



รายงานวิจัยฉบับสมบูรณ์
(Final Report)

จุดยืนภาพลักษณ์ทางการท่องเที่ยวของกลุ่มประชาคมเศรษฐกิจ
อาเซียน: กรณีศึกษาประเทศมาเลเซียและสาธารณรัฐประชาชน
ลาว (ASEAN Image Positioning: The Case Study of Malaysia
and Lao People's Democratic Republic)

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กรณีศึกษาประเทศมาเลเซียและสาธารณรัฐประชาชนลาว (ASEAN
Image Positioning: The Case Study of Malaysia and Lao People's
Democratic Republic)

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ชุดโครงการ การศึกษาจุดยืนภาพลักษณ์ทางการท่องเที่ยวของกลุ่มประชาคม
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Executive Summary

This study is a part of a cooperative project among ASEAN countries. Its focus has been envisioned to examine the current situation of destination branding and image of the two selected countries: Lao PDR and Malaysia. This research was necessary as the countries members realize that tour packages and campaigns being promoted to the market currently lack varieties and distinctive features. This study therefore will first analyse current situation. Based on the analysis, selected involved parties will be consulted to identify a 'theme' towards destination positioning development.

Basic understanding from the review of secondary data was used to form a general topic for interviews. Only limited five travel agents were interviewed. This was helpful in creating a better picture about tour package currently being offered in the marketplace. Two focus groups were then undertaken to explore the existing image of the two selected destinations. The results generated from the previous steps were corroborated to be cross-checked with key informants at the destinations. Key informants were selected from a provided list of persons in charge of ASEAN roadmap project. The continuity and background information about the project was clearly discussed. The researcher validated the results which consist of current situation (SWOT) and proposed theme as well as a tagline which could be used as a key promotional tool for ASEAN guidebook.

In the case of Laos it was found that in spite of high-quality attractions and the increased tourism infrastructure, all interviews indicated there remain a number of significant marketing barriers. The following issues and impediments were identified and perceived:

- A lack of knowledge of the destinations
- no direct access to major markets except from Thailand
- Limited circuit development
- Very poor image of domestic air services
- Limited accommodation outside tourist prime areas

The interview indicated strongly that Laos is truly the 'Hidden Heart of Asia' and offers travellers an unparalleled glimpse of old South East Asia. Tourists come to Laos to experience its

rich cultural and natural heritage. The population of Laos comprises a large number of different ethnic groups, many of whom, to date, maintain largely traditional life ways, particularly in the more remote mountainous regions. Tourists seeking a fascinating, memorable experience, visiting this country will always be enriched and seemingly lost in time. Therefore the theme generated and finally selected for Laos is experience which others cannot be matched with a tagline of "Only in Laos"

On a different pole, Malaysian branding strategies have been a remarkably successful case. The composition of this professionally completed task includes all significant parts. Being a diverse yet harmonious country, Malaysia highlights this as its uniqueness. Under this strong brand image and positioning, Malaysia succinctly develops its marketing and promotional campaign. Its marketing materials are deemed to well represent the award winning activities. It has been agreed and supported by a representative of the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia that it is considered appropriate to further foster this strongly built image.

Both countries are unique in terms of the diversity of activities and tourism development options they offer. In contrast to other destinations in ASEAN, the development focus can be on the entire countries rather than just one primary tourist attraction. From a thematic perspective, the attention is therefore drawn to the authentic cultural and natural resources of the countries.

Abstract

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Key words: Destination Positioning, Laos Theme, and Malaysia Theme

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รายงานนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อรวบรวมสถานการณ์การท่องเที่ยวของประเทศลาวและประเทศมาเลเซีย เพื่อนำไปวิเคราะห์หาจุดแข็ง จุดอ่อน โอกาส และ อุปสรรค ประเด็นที่พบนี้จะนำมาเป็นข้อมูลในการสัมภาษณ์ผู้เกี่ยวข้องหลักในการจัดการการท่องเที่ยวของทั้งสองประเทศ เป้าหมายหลักในการวิเคราะห์วิจัย คือการกำหนดหาจุดยืนภาพลักษณ์ที่มีความเป็นเอกลักษณ์ในกลุ่มประเทศอาเซียน

ภาพลักษณ์ที่นำเสนอจากการศึกษาลักษณะเฉพาะของทั้งสองประเทศ คือ ประสบการณ์ที่สามารถหาได้อย่างหลากหลาย มีแหล่งท่องเที่ยวที่น่าสนใจ ความหลากหลายเป็นจุดยืนที่ได้รับการสนับสนุนและนำมาใช้ในการประชาสัมพันธ์ประเทศมาเลเซียอย่างกว้างขวางและประสบความสำเร็จอย่างยิ่ง จึงควรนำจุดเด่นมาใช้ต่อไป ส่วนประเทศลาวควรนำความเป็นเอกลักษณ์ คือ ประสบการณ์ที่ไม่สามารถหาได้จากที่ใดในกลุ่มประเทศอาเซียน

คำหลัก: ภาพลักษณ์จุดหมายปลายทาง, ภาพลักษณ์ลาว ภาพลักษณ์มาเลเซีย

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Research

This research is a part of the ASEAN cooperation in tourism development. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok by the five original Member Countries, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined on 8 January 1984, Vietnam on 28 July 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999.

It has been well recognized by all members now that tourism is one of the significant economic drives for the development of the region. Tourist flowing within the region is significant and should be managed effectively by all members. Noting the fact that, the ASEAN region has a population of about 500 million, a total area of 4.5 million square kilometers, a combined gross domestic product of almost US\$ 700 billion, and a total trade of about US\$ 850 billion. Tourism movement within this region has always been and will remain to be a major aspect of tourism development of all countries in ASEAN. The objectives of the ASEAN Cooperation in Tourism are:

- a. To develop and promote ASEAN as a single and collective tourism destination with world class standards, facilities and attractions;
- b. To enhance cooperation in the tourism sector among Member States, involving both public and private sectors, in order to achieve facilitation of intra-ASEAN travel and free trade and investment in tourism services;
- c. To provide a common forum for discussion of major issues and developments in travel and tourism; and
- d. To provide a mechanism to coordinate and supervise cooperation projects and activities for the tourism sector in ASEAN.

Under the above broad agenda of ASEAN cooperative framework, this study has been envisioned to examine the current situation of destination branding and image of the two

selected countries: Loa PDR and Malaysia. This research was necessary as the countries members realize that tour packages and campaigns being promoted to the market currently lack varieties and distinctive features. This study therefore will first analyse current situation. Based on the analysis, selected involved parties will be consulted to identify a 'theme' towards destination positioning development. Specific research objectives are derived as stated below.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To analyse current tourism situation of the selected countries
2. To identify unique brand personality
3. To identify "themed" destination positioning development

An effort to complete the above will in turn help to achieve the forth objective, that is

4. To establish cooperative networking between Thai researchers/academia and tourism business operators in the two selected countries

1.3 Significance and Expected Outcome

The results of this study will contribute to a better understanding about ASEAN tourism products. This understanding will provide a firm platform for all members to gear their efforts to develop and promote ASEAN as one single destination. Specific outcomes of this study should be expected as:

- Tourism products currently being offered by ASEAN members will be clearly identified.
- The existing knowledge about tourism products potential which could be developed to promote ASEAN as one single destination will be better synthesized.
- Cooperative network within sectors and between cross sectors will be established.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide relevant theoretical background for further analysis of the study. A situation analysis framework will first be discussed. Then an overview of destination branding concept will be reviewed.

2.2 Context of the Tourism Industry and Market Conditions

Global, Regional and Subregional Tourism Trends

Tourism continues to be a fast growing, powerful and efficient hybrid industry. However, the global tourism industry has had to face a series of external shocks: the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the war in Iraq, the SARS outbreak in Asia and most recently, the December 2004 tsunami in South and Southeast Asia. Despite the difficulties, global international arrivals have recovered substantially since 2004. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), global international tourism arrivals increased by 10 and 6 percent in 2004 and 2005, respectively, after declining by 1.2 percent in 2003.

