travellers for the success of their commercial endeavours. In view of that, a study on which this chapter is derived from, investigated the perception of women travellers towards the quality and characteristics of facilities and services provided by hotels.

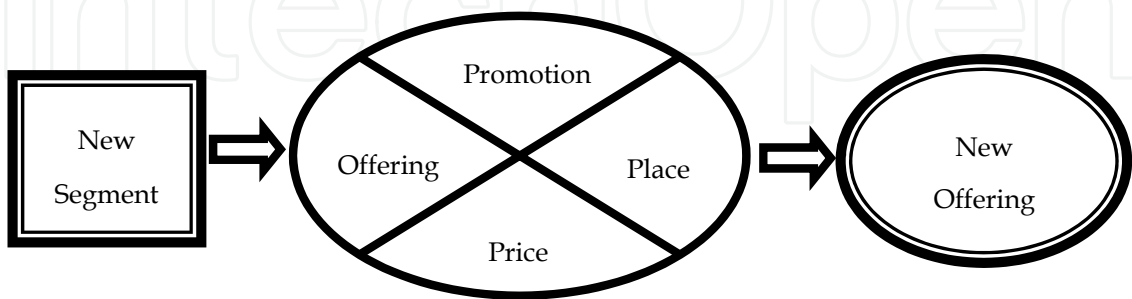
## 2. The concept of market segmentation

According to Smith (1956) market segmentation is a condition of growth that occurs when core markets have already been developed on a generalised basis to the point where additional promotional expenditures are yielding diminishing returns. Kotler (1972) defined market segmentation as the subdividing of a market into homogeneous subsets of customers, where any subset may conceivably be selected as a market target to be reached with a distinct marketing mix. In other words, segmentation involves portioning heterogeneous markets into smaller, more homogeneous market segments that can be distinguished by different consumer needs, characteristics, or behaviour (Kotler, 1980). It has long been applied by operators in the tourist industry, where 'effective segmentation schemes are considered to be of utmost importance for successfully marketing tourism products' (Stemerding *et al.*, 1996).

There is now widespread agreement that market segmentation form an important foundation for successful marketing strategies and activities (Wind, 1978; Hooley & Saunders, 1993). The benefits have been seen to include an ability to gain a fuller understanding of a particular market, improved techniques to predict consumer behaviour, and an improved ability to identify and exploit new market opportunities for commercial benefit (Heok *et al.*, 1996). Myers (1996) suggested market segmentation as one of the most important strategic concepts contributed by the marketing discipline to business firms and other types of organizations. Segmentation is a powerful tool that serves to develop understanding of the differential influence of specific service variables across segments as well as for the development of more precise marketing strategies (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2002). Segmentation, when done properly, can actually enhance sales and profits because it allows the organization to target segments that are much more likely to patronize the organization's facilities (Reid, 1983).

The purpose of market segmentation is to ensure that the elements of the marketing mix, price, distribution, products and promotion, are designed to meet particular needs of different customer groups (Baines *et al.*, 2008). As Beane and Ennis (1987) eloquently commented, 'a company with limited resources needs to pick only the best opportunities to pursue'. Since it is impossible today to remain cost competitive and offer every feature desired by customers (Pullman *et al.*, 2002), market segmentation allows organizations to focus on specific customers' needs, in the most efficient and effective way (Baines *et al.*, 2008). This latter approach has featured widely in the promotion of holidays, with packages aimed at young singles, couples, families and senior citizens, in acknowledgement that each segment possesses a different set of motives (Andereck & Caldwell, 1994). A successful operator, seeking to satisfy these segments, should be concerned with the dynamics of an evolving interplay between understanding elements of consumer motivation and providing a product/service to satisfy these needs (Pearce, 1993).

Review of literature presently available revealed that market segmentation is the best way for the hoteliers to have an understanding of what various segments require and assist them in formulating focused marketing strategies to penetrate new markets and build customer loyalty. It is a fact that today’s modern society has an increasing proliferation of tastes and furthermore consumers have increased disposable incomes which they can utilize to sate their particular preferences and predilections. As a result, marketers have sought to design product and service offerings focused on specific market demand or through a specifically applied market segmentation approach as shown in Figure 1.



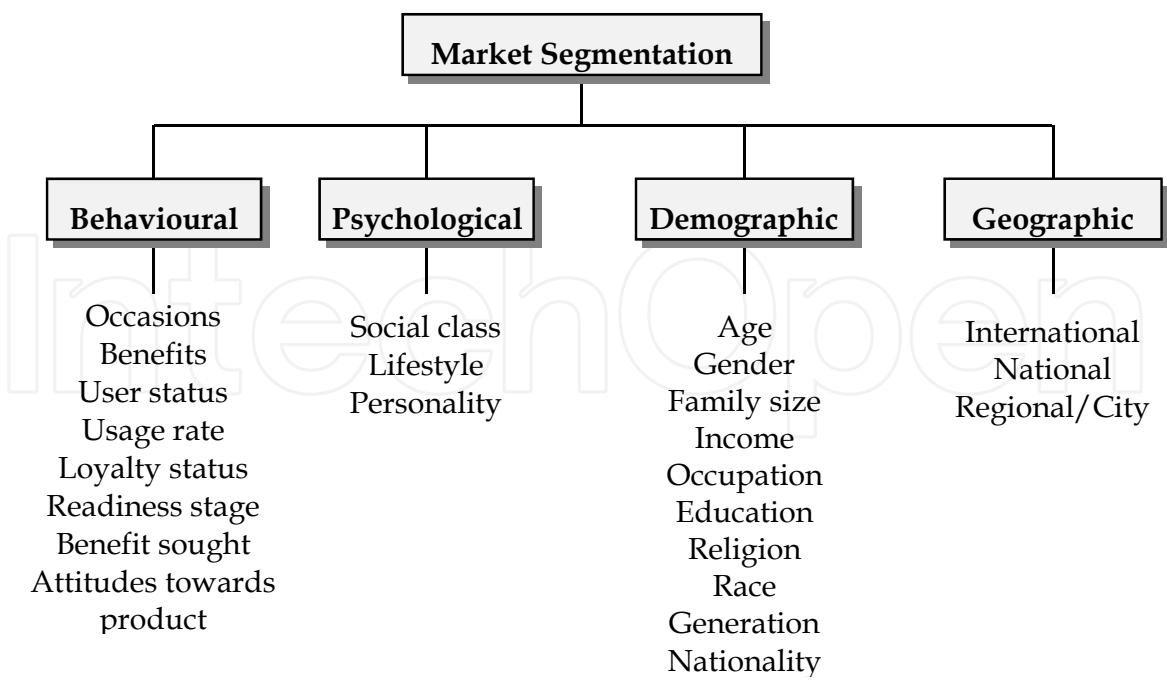
Source: Baines *et al.*, (2008).

Fig. 1. A market segmentation approach

Segmentation involves a three-step process of segmenting, targeting and positioning (STP) (Kotler *et al.*, 2006). The first step in this process is market segmentation; dividing a market into distinct groups of buyers who might require separate products and/or marketing mixes. The second step in the segmentation process is market targeting, which involves evaluating each segment’s attractiveness and selecting one or more of the market segments. The third step is market positioning, where a competitive positioning for the product and an appropriate marketing mix is developed. Once a company has chosen its target market segments, it must decide what positions to occupy in those segments. A product’s positioning is the way the product is defined by consumers based on important attributes – the place the product occupies in consumers’ minds relative to competing products (Baines *et. al.*, 2008). Kotler *et. al.*, (2006) suggested four broad categories to be used in market segmentation: Geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioural. Each of these four categories includes several variables for dividing the market into segments. These differing types of segmentation bases are depicted in Figure 2.

However, a review of the literature indicates that there is no one correct way to segment a market (Kotler, 1980). One of the most frequently used methods for segmenting a market has been demographic segmentation. Researchers commonly use socioeconomic and demographic variables to segment markets. From an academic viewpoint, the widespread use of demographic factors by tourism researchers is questionable, given that this base has been criticised for its failure to predict actual consumer behaviour (Tkaczynski *et al.*, 2009). However, demographic segmentation remains useful as it is accessible as well as measurable and consumer needs, wants, and usage rates often vary closely with demographic variables (Bowen, 1998). Gender segmentation has long been applied in spawning a raft of products targeted at women such as beauty products and fragrances, magazines, hairdressing services and clothes (Baines *et al.*, 2008). A viable marketing strategy could also similarly apply gender segmentation to the hotel industry (Howell *et al.*, 1993).





Source: Kotler *et al.*, (2006).

Fig. 2. Segmentation criteria for a consumer market

2.1 Segmenting women market

‘Women market segment exhibits a growth rate over three times faster than that for men’ (Tunstall, 1989, p. 29; Nelson, 1994, p. 233; Peters, 1997, p. 132). At the same time, ‘women no longer represent a fringe market for hospitality marketing; they represent a solid and growing percentage of travellers (Kotler *et. al.*, 2006, p.177). The simple fact is that women are now deeply integrated into the workplace, are more educated on average compared to men, and often earn as much as or more than men (Barletta, 2003). Throughout the developed world, there are increasing numbers of women entering the business world as entrepreneurs, managers and professionals. Indeed, it was no coincidence that the 1990s was been dubbed as the ‘female run decade’ (Popcorn, 1993, p. 23, cited in Mandell 1993).

Moreover, the increase of women in professional and management areas of business and in the tertiary economic sectors indicates that this trend will continue well into the next decade (Lutz & Ryan, 1993). According to the International Labor Organization (2008), the number of employed women grew by almost 200 million over the last decade, to reach 1.2 billion in 2007 compared to 1.8 billion men. In the United States, women accounted for 51% of persons employed in the high-paying management, professional and related occupations category (United States Labor Department, 2008). At the same time, this market segment is growing due to the baby boomer generation.

According to the World Health Organization (2001), it is estimated that the population of the baby boomer generation will account for one quarter of the global population in 2050 and exceed one-third of the population in countries such as the United States, Italy, Spain and Japan. Baby boomers are generally perceived to be fairly prosperous, are more likely to be working or have worked, and they are better educated than the older age groups (Stuart,

2005). Aging female baby boomers hence become a desirable market segment for the travel market. In the United States, those over 50 control 75% of the country's wealth and baby boomers control roughly 20% of total financial assets there, while the United Kingdom's 17 million baby boomers hold an estimated 80% of the country's wealth (Talwar, 2008).

Globally, women are accruing a greater share of wealth and exercising more economic power and more importantly, they are travelling. There are currently 9.1 million women-owned businesses in the United States and between 1979 and 2008, the earnings gap between women and men narrowed for most age groups (United States Labor Department, 2008). Women's economic power is accelerating as women earn and own as much as men or sometimes even more than their male counterparts. They now have more time and wider resources and opportunities to indulge their interests with the increasing amount of money they hold and attain. According to the Pacific Asia Travel Association (2005, cited in Phadungyat, 2008), it is estimated that US\$13.4 billion was spent by females in four leading Asia Pacific destinations – Seoul, Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok. This means that the potential spending power of female travellers should not be underestimated, as their expenses while travelling can be seen as a significant source of income and profit for the industries in the new century.

### 2.1.1 Targeting women travellers

The second important part of the STP process is to determine which, if any, of the segments uncovered should be targeted and made the focus of a comprehensive marketing programme. In order for market segmentation to be effective, Kotler *et al.*, (2006) suggested that all segments must be:

1. Measurable: size of the segment and the related purchasing power can be quantified
2. Accessible: able to be reached and served effectively by the marketing entity
3. Substantial: should be large and substantial enough to be profitable
4. Actionable: marketing entity can design effective marketing strategies to attract and serve the segment
5. Differentiable: distinctive from one another and respond differently to different marketing stimuli

The question therefore is, why target the women market? Women travellers represent a rising population in travel market and this is clearly seen in all relevant statistics. The majority of women travellers originate from North America, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, South and Southeast Asia, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong and Singapore (Bond, 1997). The number of women travellers is believed to continue to increase. According to Bond (2005), there are about 67 million female travellers and as such, the potential of the women's market exceeds \$19 trillion annually. To be effectively targeting this lucrative market segment, hoteliers need to know who these women travellers are. In a study commissioned by the Pacific Asia Travel Association in 1977, Bond (1997) claimed there are at least four major subdivisions of travelling women. For example, women are now travelling without being accompanied by their spouses or male partners. Women are taking more trips per year on their own including both short trips to visit relatives and friends as well as longer trips with female friends or within a tour group. The solo woman traveller represents another expanding segment of the women's travel market. According to Chiang and Jogaratnam (2005), most of the women travellers prefer travelling solo and they

represent two thirds of those travelling solo for the purpose of leisure. Besides that, women-only travel is now growing in popularity by looking at the 230% increase in the number of women-only travel companies (Bond, 2005).