Table1 Global International Arrivals by Region Visited

Year	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Europe	270.4	316.4	389.6	387.8	397.3	399.0	415.0	443.9
Americas	92.8	109.0	128.2	122.2	116.6	113.0	124.0	133.1
Asia & Pacific	57.7	85.0	114.9	120.5	131.1	119.3	153.3	156.2
Africa	15.2	20.7	28.6	29.2	29.9	30.8	32.8	36.7
Middle East	9.8	13.8	24.3	24.0	27.9	28.8	34.8	38.4
World	445.9	544.9	685.6	683.7	702.8	690.9	759.9	808.0

Source: World Tourism Organization (2005). WTO World Tourism Barometer. Vol. 3 No. 1.

The most recent United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) publications estimate total world international tourist arrivals in 2005 at around 808 million, with the Asia-Pacific region as the second-most visited region in the world after Europe. Significantly, the Asia Pacific region has been the fastest growing tourism destination region in the world. All in all, the

Asia-Pacific region accounted for 156.2 million arrivals (19.33 percent of total world international tourism) in 2005.

The UNWTO forecasts that total international tourism arrivals are likely to increase to around 1 billion by 2010, and 1.6 billion arrivals by 2020. In turn, international tourism is expected to generate a value of \$1 trillion in 2010 rising to \$2 trillion by 2020. Given the robust global outlook and based on the impact of developments in the subregional transportation road, air, rail and water networks, coupled with simplification of border processing procedures and normal promotions activities by the private and public sector, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) forecasts that international tourism arrivals to the Greater Mekong Subregion (of which, Lao PDR is part of) will likely increase by 11 percent per annum to 30.6 million arrivals by 2010 and by around 8.5 percent per annum to 46.1 million by 2015 (ADB, 2005. GMS Tourism Sector Strategy Final Report).

Tourism Initiatives in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is a geographic area in Southeast Asia comprised of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and two provinces of China – Guangxi and Yunnan. The six member countries see the GMS mechanism as a venue for regional cooperation towards the achievement of common development goals. Working with development partners such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the member countries of the GMS have endorsed a framework for cooperation designed to: (i) strengthen connectivity; (ii) integrate national markets to promote economic efficiency and private sector development; (iii) enhance human development through capacity building at the subregional level especially the participation of women and ethnic groups in regional economic development; and (iv) improve the ways in which the natural biodiversity resources of the GMS countries are managed, protected and their value enhanced. Related to these, the governments of the six GMS countries have agreed on eleven flagship programs:

1. The North-South Economic Corridor (NSEC) Development.
2. The East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) Development.
3. The Southern Economic Corridor (SEC) Development.
4. Telecommunications Development.
5. Regional Power Interconnection and Trading Arrangements.
6. Facilitating Cross-Border Trade and Investment.
7. Enhancing Private Sector Participation and Competitiveness.
8. Developing Human Resources and Skills Competencies.
9. A Strategic Environment Framework.
10. Flood Control and Water Resource Management.
11. GMS Tourism Development.

Several of these programs have direct implications and benefits for Asia and/or ASEAN as a whole, and for the selected case of Lao in particular. For example, one specific project that will likely have a direct impact on tourism in SE-Asia will be the development of the Southern Economic Corridor (SEC) road connecting Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Expected to be completed by 2009, the expressway will create a fast overland link between Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City, passing through important tourist destinations such as Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh in Cambodia. Based on similar infrastructure developments in the other economic corridors, the ADB (GMS Tourism Sector Strategy Final Report, 2005) expects normal average traffic to increase at around 7-8% per annum until the new road is opened in 2009. Then, ADB anticipates a one-time upward shift for 2010 of up to 61% above the previous year's traffic. This spike in traffic is anticipated to also result in increased demand for destinations along the Corridor that will have the attractions as well as tourist facilities and services to encourage visitors to both stay and move within ASEAN countries.

Specific to the tourism sector, the GMS Tourism Development flagship program has also identified priority projects along the Southern Economic Corridor designed to facilitate cross-border travel between the countries, as well as to stimulate tourism activity in support of the GMS countries Millennium Development Goals of sustainable development, poverty alleviation and heritage conservation. Thus, through the newly-created Mekong Tourism Coordination Office

(MTCO), the member countries will be promoting the subregion as a single destination and encouraging tourists to visit multiple countries in the region. These initiatives will have direct impacts to accelerate the tourism development in Lao and to a lesser degree the tourism development in Malaysia.

Tourist Market Trend: Experiential, learning, and enrichment travel

Creating outstanding and memorable experiences has become central, not just to the leisure and entertainment industries, but to an increasing number of businesses, as companies seek to build the emotional involvement that goes with them.

(The Experience Profit Cycle, The London Business School 2003)

A key innovation in today's tourism business is experiences. In today's environment, of ever more sophisticated tourists, those who deliver memorable tourist experiences consistently create superior value and competitive advantage. Experiential, learning, and enrichment travel are terms emerging as being the factors predominantly influencing traveler's choices. The demand is growing for travel that engages the senses, stimulates the mind and wellness, includes unique activities, and connects in personal ways with travelers on an emotional, physical, spiritual or intellectual level. An opportunity is at the forefront for destinations to diversify their tourism offer through building holistic, themed travel journeys, rather than merely packaging a series of attractions and special events. Responding to this demand, it is vital that the selected destinations are offering innovative and outstanding designs which are geared to attracting new customers, repeat guests, and meeting the needs of niche and mainstream markets interested in experiential or learning travel. The proposed themes and tourist activities should be centered as *experience providers* which sequence and stage carefully choreographed activities, gastronomy, personal encounters, and authentic experiences, designed to create long lasting memories, engaging travel, and increase customer loyalty. The types of visitor experiences in demand included:

- Reaching into the community in ways that enable travelers to meet local people and participate in day-to-day community experiences. The three most popular vehicles were via kitchen parties, home visits, and farm visits;

- Experiential, hands-on, or interactive activities that destinations have included in their tours through innovative use of their core assets;
- Special access and behind-the-scenes tours that go beyond the traditional tourism offer, are unique and in some cases, not available to mass market travelers;
- Learning and discovery that is participatory, involves two-way communication and interaction with locals, and fosters personal growth. These opportunities were not perceived to be value added, rather it was a core expectation of travelers; and
- Travel that promotes shared experiences with family, friends and fellow travelers.

The above literature reviewed provides a significant implication for further identification of theme and positioning of both selected destination.

Tourist Demographic trend

In the next 30 years, the fastest growing age segment will be the older than age 55 group, which is forecasted to increase more than 50% (from 20.9% of the population in 1990 to 30.9% in 2020). Because people are living longer, have healthier lives, and have higher levels of discretionary income, the older than age 55 segment will provide major opportunities for the selected cases.

Business Tourism- MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Convention and Exhibition)

The Meetings, Incentive, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) industry has been recognised by many destinations as a sector that provides both a high delegate spend and a high yield. Recognising the opportunity afforded by this highly lucrative industry, Malaysia established an official organisation dedicated to the promotion of association and corporate meetings, incentive events, conventions and exhibitions. The Bureau's establishment reflects Malaysia's growing stature as a destination of choice for international meetings, conventions and exhibitions. Malaysia is gradually recognised worldwide for the quality of its facilities and for the professionalism of its service and operation of MICE events. Predominantly this is being achieved by capital city destinations and their venues and associated infrastructures.

The Rise of Incentive Travel

The appreciation of travel incentives as a business tool has continued to increase in recent years. It becomes a global management tool that uses an exceptional travel experience to motivate and/or recognise participants for increased levels of performance in support of organisational goals. The common theme of incentive travel reward programs is that they present participants with unique experiences and recognition for high achievement. Being a recipient of an incentive travel award conveys status and prestige upon the winner. Many participants are multiple award winners and are highly discerning travellers. A high proportion of incentive programs include partners to increase the motivational value of the program. Corporations implement incentive programs to drive sales, increase profits, improve service, enhance morale, retain staff or provide high-profile recognition.

More and more businesses now recognise the business value of incentives and design performance plans for employees, with specific objectives and measures of success related to incentive rewards. This fast growing sector opens up many opportunities for both Lao and Malaysia.

Generation-X: More Adventure

Generation-X incentive winners will continue to want more adventure – ‘extreme’ activities in their incentive programmes. Certain groups seek ‘Extreme Incentives’ - the rugged outdoors, the thrill of adventure, the adrenaline rush. Such programmes are designed to increase competition among participants, who face a more challenging business environment and who need to learn how to take more risks and think more creatively. These incentives appeal to a very active, youthful group, particularly highly competitive sales and marketing executives, who live for the thrill and enjoy pushing themselves to the limit.