Prior to World War II, participation of women in outdoor leisure activities was restricted. Since then, participation rates of women in the labour force and the number of childless women have increased, and women are becoming more independent and are more likely to undertake outdoor recreational activities such as travel (Mieczkowski, 1990). As a result of these social changes, women are increasingly spending more time without partners, children or other family responsibilities (Scott, 2002). Women are recognized as an influential market segment within the tourism industry as they are increasingly active in the participation and consumption of travel (Wilson, 2004). According to Goffee and Scase (1985), there are two major phenomena that account for this trend. First is the change in demography. Women now tend to marry late and have fewer or no children; they are increasingly able to enter the working environment and earn equitable income. Secondly, the dramatic shift believed to be driven by the change in women's psychological expectations. In other words, women start seeking satisfaction and self-accomplishment from work and other vocations, rather than from marriage.

The evolution of the family continues to expand women's role in decision making (Hall *et al.*, 2003) with the first examples emerging in a study that found that the husband primarily controlled decisions relating to travel routes but that decisions about accommodation were shared by both husband and wife (Myers & Moncrief, 1978). Nevertheless, women are still seen as the primary decision makers for family travel (Bond, 1997; Collins & Tisdell, 2002). The disintegration of the nuclear family, new divorce legislation in countries where such laws did not exist previously, and the advances in medicine which have made possible the existence of single motherhood, together with higher educational levels achieved by women in the second half of the twentieth century, have enabled their greater integration into the workforce and the processes of policy and decision making, with more and more single women travelling (Caballero & Hart, 1996).

In Asia, Master Card Asian's Lifestyle Survey report showed that the ratio of male to female travellers in Asia/Pacific has been dramatically shifting from 90:10 in 1976, to around 60:40 in 2005 (Phadungyat, 2008). Furthermore, the figure is expected to increase with female travellers matching male travellers by 2011 and exceeding them in the long term (Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2005, cited in Phadungyat, 2008). Interestingly, research suggests that women travellers are more likely than men to be loyal repeat customers (Tunstall, 1989). Surprisingly, research also showed that in terms of travel for pleasure, women seem to be more prominent in consumption of adventure travel (Swarbrooke *et al.*, 2003). For instance, in 1996, 63% of the 'North American Adventure Travellers' tour group clients were women (Bond, 1997).

Similarly, Australia's leading adventure company, 'Intrepid' found that in 1996, 74% of their clients were women and most of these women were choosing to travel alone (Bond, 1997). As such, it is evidently clear that women are becoming more prominent in their consumption of business travel. The world of business travel is no longer dominated by male business travellers; female business travellers are now playing a major role in today's business travel industry. Clearly, the female business traveller segment has grown tremendously since the 1970s. About 40% of business travellers' today are women (Lagace,



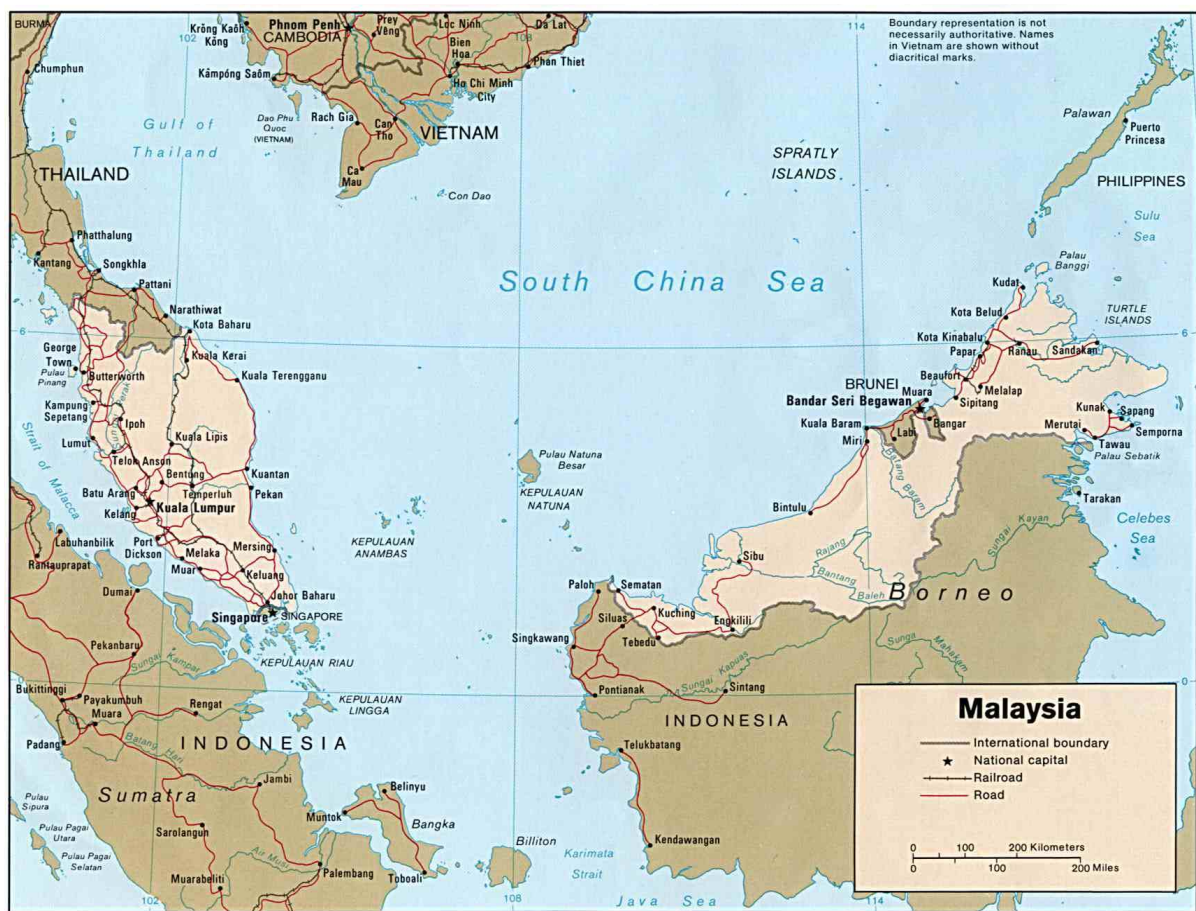
2005) while thirty years ago, women only comprised 1% of the business travel market (Tunstall, 1989).

The review of literature suggests that women travellers are a growing segment and have become a hidden but lucrative market for hoteliers. In the past, women do not seem to constitute a discrete market segment for hoteliers; rather, marketing practices accepted women as part of the family market segment and were believed to gain access to hotels in their role as wives and mothers (Mazurkiewicz, 1983). Today, the women market is expanding and substantial where their purchasing power is large and profitable enough to be served. They can be effectively reached and served with focused marketing programmes targeted specifically towards them. Considering the economic potential of this fast growing market segment, a virtually untapped and lucrative market is waiting to be served by the hoteliers. Having segmented the market, determined the size and potential of market segments and selected specific target markets, the third part of the STP process is to position a brand within the target market. Positioning is important because it is the means by which goods and services can be differentiated from one another and as such, gives consumers a reason to buy (Baines *et al.*, 2008). Key to this process is the identification of the hotel attributes that are considered to be important by the women travellers.

Mehta and Vera (1990) concluded that the planning of services and facilities should be driven by the key attributes for the segments that the hotel is serving. These attributes may be tangible (price, physical appearance, location and others) and intangible (security, reputation, staff behaviour and the like). By understanding how women travellers rate these attributes, it becomes possible to see how hotel attributes can be adapted and communicated to become more competitive within the market. Consequently, the study of the influence of the many factors involved in the women travellers' selection is very important so that hoteliers can understand their preferences and formulate a focused marketing plan to satisfy their needs. Therefore, this study aims to help hoteliers have a better understanding on factors influencing women travellers' purchase as well as to position their brand effectively.

### 3. The growth of tourism industry in Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the fastest growing tourism destinations in South East Asia as well as demonstrating political stability and industrial growth. Malaysia shares its land borders with Thailand, Indonesia, and Brunei, and its maritime borders co-exist with Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines. There are two regions to the country, with 11 states in the peninsular of Malaysia and 2 states on the northern part of Borneo. Peninsular Malaysia is separated from Sabah and Sarawak by the South China Sea (Figure 3). Before its independence in 1957, the Malaysian economy was heavily dependent on primary commodities mainly tin, rubber, palm oil and petroleum products. The Malaysian government had serious attention to develop the tourism industry after a decrease in oil and a severe recession in the mid 1980s. In the Ninth Malaysia Plan, covering the period of 2006 - 2010, the tourism industry had become one of the key economic areas where allocated spending for tourism development was magnified to RM1.8 billion, a 136% increase over what was spent during the Eighth Malaysia Plan (Hamzah, 2004).



Source: University of Texas libraries (2010).

Fig. 3. Map of Malaysia

Serious efforts in developing and promoting tourism began with the establishment of the Tourist Development Corporation Malaysia (TDCM) in 1972 and followed by a specific ministry, the Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism (MOCAT) which was set up in 1987. In April 2004, MOCAT was restructured and split into three ministries. After the restructuring, Ministry of Tourism (MOTOUR) was assigned to take care of, coordinating and implementing government policies and strategies pertaining to tourism development (Tourism Malaysia, 2010). Under the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board Act 1992, the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board, or Tourism Malaysia was established to increase the number of foreign tourists to Malaysia, extend the average length of their stay and increase Malaysia’s tourism revenue (Tourism Malaysia, 2010). Its activities centre mainly on promotion and the increase of arrivals for both international and domestic tourism (Tourism Malaysia, 2010). It also coordinates all tourism related marketing and promotional activities conducted by any organisation, government or nongovernmental agencies. Tourism Malaysia also offers recommendations for the adoption of appropriate methods, measures and programmes in order to facilitate or stimulate the development and promotion of the tourism industry in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2010).

In 1990, Malaysia geared up for its first serious attempt at promoting tourism with the launch of its “Visit Malaysia Year” campaign (Hamzah, 2004). This marked a departure

from previous attempts to market Malaysia as a tropical paradise destination, which did not achieve great success as tourists were more interested in visiting better-known destinations such as Phuket and Bali in neighbouring Thailand and Indonesia (Mike, 2010). Facing mounting competition from neighbouring South East Asian countries, Malaysia re-packaged its image, weaving the different images into a seamless tapestry that mirrored the multi ethnicity of its people (Mike, 2010). Over the years, the tourist image that Malaysia portrayed had changed from 'Beautiful Malaysia' to 'Only Malaysia', followed by 'Fascinating Malaysia' and currently 'Malaysia, Truly Asia'. Multiculturalism and cultural diversity as projected by the promotional tag line, 'Malaysia, Truly Asia', have made Malaysia a hit among international tourists (Hamzah, 2004). The Visit Malaysia Year 2007 campaign helped to increase awareness of Malaysia as a tourist destination throughout the world and to sharply increase the number of tourists visiting the country (Mike, 2010).