Social and Environment Responsibility

A new generation of corporate incentive participants is less comfortable with the conspicuous consumption that often characterises such events. This is particularly the case

when they take place against a background of disadvantaged communities or in developing countries. There are many encouraging examples of recent C & I events that have included an opportunity for participants to actually interact with local people and do something to help them during the trip:

- Football matches with local children
- Raising money for a local school or hospital, through sponsorship or through an auction at a gala dinner
- Environmental improvement projects

The Use of Spas

Spas are increasingly being used as rewards in incentive programmes and as a way to energize or relax corporate meeting attendees – men as well as women. The spa has become an amenity that guests as well as meetings planners expect at hotels and resorts. Many companies are realizing that a spa-based incentive is a wise investment in the well-being of their employees. By combining healthy food, exercise, beauty treatments, and seminars on topics such as stress relief, relaxation, and aromatherapy, time spent at a spa can rejuvenate the mind and body - meaning that participants will be more productive when they get back to the office. Meeting and Incentive groups with large budgets are increasingly arranging for participants to sign up for such treatments and charge them to the company.

The Rise of the Retreat

A term used, until very recently, only to signify a temporary withdrawal from everyday life for the purpose of religious contemplation and meditation, the word 'retreat' is now commonplace in corporate language, meaning an off-site, usually residential, board meeting. But such events differ from regular off-site board meetings in a number of ways:

- Instead of moving quickly through a rigid agenda, board members spend their time at a retreat concentrating on specific long-term issues or thinking more broadly about the future of their organisation
- Retreats are designed to spark creative thought

- Retreats can be an effective way to teach new members about an organisation's goals and customs
- Retreats often use outdoor settings that are conducive to walking and reflecting on what is happening during the event
- Time for social interaction is a vital element: teambuilding activities are often requested
- Outside facilitators may be used

Global tourism context and market conditions can now help identify market opportunities for the selected destinations. It is important to capitalize on the emerging trend and position the destinations' attractiveness effectively in the marketplace. The following section now turn to the review of what factors should be taken into consideration in the analysis of both internal and external environment. The review is provided in a checklist form which will be used as a basis for an analysis in the following chapters.

2.3 Tourism Business Environment (SWOT)

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Advantages of proposition?	Disadvantages of proposition?	Market developments?	Political effects?
Capabilities?	Gaps in capabilities?	Competitors' vulnerabilities?	Legislative effects?
Competitive advantages?	Lack of competitive strength?	Industry or lifestyle trends?	Environmental effects?
USP's (unique selling points)?	Reputation, presence and reach?	Technology development and innovation?	Competitor intentions - various?
Resources, Assets, People?	Financials?	Global influences?	Market demand?
Experience, knowledge, data?	Own known vulnerabilities?	New markets, vertical, horizontal?	New technologies, services, ideas?
Financial reserves, likely returns?	Timescales, deadlines and pressures?	Niche target markets?	Vital contracts and partners?
Marketing - reach, distribution, awareness?	Cashflow, start-up cash-drain?	Geographical, export, import?	Sustaining internal capabilities?
Innovative aspects?	Continuity, supply chain robustness?	New USP's?	Obstacles faced?
Location and geographical?	Effects on core activities, distraction?	Tactics - surprise, major contracts, etc?	Insurmountable weaknesses?
Price, value, quality?	Reliability of data, plan predictability?	Business and product development?	Loss of key staff?
Accreditations, qualifications, certifications?	Morale, commitment, leadership?	Information and research?	Sustainable financial backing?
Processes, systems, IT, communications?	Accreditations, etc?	Partnerships, agencies, distribution?	Economy - home, abroad?
Cultural, attitudinal, behavioural?	Processes and systems, etc?	Seasonal, weather, fashion influences?	Seasonality, weather effects?

2.4 Destination Branding

Destination branding is about how tourists perceive the destination in their minds. Branding a destination is not just about creating a logo or a slogan. It is about capturing the distinct elements of the destination in the brand and communicating these elements through the brand's components: identity, essence, personality, image, character and culture. Managing these components in order to create a unique position of the destination brand in the consumer's mind is called brand positioning. A destination brand can be leveraged by creating a new "product" under the same umbrella name to increase the customer base and by co-branding.

2.4.1 The Concept of Destination Branding

All products require a "branding" effort to successfully compete for customers. Destination branding is about combining all the attributes associated with the place (i.e. its products, and services from various industries such as agriculture, tourism, sports, arts, investment, technology, education, etc.) under one concept, which expresses a unique identity and personality of the destination and differentiates it from its competition. Most importantly, branding requires a vision and mission about the destination and its future success.

What is behind a brand and what does it take to create a brand? It is important to understand what brand means in order to better utilize its marketing potential. A brand is an accumulation of characteristics that form a destination's image and identity. In simple words, branding is a **promise** to the consumer, an **expectation of performance** and a **mark of integrity and reputation** (Travis, 2000). It builds up continuously in the minds of the destination's consumers and it is affected by experiences, memories (Deutsch and Real, 2002) and other visitors' comments. A brand reflects all the destination products and services, which are part of the destination's identity. A brand needs to have unique elements, which differentiate it from its competitors and establish an image in the mind of the consumer. After establishing an image, branding can further build upon other destination brand elements.

Destination branding is not just about the visual and verbal elements used in a logo or slogan. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) usually face challenges with selecting verbal elements to include in a brand name and tagline, as well as selecting visual elements to use in a logo. However, branding is not only about these elements. It is about the philosophy and the values that form the brand. The verbal and visual elements of a destination brand should represent the values and identity of a destination and capture the perceptions of its visitors.

When a brand is established in a consumer's mind it can trigger associations with smaller destinations within the area the brand represents. But first there is a need to establish a consistent brand identity. For example, "The Henry Ford" brand is the umbrella brand name for five different attractions in the same destination. Although each attraction has its own positioning, promise, descriptor and tagline, all of them are consistently branded under one brand. The choice of any brand name must be based on research performed by the organization as to how visitors perceived and referred to the destination. In the case of a country, the brand name provides an umbrella for the country's other destinations, as well as other business entities, which benefit from its greater exposure. For example, a shopping related business located in a primarily outdoor recreation destination will benefit from the overall increase in traffic in the area caused by the overall attractiveness of the larger destination. A brand also relies on how much the smaller entities in a destination embrace and support it in order to reinforce the brand identity to the visitors and increase its reputation.

2.4.2 Important Issues on Branding

The literature also suggests that the following issues must be considered carefully.

- Branding creates that first idea about a destination in the consumer's minds
- Branding efforts should be based on visitors' perceptions about the destination
- A mission and vision are necessary in destination branding
- A destination brand exists in the mind of the consumer who, if satisfied, remains loyal and does not switch.

2.4.3 Components of destination branding

As mentioned earlier, branding is not just a logo or trademark. It incorporates many components that work together to form the destination brand concept. Their management is part of the brand strategy. The components are identity, image, personality, essence or soul, character and culture. The value of the brand is described by the term brand equity. Brand positioning and leveraging are branding management approaches.

Brand identity

Brand identity is how brand strategists want the brand to be perceived. "It is a set of unique brand associations that represent what the brand stands for. These associations imply a promise to customers from organization members. Brand identity should help establish a relationship between the brand and the customer by generating a value proposition involving functional, emotional or self expressive benefits" (Aaker 1996, p.68).

Brand culture

Brand culture is about the system of values that surround a brand much like the cultural aspects of a people or a country (Upshaw, 1995).

Brand essence or brand soul

Brand essence represents the emotional elements and values of the brand. Essence should be part of a long term positioning that does not change with every communication (<http://www.allaboutbranding.com/index.la sso?article=108>).

Brand character

Brand character is related to its internal constitution, how it is perceived in terms of integrity, trustworthiness and honesty (Upshaw, 1995). This is also related with the promise of the brand to deliver the experience associated with its name.

Brand personality

Brand personality is the set of human characteristics that are associated with the brand. It includes such characteristics as gender, age, socioeconomic class, as well as human personality traits such as warmth and sentimentality (Aaker, 1996, p. 141).

Brand image is a key component in the formation of a clear and recognizable brand identity in the market (Williams et al, 1999). **Brand image is related to how the brand is currently perceived by consumers** (Aaker, 1996, p. 71). In other words what is the reputation of the brand in the marketplace (Upshaw, 1995). For example, Las Vegas' brand essence is the ultimate entertainment and gaming extravaganza destination.