Tourism industry has become an important contributor to the Malaysian economy, generating RM36.9 billion for gross national income (GNI) in 2009. This makes tourism the fifth largest industry in the Malaysian economy after Oil, Gas and Energy, Financial Services, Wholesale and Retail, and Palm Oil. It was estimated by 2020, the tourism industry will contribute RM103.6 billion in GNI, with arrivals increasing from 24 million in 2009 to 36 million in 2020 (Ministry of Information Communications and Culture (KPKK), 2010). Over the past decades, Malaysia has managed to increase international arrivals from 7.9 million in 1999 to approximately 24 million in 2009, enabling Malaysia to be listed in the top 10 most visited countries. In the context of tourism receipts, the contribution from this sector has been very encouraging (Tourism Malaysia, 2010). The tourism sector has grown from RM30 billion in 2004 to RM53 billion in 2009, a growth of 1.8 times from 2004 to 2009, placing Malaysia 13th overall in terms of global tourist receipts.

### 3.1 Tourism development in Penang

Penang, branded as the Pearl of the Orient, was Asia's leading sun, sea and sand destination in the 1960s and 1970s. It is thus not surprising that the corresponding decades witnessed a rapid growth of the industry in Penang (Kee, 1996). Tourist arrival increased from 39,357 in 1970 to 200,927 in 1980 and hotel development also increased from 24 hotels with 1,456 rooms in 1970 to 36 hotels with 2,933 rooms by 1980 (Kee, 1996). Penang had hit its peak in tourist arrivals in the 1990s but this trend soon waned towards the end of the century. Nevertheless, in July 2008, George Town, the island state's old capital won the prestige of being ascribed, together with the Straits town of Melaka, in the UNESCO World Heritage List of cities and sites of great cultural value to the global community (SERI, 2010). Penang then, was back to good times with this listing as 6.3 million tourist arrivals were recorded in 2008 as compared to 5.1 million in 2007 (Tourism Malaysia, 2010). In the year 2009, despite the threat posed by spread of the Influenza AH1N1 virus, Penang ranked third place for foreign tourist arrivals in Malaysia, after Kuala Lumpur and Pahang (Tourism Malaysia, 2010). With the recently launched direct flights from Penang to Singapore, Chennai, Hong Kong and Macau by Air Asia, inbound tourism has increased considerably. The majority of the visitors to this island are from Malaysia (about 50% of the total number of visitors) and its ASEAN counterparts (Indonesia and Singapore); other major sources of international markets are China, Japan, Taiwan, United States and United Kingdom (Table 1).



Rank	Penang	Malaysia
1	Indonesia	Singapore
2	Singapore	Indonesia
3	China, Hong Kong and Macau	Thailand
4	Japan	Brunei Darussalam
5	Taiwan	China, Hong Kong and Macau
6	Thailand	India
7	United States	Australia
8	United Kingdom	Philippines
9	Australia	United Kingdom
10	India	Japan

Source: Tourism Malaysia (2010)

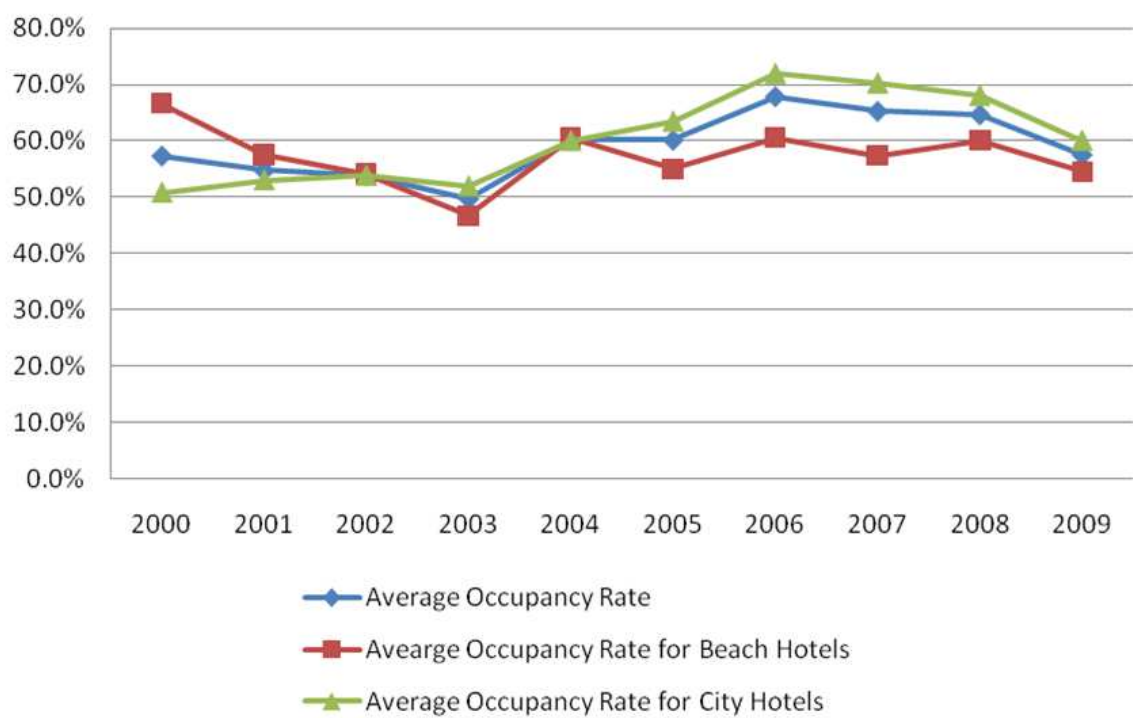
Table 1. Ranking of international tourist arrivals in Penang and Malaysia, 2009

As a tourism destination, Penang has several key strengths and differentiated products in attracting international as well as domestic tourists. Cultural and heritage tourism has been given due emphasis with the listing of George Town in the UNESCO World Heritage status in 2008. At the same time, Penang also offers a vast array of tourism products to cater for the diverse interests and demands of tourists. Tourism products include the promotion of Penang as an attractive hill and island resort, an international shopping and business event destination, cruise tourism as well as medical tourism (Penang State Tourism, 2010). Visit Penang Year 2010-2012, a three year tourism campaign was recently launched by the Penang state government (Penang State Tourism, 2010). The Chief Minister of Penang has indicated that this three year campaign is an approach combining a high degree of public and private sector cooperation to ensure a sustained effort in order to achieve a bigger contribution to the Penang Gross Domestic product. The states government targets around 10 million tourist arrivals by 2014.