Brand positioning

Brand positioning involves the management of the brand and the "manipulation" of the brand components to create an image, a position in the minds of the visitors that differentiates the destination from its competitors.

Positioning a destination brand means to use the destination's strong points and build upon them. It is vital that the brand is believable and reflects some of the underlying features of the destination even though they might not be widely known. It is also important to understand the position of the destination in the minds of the consumers so that the pertinent positioning strategy is formulated. An example on positioning comes from Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott (2002) and is related to the positioning of New Zealand. The writers discuss that the brand is 'New Zealand', its brand essence is 'landscape' and its positioning is 'New Pacific Freedom.' This tagline for their positioning strategy aims to communicate an adventurous new land and culture on the edge of the Pacific Ocean (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott, 2002).

Brand equity

David Aaker (1996, pp. 7,8) defines brand equity as "a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and that firm's customers. The major asset categories are brand name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand associations." Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) define brand equity in more technical terms as "the total accumulated value or worth of a brand; the tangible and intangible assets that the brand contributes to its corporate parent, both financially and in terms of selling leverage."

Consequences of branding absence

The importance of branding may be better perceived by discussing what happens when branding is not present. Lack of branding means that the consumer may not be as aware of a destination or its identity. This means that during the decision making process of choosing a travel destination the consumer will consider a destination, which has a distinct position in his/her mind. Lack of branding means also lack of visual, emotional, rational and cultural destination images, which do not encourage potential visitors to feel a certain way about a destination and potentially motivate them to go there. Branding is very important in today's market. With so many products and services to choose from, consumers need to have some basis in order to make decisions (http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/inee-ef.nsf/vwGeneratedInterE/h_ee00231e.html).

It is suggested that destination should not try to be all things to all people. This is not differentiating the destination brand from the competition. Create a unique position in the minds of the consumers. The positioning of a brand is associated with the concepts of brand image and brand associations. A brand association is anything "linked" in memory to a brand (Aaker, 1991, p. 109.)

2.5 Destination Positioning

Position is a form of market communication that plays a vital role in enhancing the attractiveness of a tourism destination. Positioning is a communications strategy that is the natural follow-through of market segmentation and target marketing. Since market segmentation is based on the notion that different tourism destinations appeal to different types of tourists, target market segments must be selected before tourism marketers can begin to entice these potential customers. An effective positioning strategy provides a competitive edge to a destination that is trying to convey its attractiveness to the target market. Thus, true positioning differentiates a destination from its competitors on attributes that are meaningful to customers and gives it a competitive edge. However, this is a complex process that requires careful analysis of the attributes of destinations and the needs of the target markets. Selection of a positioning strategy that creates a distinctive place in customers' minds is essential in preventing the following pitfalls (Lovelock, 1991).

1. The destination is forced into a position of competing directly with a stronger competitor. For example, a destination that is further from the source of its visitors may be relegated to a secondary or tertiary level of competition with destinations that are closer to the market.
2. The destination's position is so unclear that its target market does not recognize the message that is being sent to them. This often happens when a destination tries to be all things to all people.
3. The destination has no identity or has a negative image in customers' minds and does not create customer demand.

2.5.1 Effective Positioning

According to the basic principles of marketing, products and services are created to solve customer "problems" (i.e., to satisfy needs and wants) and provide benefits. Thus, to be effective, positioning must promise the benefit the customer will receive, create the expectation, and it offer a solution to the customer's problem. If at all possible, the solution should be different from and better than the competition's solution set, especially if the competitors are already offering a similar solution.

Properly targeted, single-minded positioning affects everything a destination does or stands for, not only advertising, but also all of its promotions. Positioning also affects policies and procedures, employee attitudes, customer relations, complaint handling, and the myriad of other details that combine to make the tourism experience. Tourism services compete on more than just image, differentiation, and benefits offered. There must be a consistency among the various offerings and it is the positioning statement that guides this consistency. Likewise, although positioning can be applied for an entire country, a given area, or a specific city, tourism officials should develop a consistent message if the country plans to use one market to generate business for another. There are two tests of effective positioning. First, the position must be believable in the tourist's mind. Second, the destination must deliver that promise on a consistent basis.

2.5.2 Positioning Intangibles

One of the biggest challenges faced by tourism marketers is that the product is largely intangible. Some would argue otherwise, because what is more important than the hotel room, the meal, the beach, the ocean, and the mountains? These are all tangible aspects of the tourism destination. However, these tangibles are what is being "sold", but not what is being "marketed". If we were selling beaches or mountains, what difference would it make where the tourist went, assuming a comparable level of quality?

'What we are marketing, of course, are intangibles. The tangibles are essential and necessary but as soon as they reach a certain level of acceptance, they become secondary. Because they are so difficult to differentiate, to be competitive, the intangibles have to be marketed. Even as tangibles, mountains and beaches have a measure of intangibility because they are experienced rather than possessed.

If tourism products are mostly intangible, they have to be marketed with tangible evidence. This is what is referred to as "tangibilizing the intangible." However, this is a complicated process. By emphasizing the concrete elements one may fail to differentiate oneself from the competition, and since the intangible elements are abstract, by emphasizing the abstract one compounds the intangibility. Thus, tourism destination positioning should focus on enhancing and differentiating abstract realities by manipulating the tangible clues.

Unfortunately, being aware of this need does not ease the problem. It is still difficult to find meaningful tangible evidence that supports intangible constructs. What must be done, is to create a "position" in the tourist's mind. That is why positioning relies heavily on target marketing. The mental constructs held by the target market must be known, as well as the tangible evidence that sustains them.

2.5.3 Positioning Process

The positioning process consists of the various steps needed to develop an effective positioning strategy. This process must be continuous to keep up with changes in the environment including the changing needs of the customer and the competitors' tactics.

Developing a positioning strategy for both selected destinations (Lao and Malaysia) will be used as case exemplars to illustrate the steps in the positioning process.

1. Market Positioning

Market positioning is the first step and is defined as the process of identifying and selecting markets or segments that represent business potential, to determine the criteria for competitive success (DiMingo, 1988). This must be based on a thorough knowledge of the needs, wants, and perceptions of the target market, along with the benefits offered by the destination. To do this, a few crucial questions must be answered. These are:

1. What is important to the target market?
2. How does the target market perceive the destination?
3. How does the target market perceive the competition?
4. What attributes should a destination use to differentiate itself to make the best use of its limited resources?

2. Psychological Positioning

This step utilizes communications to convey a destination's identity and image to the target market. It converts customer needs into images and positions a destination in the visitors minds.

Psychological positioning is a strategy employed to create a unique product image with the objective of creating interest and attracting visitors. Since it exists solely in the mind of the visitor, it can occur automatically without any effort on the part of the marketer and any kind of positioning may result. Two very dissimilar destinations may be perceived as the same; two similar destinations may be perceived as different. What the marketer hopes to do is to control the positioning, not just let it happen. Moreover, failure to select a position in the marketplace, to achieve, and to hold that position may lead to various consequences, all undesirable, as pointed out earlier. There are two kinds of psychological positioning in marketing: objective positioning and subjective positioning. Each has its appropriate place and usage.

- **Objective Positioning**

Objective positioning is concerned, almost entirely, with the objective attributes of the physical product. It means creating an image about the destination that reflects its physical characteristics and functional features. It is usually concerned with what actually is, what exists. Objective positioning can be very important and is often used in the tourism industry. If a destination has some unique feature, that feature may be used to objectively position the destination, to create an image, and to differentiate it from the competition.

It has been suggested that less successful objective positioning occurs when the feature is not unique. This is why many destination promotions with pictures of beaches fail to create a distinct image or successfully differentiate the product. Other unsuccessful approaches may include a picture of two people looking at a mountain that looks like any other mountain or lying on a beach that looks like any other beach. One of the first rules of effective positioning is uniqueness.

- **Subjective Positioning**

Subjective positioning is concerned with subjective attributes of the destination. Subjective positioning is the image, not of the physical aspects of the destination, but other attributes perceived by the tourist, (i.e., they do not necessarily belong to the destination but to the tourist's mental perception). These perceptions and the resulting images may not necessarily reflect the true state of the destination's physical characteristics. They may simply exist in the tourist's mind and not all tourists' images agree with a particular perception or image.

3. Positioning Approaches

This is the final step in the positioning process, and there are several different approaches to positioning any tourism destination (Aaker and Shamsby, 1982). 'While psychological positioning creates an image, this positioning approach completes the picture, using visual and words, to reinforce what the destination does best and what benefits are offered. Tourism marketers may decide to select the most

appropriate of the following approaches, depending on the information gathered during market and psychological positioning. The following positioning may be used:

- **Positioning with respect to use or application** (positioned based on the reasons for visiting)
- **Positioning according to the users or class of users** (positioning features the people who should visit the destination).
- **Positioning with respect to a product class** This technique is often used to associate a destination with experiences that are extraordinary and/or unique.

It can be concluded that positioning is the ultimate weapon in niche marketing. Stripped of all its trappings, positioning analysis answers the following questions:

1. What position does a destination own now? (In the mind of the target market.)
2. 'What position does the destination want to own? (Look for positions or holes in the marketplace.)
3. 'Who must the destination outposition? (Manipulate what's already in the mind.)
4. How can it be done? (Select the best approach that will work for the target market.)

In sum, positioning is a valuable weapon for tourism marketers. To position successfully requires recognizing the marketplace, the competition, and tourists' perceptions. Positioning analysis on a target market basis provides the tools to identify opportunities for creating the desired image that differentiates a destination from its competitors and for serving the target market better than anyone else.

This chapter has provided a literature related to destination branding, destination positioning and its processes. These literature reviewed lays a firm foundation upon which the selected destinations' brand, image, theme and positioning can be advanced. The following chapter will outline research methods and methodology used to achieve the set objectives.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods selected to achieve the objectives of this study. The subject matter, research questions, topic, and objectives of this study all have a bearing on the choice of methodology. The following sections first outline the data collection procedure and research methodology.

Table 2: Research Methods and Objectives

<i>Methods</i>	<i>Objectives</i>
<i>Stage 1 Literature Review</i>	To build and understanding about branding and destination positioning research as a basis for explanation and evaluation.
<i>Stage 2 Exploratory Study</i>	
<i>2.1 Secondary and Archival Data</i>	To gain familiarisation with the area of study, specifically relating to destination performances and marketing practices.
<i>2.2 Interviews with travel agents</i>	Establish broad examples of image and existing tour programme offered to the selected destinations
<i>2.3 Focus groups (both experienced travelers and non-experienced travelers)</i>	To explore the existing image from travelers and/or tourists point of view
<i>Stage 3 Results validation</i>	To validate the results of situation analysis and the proposed theme from key informants, experts and involved stakeholders of the two selected destinations.

It was important to first take time to gauge the existing brand landscape. Secondary and archival data help researcher evaluate the existing market positioning and assumptions as well as market structure, market segmentation information which pertain to the selected destinations. These secondary and archival data were also collected from available updated press media. Building a clear picture of what have happened and what will happen about the destinations help frame an understanding about the current situation. As a result of this first step research, SWOT analysis could then be performed. The points identified at this stage were considered as tentative, as these were later validated by the key informants of the selected destinations. All points were re-confirmed. There were a few issues added as a result of the interviews.

Basic understanding from the review of secondary data was then used to form a general topic for interviews. Only limited five travel agents were interviewed. This was helpful to create a better picture about tour package currently being offered in the marketplace.

Two time focus groups were undertaken with the same group of young travelers to explore the existing image of the two selected destinations. The recommended number of people per group is usually six to ten (MacIntosh 1993), but some researchers have used up to fifteen people (Goss & Leinbach 1996) or as few as four (Kitzinger 1995). Numbers of groups vary, some studies using only one meeting with each of several focus groups (Burgess 1996), others meeting the same group several times. In this study, two meetings with the same group were held. The group consists of a group of 16 young travelers, 5 participants have just visited Laos and the remaining has not visited the place. The same group also consisted of 4 travelers who have visited Malaysia and the remaining has not visited Malaysia. The discussion lasted about 2.5 hours, approximately 1 hour discussing each destination and having 30 minutes break. The following topics were explored.

1. Identify 5 key words which came to their mind when they think of the destination?
2. Explain and share their real experiences in comparison to their perceived view
3. What are the top 5 activities they think are a “must do” ?
4. Top five places they think of the country and think of these five places

5. What attributes should a destination use to differentiate itself to make the best use of its resources?

The group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience and purely from perceived image. These focus groups rely on interaction within the group based on the above topics that are supplied by the researcher. It was important that the selected individuals or participants have a specific experience of or opinion about the topic under investigation; that an explicit interview guide is used; and that the subjective experiences of participants are explored in relation to predetermined research questions.

It is not always easy to identify the most appropriate participants for a focus group. If a group is too heterogeneous, whether in terms of gender or class, or in terms of professional and 'lay' perspectives, the differences between participants can make a considerable impact on their contributions. Alternatively, if a group is homogenous with regard to specific characteristics, diverse opinions and experiences may not be revealed. Participants need to feel comfortable with each other. Meeting with others whom they think of as possessing similar characteristics or levels of understanding about a given topic, will be more appealing than meeting with those who are perceived to be different (Morgan 1988). The nature of the group composition was rather homogeneous in terms of their age. A list of all participants is shown in appendix.

The results generated from the previous steps were corroborated to be cross-checked with key informants at the destinations. Key informants were selected from a provided list of persons in charge of ASEAN roadmap project. The continuity and background information about the project was clearly discussed. The researcher validated the results which consist of current situation (SWOT) and proposed theme as well as a tagline which could be used as a key promotional tool for ASEAN guidebook. A list of these key informants is shown in appendix.

Chapter 4: A Case of Lao People's Democratic Republic



4.1 Destination Description

Laos was under the control of Siam (Thailand) from the late 18th century until the late 19th century when it became part of French Indochina. The Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1907 defined the current Lao border with Thailand. In 1975, the Communist Pathet Lao took control of the government, ending a six-century-old monarchy. Initial closer ties to Vietnam and socialization were replaced with a gradual return to private enterprise, a liberalization of foreign investment laws, and the admission into ASEAN in 1997. The government of Laos - one of the few remaining official Communist states - began decentralizing control and encouraging private enterprise in 1986. The results, starting from an extremely low base, were striking - growth averaged 7% in 1988-2001 except during the short-lived drop caused by the Asian financial crisis beginning in 1997. Despite this high growth rate, Laos remains a country with a primitive infrastructure; it has no railroads, a rudimentary road system, and limited external and internal telecommunications. Electricity is available in only a few urban areas. Subsistence agriculture accounts for half of GDP and provides 80% of total employment. The economy will continue to benefit from aid from the IMF and other international sources and from new foreign investment in food processing and mining.

Since the early 1990s Lao PDR has adopted an increased engagement within the region and internationally. It joined ASEAN in 1997 and is committed to tariff reduction under the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) to be phased in by 2008. There is growing engagement with other nations on key regional issues such as human trafficking, drug prevention and quarantine. The Lao PDR currently hosts the Mekong Secretariat. The Government has also begun the accession process to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

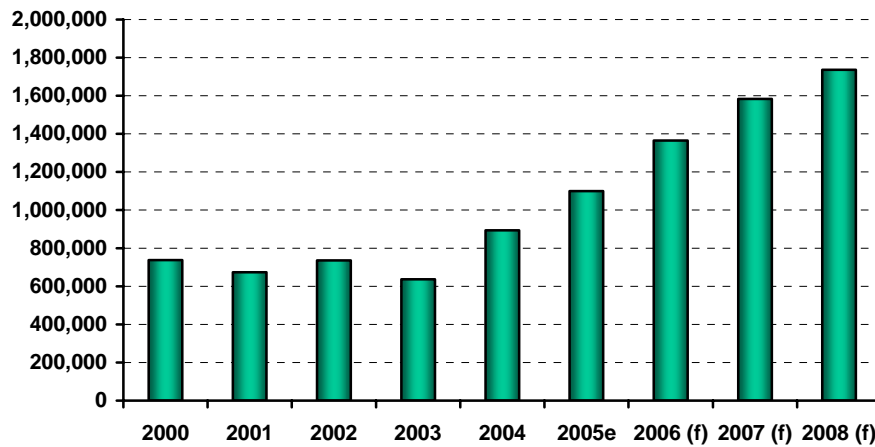
Lao is an active partner in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation Program. This programme has strategic importance in terms of potential exports to rapidly industrialising neighbouring countries. The ADB initiatives designed to enhance economic relations within the six countries is contributing to improvement in infrastructure such as roads and the promotion of freer flow of goods and services in the sub-region. The Lao PDR is the poorest GMS country and its integration into ASEAN and the GMS provides both challenges and opportunities. The level of social and economic development this integration and engagement will bring to its people will depend on how the government manages the multiple transitions it faces in the political, social and economic spheres.