3.1.1 Hotel industry in Penang

Penang is one of the top suppliers of hotel rooms in Malaysia with 127 hotels providing a supply 12,697 rooms within the state. In terms of foreign tourist arrivals and hotel guests, Penang ranked number three among the 13 states in Malaysia. However, the hotel occupancy rate does not have any close correspondence to the increasing number of tourist arrivals. The occupancy rate measures the success of a hotel’s staff in attracting guests to a particular hotel and it is measured by the number of rooms sold divided by the number of rooms available (Bardi, 2007).

Figure 4 shows Penang received a low average growth rate from 2000 to 2009. The drop in occupancy rate was recorded particularly among the beach hotels. This indicates that leisure holidays in Penang have reduced significantly while business holidays remain at almost a constant rate. City hotels which tend to attract a mix of leisure vacationers and business travellers saw a good turnover compared to the beach hotels after year 2003. However, within the first quarter of 2010, statistics released by the Malaysian Hotel Association (MAH) showed the occupancy rate of hotels in Penang hit 56%, compared with 53% in the first quarter of 2009. It was expected that Penang would then register a higher occupancy rate of about 70% in the second half of 2010, compared with about 65% in the corresponding period of 2009.



Source: Penang State Tourism (2010)

Fig. 4. Hotel occupancy rate in Penang (2000-2009)

Nevertheless, no market segmentation approach was seen to have been considered while Penang keeps promoting a multifaceted image and offers a variety of tourists’ attractions and products. On the other hand, the survival of the hotel industry in Penang is dependent on its sustainability as an international tourist destination (Lim, 2003). Stiff competition from neighbouring countries is a great challenge to the travel and hotel industry in Penang. A short-term measure to address this would then be to look into ways to increase occupancy rates of Penang hotels. In the long term however, the tourism and hospitality industry has to learn how to undertake market segmentation in order to target profitable market segments and increase business performance.

4. Research methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine women travellers’ preferences on hotel attributes. More specifically, the intent of this study is to assess if there are significant differences between the socio-demographic and travel variables of women travellers towards the facilities and services provided by hotels.

Considering this intent, the study was carried out with the following objectives:

1. To examine women travellers' preferences of hotel characteristics and in-room characteristics during the process of hotel selection.
2. To investigate whether women travellers’ preferences of hotel characteristics and in-room characteristics differ based on their socio-demographic and travel variables.

A quantitative methodology associated with the positivistic or hypothetical-deductive paradigm was employed in this study. The survey method was adopted as it is apt for a



deductive research approach and allows for large amounts of data to be collected from a considerable population size in a very economical way. A structured and self administered questionnaire was developed as the survey instrument to achieve the research objectives. This questionnaire was developed based on the information obtained through literature review and the survey was carried out by interviewing international women travellers who travelled to Penang, Malaysia. The survey was conducted for one month, from January to February 2011. 218 questionnaires were duly completed and returned, representing a 43.6% response rate.

A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotations was performed to delineate the underlying dimensions of 24 items of hotel characteristics and 20 items of room characteristics.

## **5. Research findings**

### **5.1 Respondent characteristics**

From the 218 respondents, the majority was the group between 25 to 34 years old with 38% (83) falling within this category; 28% (62) were below 25 years old and 12% (26) fell into the 45-54 age group category. Another 12% (26) were over 54 years old and only 10% were between the ages of 35-44. About 118 respondents (54%) were diploma or bachelor degree holders while 21% (46) obtained master or PhD degrees. About 14% (29) of the respondents attended secondary school, 3% (7) only attended primary school and another 8% (18) obtained other academic qualifications. About 59% (128) of the respondents were single and the remaining of 41% (90) were married.

In terms of annual household income, 28% (62) of the respondents reported in the range of US\$30,001-60,000, 26% (56) of the respondents reported annual household incomes of less than US\$30,000 followed by 18% (40) who reported annual household incomes between US\$90,001-120,000. Respondents who reported an annual household income between US\$60,001-90,000 and over US\$150,000 made up 16% (34) and 9% (20) respectively. Only 3% (6) of the respondents reported an annual household income in the range of US\$120,001-150,000. About 44% of the respondents (96) spent 3-4 days at Penang Island compared to 32% (69) that spent 1-2 days followed by 15% (33) who have spent one week or more. The remaining 9% (20) spent 5-6 days at Penang Island. Most of the respondents were on holiday at Penang Island accounting for 69% (151) of the respondents, 9% (19) travelled for visiting friends and family (VFR) followed by 5% (10) who travelled for business purposes. Another 17% (38) of the respondents visited Penang Island for other purposes.

### **5.2 Respondent preferences on hotel and in-room characteristics**

Factor Analysis was used to provide a better understanding of the underlying structure and to subsequently provide a simplified regression procedure for further analysis (Pitt & Jeantout, 1994). Factors were considered significant and retained only if they had an eigenvalue equal to or greater than 1, and variable with factor loading equalling to or greater than 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 1995). To reaffirm the notion that distinct dimensions existed for women travellers, an exploratory factor analysis was used. The 24 items of hotel characteristics and 20 items of in-room characteristics were subjected to principal

component analysis (PCA) respectively via the SPSS Version 17 software and the suitability of data for analysis was then accessed.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test were performed for all 24 items of hotel characteristics. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) suggested .6 as the minimum value of KMO index for a good factor analysis. For factor analysis to be appropriate, Bartlett's Test should be significant, where  $p<.05$  (Bartlett, 1954). The value of the overall KMO analysis was .814 and Bartlett's Test of sphericity was significant, with  $p=.000$  (Sig. value) indicating that the factor analysis was appropriate. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients with .3 and above supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix (Table 2).

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.814
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1410.013
	df	276
	Sig.	.000

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's test on hotel characteristic items

Similar tests were performed on the 20 items of in-room characteristics. The value of the overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) analysis was .765 and Bartlett's Test of sphericity was significant, with  $p=.000$  (Sig. value) indicating that the factor analysis was also appropriate. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of several coefficients registering .3 and above supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix (Table 3).

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.765
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1196.563
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's test on in-room characteristic items

5.3 Analysis of hotel characteristics

Five factors (see Table 4) with eigenvalue greater than one, and explaining approximately 49.5% of the variance, were derived from the analysis. Items with factor loadings of 0.40 or higher were clustered together to form constructs, as suggested by Kass and Tinsley (1979). From the initial 24 items, two items with a factor loading of below 0.40 were excluded. The two items that were excluded were 'Room number not on key' and 'Surveillance cameras in hallways'. Each factor designation was based on the characteristics of its composing variables and labelled as follows: 'Core-services', 'Convenience', 'Additional-services', 'Comfort' and 'Price and reputation'. The core-services factor had the highest eigenvalue, 5.590, representing 23.29% of the explained variance.

The second highest eigenvalue was the convenience factor. This value of 2.301 represented 9.58% of the explained variance in the sample. The additional services factor had 1.510 eigenvalue, representing 6.29% of the explained variance followed by the comfort factor

which had an eigenvalue of 1.268, representing 5.28% of the explained variance. The fifth factor, the price and reputation factor had an eigenvalue of 1.214, representing 5.06% of the explained variance in the sample. The total variance explained by the five factors was an accumulative 49.5%. The core-services factor included characteristics with factor loadings greater than 0.465 such as 24 hours airport transportation (0.649), front desk staff on duty 24 hours (0.646), bell service (0.619) and 24 hours room service (0.534). Other characteristics in this factor were swimming pool, sauna, fitness facility (0.491) and security personnel on duty 24 hours (0.465). All of these characteristics were features that were preferred by women travellers and would clearly result in whether a hotel was acceptable to them. The next two factor named were convenience and additional services.

	Factor Loading				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
<i>Factor 1: Core- services</i>					
24 hours airport transportation	0.649				
Front desk staff on duty 24 hours	0.646				
Bell service	0.619				
24 hours room service	0.534				
Swimming pool, sauna, fitness facility	0.491				
Security personnel on duty 24 hours	0.465				
<i>Factor 2: Convenience</i>					
Room close to lobby or lower floor		0.656			
Express check-out		0.606			
Bright hallway lighting		0.579			
On-premise parking		0.570			
Parking area lighting		0.540			
Hotel entrance/exit doors locked at night		0.519			
Prearranged check-in		0.410			
<i>Factor 3: Additional Services</i>					
Women-only floor			0.805		
Gift shop			0.763		
24hours restaurant or coffee shop			0.653		
<i>Factor 4: Comfort</i>					
Hotel location				0.724	
Cleanliness of hotel				0.705	
Friendly service of hotel staff				0.615	
Well-maintained furnishings				0.497	
<i>Factor 5: Price and reputation</i>					
Price of accommodations					0.782
Reputation of hotel					0.584
Eigen value	5.590	2.301	1.510	1.268	1.214
Percent of variance (%)	23.29	9.58	6.29	5.28	5.06
Cumulative variance (%)	23.29	32.87	39.16	44.44	49.50
Alpha	.70	.76	.81	.60	.50

Table 4. Factor analysis of hotel characteristics

The characteristics included in the convenience factor with factor loadings greater than 0.410 were room close to lobby or lower floor (0.656), express check-out (0.606), bright hallway lighting (0.579) and on-premise parking (0.570). Parking area lighting (0.540), hotel entrance/exit doors locked at night (0.519) and prearranged check-in (0.410) were also included within this factor. The additional services factor with loadings greater than 0.653 included women-only floor (0.805), gift shop (0.763) and 24 hours restaurant or coffee shop (0.653). The fourth factor was comfort, with loadings greater than 0.497 that included the following characteristics: hotel location (0.724), cleanliness of hotel (0.705), friendly service of hotel staff (0.615) and well-maintained furnishings (0.497). The fifth factor was the price and reputation factor that included price of accommodation (0.782) and reputation of hotel (0.584).

Reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha) were computed for the items that formed each factor. The reliability coefficients for the 5 hotel factors were .70, .76, .81, .60 and .50 respectively. The results show that the reliability coefficients for these five room factors exceeded the recommended level of .50 (Nunnally, 1967). It can then be deduced that these five hotel factor dimensions were perceived as particularly important by the women travellers in selecting hotels.

#### 5.4 Analysis of in-room characteristics

Five factors (Table 5) with eigenvalue greater than one, and explaining approximately 54.46% of the variance, were derived from the analysis. Items with factor loadings of 0.40 or higher were clustered together to form constructs, as suggested by Kass and Tinsley (1979).

From the initial 20 items, one item with a factor loading of below 0.40 was excluded. The excluded item was 'well-lighted vanity area'. Each factor designation was based on the characteristics of its composing variables and named as follows: 'In-room amenities', 'Complimentary', 'Bathroom amenities', 'Security' and 'Fire safety'. The in-room amenities factor had the highest eigenvalue, 4.716, representing 23.58% of the explained variance. The second highest eigenvalue was the complimentary factor. This value of 2.274 represented 11.37% of the explained variance in the sample. The bathroom amenities factor had 1.461 eigenvalue, representing 7.31% of the explained variance followed by the security factor which had an eigenvalue of 1.289, representing 6.44% of the explained variance. The fifth factor, the price and reputation factor had an eigenvalue of 1.152, representing 5.76% of explained variance in the sample. The total variance explained by these five factors accumulated to 54.46%. The in-room amenities factor included characteristics with significant factor loadings greater than 0.483 such as in-room mini bar or coffee maker (0.802), hair dryer (0.723), in-room ironing board and iron (0.703), full-length mirror (0.583) and comfortable mattress and pillows (0.483).

All of these characteristics were features that were preferred by women travellers and would clearly result in whether a hotel would be suitable for them. The next two factors were complimentary and bathroom amenities. The complimentary factor with factor loadings greater than 0.477 included characteristics such as free cable TV (0.769), free local telephone calls (0.760), safety deposit boxes (0.533) and Jacuzzi (0.477). The bathroom amenities factor with factor loadings greater than 0.579 included sanitary items in bathroom (0.830), bathrobes and towels in bathroom (0.769) and additional phone in bathroom (0.579). The fourth factor

was the security factor with factor loadings greater than 0.554 which included these following characteristics: peep holes (0.799), chain locks/latches (0.599) and safety deposit boxes (0.554). The fifth factor was the fire safety factor with factor loadings greater than 0.409 which included individual room smoke detectors (0.639), non-smoking rooms (0.631), individual room sprinkler system (0.621) and in-room temperature control (0.409).