4.2 Destination Performance

The Lao PDR's tourism industry is expanding rapidly and offers a key opportunity to earn significant foreign exchange. Statistics compiled by the National Tourism Authority (NTA) indicate that the number of international arrivals in the year 2000 was 737,208, increasing from 37,613 just 9 years prior. The Lao authorities recognize the importance of its abundant natural and cultural assets, and actively promote them in an effort to draw international visitors to areas of natural bounty. However, the present lack of national capacity to plan, implement and sustainably manage cultural and nature tourism activities both inside and around the country's many national protected areas (NPA's) places the natural and cultural heritage at risk of being degraded. Laos has seen substantial increase in visitor arrivals since 1995, and although individual markets have fluctuated, the overall trends have been encouraging. Figure 1 depicts the growth and number of tourist arrivals. However, it should be noted that the existing statistical data include same-day visitors with overnight visitors. Thailand has been and more likely remains as the top generating market for Laos with tourists from USA, France, China, Japan and United Kingdom also being fast growing markets for Laos.

The regulations that have restricted tourism in Laos have been progressively reduced and tourists can now travel relatively freely around the Country. The main gateway and business centre is currently concentrated in two principal regions. These are Vientiane and the province of Luang Prabang as the prime tourist area.

Figure 1: Tourist arrivals



Source: Lao National Tourism Administration, 2004

Tourists come to Laos to experience its rich cultural and natural heritage. The population of Laos comprises a large number of different ethnic groups, many of whom, to date, maintain largely traditional lifeways, particularly in the more remote mountainous regions. Laos also has an abundance of natural forest cover home to a vast number of bird and animal species, some of whose survival is threatened by forest utilization and hunting. Given this solid base of exotic appeal, tourism is now the largest earner of foreign exchange for the Lao government. Recognizing its importance to Lao's economic development, international donor and lending agencies are actively supporting the growth in tourism – for example, the Asian Development Bank is investing \$12 million in assisting both tourist infrastructure development, such as roads and airports, and the capacity to manage a growing number of visitors.

4.3 Tour Package

The interviews helped identify current tour package offered in the marketplace for Laos. It is found that the prime tourism attractions such as Luang Prabang and Vientiane were included in all tour packages. A typical 6 day tour will feature the following key places as following illustration:

TIMELESS LAOS

TOUR OPERATOR : [BA Tours & Travel Company](#)

What to See

Vientiane - Luang Prabang - Pak Ou cave - Khouangsi Waterfalls

Day 1: Arrival –Vientiane

On arrival in Vientiane Capital, you are met and transferred to our centrally located hotel. A city tour acquaints us with the major sights of the capital. We visit the sacred Wat Sisaket the oldest temple with thousands of miniature Buddha statues and the former royal temple of Wat Prakeo previously housed the famous Emerald Buddha Image. On the way to the famous and sacred structure of That Luang Stupa, we stop to take some pictures of the imposing Patuxay Monument, which is well known as Vientiane's own Arc de Triumph, sunset by Mekong Riverside and late evening. Overnight in Vientiane.

Day 2: Vientiane - Luang Prabang

We board a short afternoon flight to Luang Prabang, which is perhaps the best-preserved traditional city in South East Asia. The tranquility and charm of this town with its splendid natural scenery and cultural sights make it one of the most delightful places to visit in Laos. On arrival, we start seeing the impressive stupa of Wat Visoun, the shrine of Wat Aham, Wat Mai, we then climb up to the top of Phousi Mount for an enjoyable exploration of the sacred, gilded stupa as well as a beautiful sunset view of the city and the Mekong River. From there, we explore Street Night Market, where you can find the lovely collection and handmade textile by local and hill tribe people surrounding Luang Prabang. Overnight in Luang Prabang. (B)

Day 3: Luang Prabang - Pak Ou cave

After breakfast, we enjoy a short-guided tour seeing the city's oldest temple of Wat Sene and the magnificent Wat Xiengthong with its roofs sweeping low to the ground, which represent the classical architecture of Luang Prabang temple. We then embark on a cruise upstream on the Mekong River, which also gives us a beautiful view of the tranquil countryside as well as an interesting visit to the mysterious of Pak Ou Caves, crammed with thousands of gold lacquered Buddha statues of various shapes and sizes. Along the way, we stop at the village of Ban Xanghai, where they make the local rice wine. On return, we also have time visiting

Ban Xangkhong, Ban Xienglek, villages of Jute Sar paper hand making, known for its hand made paper quality. Overnight in Luang Prabang (B)

Day 4: Luang Prabang – Khouangsi Waterfalls

This morning you may want to wake up early and participate in the daily early morning ritual of saffron-clad monks with their black Alms-giving bowls being given offerings from the local people, including the ubiquitous sticky rice. Breakfast; this morning you may want to wake up early and participate in the daily early morning ritual of saffron-clad monks with their black Alms-giving bowls being given offerings from the local people, including the ubiquitous sticky rice. From there you will visit the morning Phosi Market where you will see such diverse offerings as dried buffalo skin, local tea and saltpeter among the chickens, vegetables and hill-tribe weavings. Laos is also known for its traditional crafts, and today you will visit local village of Lao ethnic minority groups at Ban Ouay, Hmong Village, Ban Ou, Laoloum Village and Ban Thapene, Khmu Village, then drive to the beautiful Khouangsi Waterfall where you can splash around in the pools or walk along the forest paths, return to Luang Prabang by late afternoon and continue to Ban Phanom, a well known weaving village, return to the city by late evening for observing the sunset at Wat Siphouthabath.

Overnight in Luang Prabang (B)

Day 5: Luang Prabang – Vientiane

The National Museum at the former Royal Palace, which displays a lovely collection of the artifacts reflecting the richness of Lao culture dating from the days of the early kings right through the last sovereign, and the Central Market are not to be missed. Today, we visit these sights before catching a flight back to Vientiane. After checking into hotel, we transfer out to see the Buddha Park, a blend of Buddhist and Hindu sculptures created by mystical monk on parkland located by the Mekong River and the impressive Friendship Bridge. A view of the Spectacular sunset over the Mekong River is perfect way to finish the day.

Overnight in Vientiane. (B)

Day 6: Vientiane – Departure

After breakfast, we visit the Morning Market, and the weaving village of Ban Nong Bouathong [if time permits]. The tour ends after your transfer to Wattay Airport or Friendship Bridge for departure. (B)

Box 1: Laos Tour Description

NORTHERN LAOS (Laos)

Our tour of Northern Laos is a journey from Vientiane to Luang Prabang and beyond. We travel along near empty roads through magnificent mountain scenery in a part of Asia where time seems to stand still. This remote land that was once known as the Kingdom of Lang Xang, or the Land of a Million Elephants, is home to some of the most awesome scenery and best mountain roads in Asia. Starting in the sleepy capital, Vientiane, we fly north to remote Luang Nam Tha near the Chinese border for where Akha, Hmong, Kamu among many tribal people live in scenic valleys or on isolated mountainsides. The combination of rugged mountain scenery and the rich, varied cultures still hardly tainted by tourism make this tour a very special experience. Traveling by boat as well as bicycle, we pass through limestone canyons and jungle covered valleys. Finally, we arrive in the old royal capital of Luang Prabang. Nestled among mountains at the confluence of the Mekong and Khan Rivers, this delightful town has a unique and special charm. We spend the last days of the tour cycling amongst the temples and discovering the French colonial splendour that drove UNESCO to make Luang Prabang a world heritage site.

It was also found that Laos also has been positioned as a cultural heritage destination. A typical cultural tour around Laos seems concentrated around the prime tourist attractions of Luang Prabang too.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Vientiane - Luang Prabang - Pakou

Day 1: Arrival - Vientiane - Luang Prabang

Upon arrival, you are met and transferred to central capital or orientation tour, [if time permits] then transfer to airport for a short flight to Luang Prabang, which is perhaps the best-preserved traditional city in Southeast Asia. The tranquility and charm of this town with its splendid natural scenery and cultural sights make it one of the most delightful places to visit in Laos. After checking into hotel, we visit the impressive stupa of Wat Visoun and the shrine of Wat Aham, Wat Mai, we then climb up to the top of Phousi Mount for an enjoyable exploration of the sacred, gilded stupa as well as a beautiful sunset view of the city and the Mekong River. From there, we

explore Street Night Market, where you can find the lovely collection and handmade textile by local and hill tribe people surrounding Luang Prabang. Overnight in Luang Prabang.

Day 2: Luang Prabang - Pakou - Luang Prabang

This morning you may want to wake up early and participate in the daily early morning ritual of saffron-clad monks with their black Alms-giving bowls being given offerings from the local people, including the ubiquitous sticky rice. Today, we enjoy a short-guided tour seeing the city's oldest temple of Wat Sene and the magnificent Wat Xiengthong with its roofs sweeping low to the ground, which represent the classical architecture of Luang Prabang temple. We then embark on a cruise upstream on the Mekong River, which also gives us a beautiful view of the tranquil countryside as well as an interesting visit to the mysterious of Pak Ou Caves, crammed with thousands of gold lacquered Buddha statues of various shapes and sizes. Along the way, we stop at the village of Ban Xanghai, where they make the local rice wine. On return, we take a short drive to Ban Phanom, well known for its hand weaving. Overnight in Luang Prabang. (B)

Day 3: Luang Prabang – Vientiane

The National Museum at the former Royal Palace, which displays a lovely collection of the artifacts reflecting the richness of Lao culture dating from the days of the early kings right through the last sovereign, and the Central Market are not to be missed. We visit these sights, this morning before we catch a flight back to Vientiane. Upon arrival, we see the major temples including the oldest Wat Sisaket, a temple of thousands of miniature Buddha statues and the former royal temple of Wat Prakeo previously housed the famous Emerald Buddha Image. On the way to the famous, sacred structure of That Luang Stupa, we stop to take some pictures of the imposing Patuxay Monument, which is Vientiane's own Arc de Triumph, sunset by Mekong Riverside and late evening. Overnight in Vientiane. (B)

Day 4: Vientiane – Departure

After breakfast, we visit the Morning Market and the weaving village of Ban Nong Bouathong (if time permits). The tour ends after your transfer to Wattay Airport or Friendship Bridge for departure. (B)

4.4 Situation Analysis (SWOT)

In spite of high-quality attractions and the increased tourism infrastructure, all interviews indicated there remain a number of significant marketing barriers. The following issues and impediments were identified and perceived:

- A lack of knowledge of the destinations
- no direct access to major markets except from Thailand
- Limited circuit development
- Very poor image of domestic air services
- Limited accommodation outside tourist prime areas

Based on the above issues, SWOT analysis was conducted and summarised.

Strengths

- Quality of the cultural and nature-based experience available
- Friendly Laos people
- Product and market development potential
- Emerging Transportation network
- Ease of combining Laos with major neighbouring tourist destinations
- Nearby important regional markets (i.e Thailand, Singapore, China)
- Strong support from cooperative framework (i.e ASEAN, GMS)

Weaknesses

- Poor international recognition
- Management and institutional capacities
- Service and facility standards
- Lack of professional skills in some sectors of the tourism industry
- Lack of owned financial capacity
- Harnessing the private sector
- Marketing and product development
- Controlling mechanism for tourism development
- Too many cooperation frameworks

Opportunities

- Harness the strengths
- Address the weaknesses
- Emerging markets and new travellers in Asia
- Synchronizing with other cooperation frameworks

Threats

- Pandemic Diseases
- Natural disasters
- Economic crisis

4.5 Identifying Market Positioning and Selected Target Market

Market Positioning

As mentioned earlier, market positioning is the first step and is defined as the process of identifying and selecting markets or segments that represent business potential, to determine the criteria for competitive success (DiMingo, 1988). This must be based on a thorough knowledge of the needs, wants, and perceptions of the target market, along with the benefits offered by the destination. To do this, a focus group was undertaken with the selected target market. Five crucial questions were answered. These are:

1. Identify 5 key words which came to their mind when they think of the destination?
2. Explain and share their real experiences in comparison to their perceived view
3. What are the top 5 activities they think are a “must do” ?
4. Top five places they think of the country and think of these five places
5. What attributes should a destination use to differentiate itself to make the best use of its resources?

Laos Market Positioning from Tourist Perspectives

Top five words for Laos	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beautiful scenery 2. Friendly people 3. Good spicy foods 4. Less developed in Asia 5. Old preserved South East Asia
Top five activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tubing 2. Morning Alms Giving 3. Visit Temples 4. Shopping 5. Walking and Hiking
Top five places	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Luang Prabang 2. Vang Vieng 3. Vientiane 4. The Wat Phu- Champasak 5. Wat Xiang Khouan
Distinctive Attributes	Eco-activities, Villages
Real and Perceived view Compared	Easier to travel around, safer, many more foreigners, more westernized shops and cafes more nightlife and clubbing

Based on these findings, a theme will be proposed in the final chapter.

Chapter 5: A Case of Malaysia



5.1 Destination Description

Comprising the territories of Malaya, Sarawak, and Sabah, Malaysia stretches from peninsular Malaysia to northeastern Borneo in Southeast Asia. Central mountains divide peninsular Malaysia (Malaya), separating the narrow eastern coast from the fertile western plains, with its sheltered beaches and bays. Sarawak and Sabah share the island of Borneo with Indonesia and Brunei, where swamps rise to jungle-covered mountains. Malays make up half the population, and almost all Malays are Muslims. Ethnic Chinese constitute a quarter of Malaysia's people, and Indians some 7 percent—both groups are concentrated on the peninsula's west coast.

In the mid-19th century the United Kingdom began importing Chinese to work the tin mines of Muslim sultanates on the Malay Peninsula; by the turn of the century new rubber plantations employed transported Indian laborers. In 1957 the Federation of Malaya gained independence from Britain. Six years later the colonies of Sarawak and Sabah, on the island of Borneo, and Singapore joined Malaya to form the Federation of Malaysia; Singapore withdrew in 1965. Malaysia is one of the world's largest exporters of semiconductors, electrical goods, and appliances. After a long period of economic growth, Malaysia—like many countries—was hit hard by the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s. Kuala Lumpur, the nation's capital, anchors the new Multimedia Super Corridor, Asia's equivalent of the U.S.'s Silicon Valley.

Population: 26,121,000

Capital: Kuala Lumpur

Area: 329,847 square kilometers (127,355 square miles)

Language: Bahasa Melayu, English, Chinese dialects, other regional dialects and indigenous

Religion: Muslim, Buddhist, Daoist, Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Shamanist

Currency: ringgit

GDP per Capita: U.S. \$8,800

5.2 Tour Package

The interviews helped identify current tour package offered in the marketplace for Malaysia. It is found that the prime tourism attractions such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Cameron Highland were included in all tour packages. A typical 6 day tour will feature the following key places as following illustration:

Malaysia Tour Package (TA-009)

(6 Nights/7 Days)

Kuala Lumpur – Cameron Highlands - Penang - Kota Bharu – Tasik Kenyir - Kuantan

Day 01 : Kuala Lumpur – Cameron Highlands

Depart from your hotel in Kuala Lumpur to Cameron Highlands which is 1542 meters above sea level, famous for its world-renowned tea. We will stop at the Hindu Temple, Batu Caves and the Royal Pewter Factory. Proceed North to the Hill Resort. En route we will visit a cottage industry making bamboo baskets and the Lata Iskandar Waterfall.

Time free at leisure after arrive at Cameron Highlands.

Accommodation at Equatorial Hotel.

Day 02 : Cameron Highlands – Penang (Breakfast)

Breakfast at hotel.

Cameron Highlands Tour: visiting a tea plantation, tea factory, a vegetable farm and the market square. Proceed to Penang. En route visit to the Sam Poh Tong Cave Temple in Ipoh, the Ubudiah Mosque, Iskandariah Palace and Istana Kenangan Museum. Cross over to Penang using the third longest bridge in the world arriving in the evening.

Accommodation at Parkroyal Hotel.

Day 03 : Penang (Breakfast)

Breakfast at hotel. Proceed on around Penang tour: visit to a Batik Factory, a nutmeg a clove stall, the Snake Temple and Wat Chayamangkalaram Temple. Rest of the day at leisure or time to relax at the beach.

Day 04 : Penang – Kota Bharu (Breakfast)

Breakfast at hotel. Drive to Kota Bharu using the East West Highway. The Highway cuts through the main mountain range and offers breathtaking views of the tropical rain forest and if you are lucky you may have to stop for elephants crossing the road. Arrive in the evening in Kota Bharu and check-in at your hotel.