	Factor Loading				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
<i>Factor 1: In-room amenities</i>					
In-room mini bar or coffee maker	0.802				
Hair dryer	0.723				
In-room ironing board and iron	0.703				
Full-length mirror	0.583				
Comfortable mattress and pillows	0.483				
<i>Factor 2: Complimentary</i>					
Free cable TV		0.769			
Free local telephone calls		0.760			
Phone by bed		0.533			
Jacuzzi		0.477			
<i>Factor 3: Bathroom amenities</i>					
Sanitary items in bathroom			0.830		
Bathrobes and towels in bathroom			0.769		
Additional phone in bathroom			0.579		
<i>Factor 4: Security</i>					
Peep holes				0.799	
Chain locks/latches				0.599	
Safety deposit boxes				0.554	
<i>Factor 5: Fire safety</i>					
Individual room smoke detectors					0.639
Non-smoking rooms					0.631
Individual room sprinkler system					0.621
In-room temperature control					0.409
Eigen value	4.716	2.274	1.461	1.289	1.152
Percent of variance (%)	23.58	11.37	7.31	6.44	5.76
Cumulative variance (%)	23.58	34.95	42.26	48.70	54.46
Alpha	.74	.64	.70	.70	.60

Table 5. Factor analysis of In-room characteristics

Reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha) were computed for the items that formed each factor. The reliability coefficients for the 5 factors were respectively .74, .64, .70, .70 and .60. The results show that the reliability coefficients for these five room factors exceeded the recommended level of .50 (Nunnaly, 1967). It can then be safely concluded that these five room factor dimensions were perceived as being particularly important by the women travellers in the selection of hotels.



## 6. Conclusion

The study undertaken identified five underlying hotel factors that are considered by women travellers during hotel selection, namely; (1) Core-services, (2) Convenience, (3) Additional services, (4) Comfort and finally, (5) Price and reputation. The study also suggested five other factors, namely; (6) In-room amenities, (7) Complimentary facilities, (8) Bathroom amenities, (9) Security and (10) Fire safety to make up the room characteristics that influence women travellers.

The overall results suggest that women travellers placed importance on 'Cleanliness of hotel' and 'Friendly services of hotel staff' as well as 'Bathrobes and towels in bathroom' and 'In room temperature control' during hotel selection. Besides these characteristics, factors such as security personnel on 24 hours duty, well-maintained furnishing, front desk on 24 hours duty, individual room sprinkler systems and individual room smoke detectors also emerged as an importance aspect of women travellers' preferences. Although these results may not seem surprising, they reinforce the notion which suggests that women travellers prefer staying at hotels that provide quality services and attributes where the guests' comfort and safety were of top priority. Hoteliers would do well in understanding these preferences of women travellers by reviewing the result of hotel attributes analysis presented in this chapter.

The results presented within this chapter should impress upon the hoteliers that women travellers prefer staying at hotels that provided quality services and in-room amenities without compromising the comfort and safety of guests. Furthermore, this study is significant from the perspective of hoteliers in order to gain more knowledge about the women market segment within the hospitality industry. Accordingly, the results of this study would enable hoteliers to know how women travellers perceive the quality of hotel services and facilities and to help them in formulating appropriate marketing strategies to attract these women travellers in a more effective way as well as in retaining existing customers. At the same time, by understanding the preferences of women travellers, hoteliers would be able to achieve a competitive advantage and stand out among competitors, which in turn will lead to an increased business and commercial performance.

Although this study was carried out in Penang Island, Malaysia, hotels elsewhere in the world can learn from these findings and suggestions, as the factors that comprise both hotel and in-room characteristics are universal among hotels throughout the world. The work from this study will hopefully bring some inspiration as well as insight for hoteliers to understand and satisfy the ever growing number of women guests. Knowing how travellers perceive the quality of services and facilities would enable hoteliers to achieve a competitive advantage, stand out among competitors, enhance brand image, increase business performance, retain existing customers and attract new ones (Lewis,1993).

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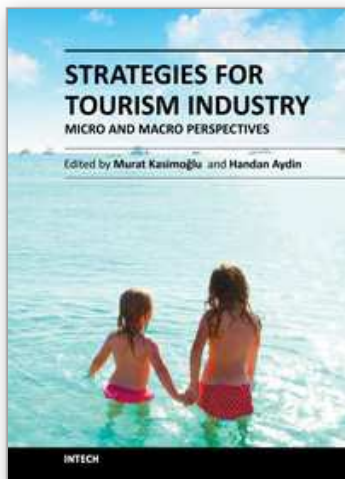
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## **Strategies for Tourism Industry - Micro and Macro Perspectives**

Edited by Dr. Murat Kasimoglu

ISBN 978-953-51-0566-4

Hard cover, 392 pages

**Publisher** InTech

**Published online** 20, April, 2012

**Published in print edition** April, 2012

Today, it is considered good business practice for tourism industries to support their micro and macro environment by means of strategic perspectives. This is necessary because we cannot contemplate companies existing without their environment. If companies do not involve themselves in such undertakings, they are in danger of isolating themselves from the shareholder. That, in turn, creates a problem for mobilizing new ideas and receiving feedback from their environment. In this respect, the contributions of academics from international level together with the private sector and business managers are eagerly awaited on topics and sub-topics within Strategies for Tourism Industry - Micro and Macro Perspectives.

### **How to reference**

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Azizan Marzuki, Tan Lay Chin and Arman Abdul Razak (2012). What Women Want: Hotel Characteristics Preferences of Women Travellers, Strategies for Tourism Industry - Micro and Macro Perspectives, Dr. Murat Kasimoglu (Ed.), ISBN: 978-953-51-0566-4, InTech, Available from:  
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