Day 05 : Kota Bharu – Tasik Kenyir (Breakfast)

Breakfast at hotel. In the morning, have a short orientation tour through Kota Bharu. Visit the colorful Wet market. You can find a variety of local items like clothes, cloth of exotic patterns, fruits, vegetables etc. Depart to Tasik Kenyir and enjoy the scenic drive along the East Coast of Malaysia. Stop and visit a local fishing village. Tasik Kenyir is a unique lake surrounded by 1000 acres of woodlands. Lake Kenyir comprises 340 islands, more than 14 waterfalls, rapids, rivers and limestone caves. The Lake Kenyir is the largest man-made lake in Southeast Asia. In the afternoon enjoy the tranquility of the rain forest or simply unwind with a drink on the hotel terrace.

Day 06 : Tasik Kenyir – Kuantan/Cherating (Breakfast)

Breakfast at hotel. Drive to Kuantan/Cherating, enroute stop at local villages and see the traditional way of living. You will see local boat making, Brassware making. In the afternoon, visit to Cherating village where you will see Pandan Leaves being weaved into bags, mats and crafts, brown sugar making and monkey plucking coconuts.

Accommodation at Swiss Garden Hotel.

Day 07 : Kuantan/Cherating – Kuala Lumpur (Breakfast)

Breakfast at hotel. Drive from Kuantan/Cherating back to Kuala Lumpur.

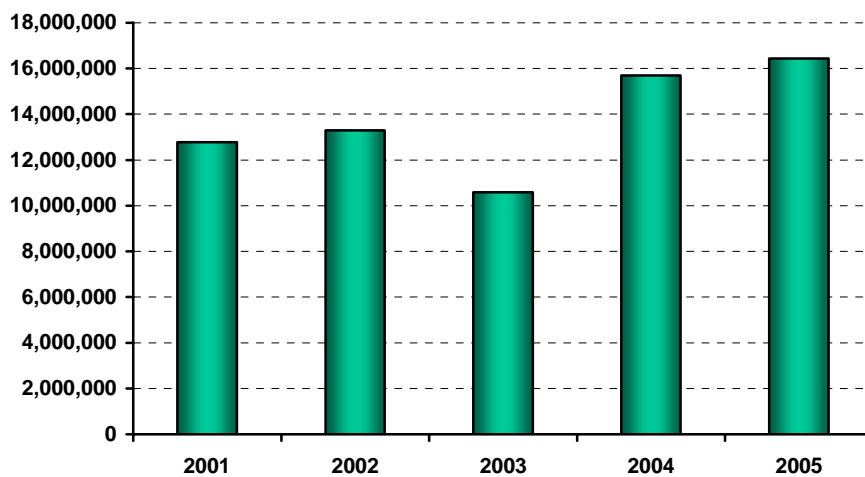
End of your tour in the City.

5.3 Destination Performance

The year 2005 was an interesting year for the Malaysia tourism industry. Despite natural disasters and regional instability, Malaysia continued to benefit from the Asian tourism boom, with tourist arrivals reaching almost 17 million, matching the target set by the Malaysian government at the beginning of the year. Singapore remained the top country for tourist arrivals, accounting for 57% of the total in 2005. Malaysia is also among the top three countries for the

most number of tourist arrivals among the 53 commonwealth countries according to the World Tourism Organisation. Tourist arrivals for Malaysia rose by more than 160% between 2000-2005, an astonishing achievement for tourism. Within this period, the market was able to recover rapidly from the 2003 SARS outbreak, recording a 48% leap in arrivals in 2004 after its 2003 dip.

Tourist arrivals



Source: *Tourism Malaysia, 2006*

The Malaysian tourism industry is one of the major foreign exchange earners second only to its manufacturing industry. The country's tourism receipts of about RM34 billion in 2005 represented an increase of 15 % from RM30 billion in 2004. Singaporean tourists were the biggest contributors, followed by Thailand and Indonesia. Tourist receipts in Malaysia accounted for approximately 7% of Malaysian GDP.

The Malaysian tourism board played an important role in boosting growth of the travel and tourism industry. In 2005, Tourism Malaysia embarked on a mission to promote Malaysia as a top Meeting, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibition (MICE) venue. The tourism board campaign of 'Meet and Experience, Malaysia Truly Asia' portrayed Malaysia as a peaceful, colourful and festive multicultural nation with many diverse religions, cultures and ethnics differences living together in perfect harmony, a tourism experience encompassing the whole of

Asia within one comprehensive destination. Events such as Petronas Malaysia F1 Grand Prix, Le Tour de Langkawi, Langkawi International Maritime and Air Show Exhibition (Lima) and other world-class events further enhanced the image of Malaysia as a desirable holiday destination.

The strength of foreign currencies, including the Euro and Singapore dollar, in relation to the Malaysian Ringgit, attracts many travellers to Malaysia. The value for money factor is particularly attractive for visitors from India, Thailand, and Singapore, who form over 60% of Malaysia's total tourist arrivals. This image has also been fostered by budget airways. Domestic and outgoing tourism continued to grow robustly despite added surcharges due to rising fuel prices. The continuing price war between budget carrier AirAsia and the national carrier Malaysian Airline System (MAS) managed to keep the rise of transportation charges to a minimum. The never-ending expansion of budget airlines within the region provided more choice for the outgoing tourist but also facilitated in the growth of tourist arrivals by providing low-cost no-frills air transport to the inbound tourist.

Malaysia was shielded from the full force of the tsunami at the end of 2004, and is among one of the few nations within the region with a minimal threat from terrorism. Malaysia managed to pull in tourists originally meant for other troubled nations, typically those of Indonesia and Thailand. Malaysian beaches and island resorts provided safe heavens and an alternative destination for tourists intended for Bali, which had experienced a bout of recent anti-western terrorism.

Malaysia's hotel occupancy rate stood at 60% in 2005 due to the steady increasing number of tourist arrivals from countries such as Singapore and Thailand, coupled with growing numbers of domestic tourists. The occupancy rate for popular tourist attractions such as Kuala Lumpur and the Genting Highlands was much higher at about 68% and 77% respectively. Despite this, there is no fear of a shortage of supply in travel accommodation as there is a steady increase in the number of hotels such as First World Hotel in Genting, the world's largest hotel with its 6,200 rooms expected to fully operational by the beginning of 2006. Another six hotels will supply an additional 1,500 rooms for Kuala Lumpur in 2006. The Four Seasons and Grand Hyatt with a combined offer of more than 800 rooms are scheduled to open in 2008.

Land based transportation including buses, coaches, and rail remains the primary method of transportation for all tourists travelling to and from Malaysia, with 79% of arrivals and 94% of outgoing tourists in 2005. Despite its popularity, land transportation only accounted for 14% of the RM14 billion tourists spend on transportation. The no visa or free visa upon arrival agreement with neighbouring countries such as Brunei, Singapore and Thailand, encouraged regional travel for either city breaks or other forms of short holidays. The absence of a low-cost no-frills air service between Malaysia and Singapore, the single most dominant nation in the Malaysian travel and tourism industry, resulted in the active development in land based transportation between the two countries, typically in the area of luxury tour coaches. 2005 saw the introduction of coach services matching those provided for first class air passengers. The cost of travelling on such luxury coaches is a fraction when compared with the price for an air ticket on the national carrier.

Challenging future

With positive market conditions, incoming tourist receipts are expected to continue to grow by 8 to 10% annually. The government's move to impose a minimum rate for five-star hotel rooms from April 2006 will see improved profitability for hotel operators. The consolidation between the national carrier and budget carriers on domestic routes, the result of the Malaysian government's plan for rationalisation for domestic air services at the end of 2005, spells the end of discount airfares, allowing the national carrier to concentrate their attention on rebranding and premium international routes.

The travel and tourism industry will continue to be a major contributor to Malaysian GDP, with tourist receipts exceeding RM52 billion in 2010. Competition within the region for tourist arrivals will remain strong.

The stability of a country remains a major consideration for tourists, especially those from North America. With a stable government and its continued cooperation with other countries to combat terrorism and transnational crime, favourable trends should be sustainable for the travel and tourism industry in the coming years.

5.4 Situation Analysis (SWOT)

Malaysia suffered one of the worst collapses in the region during the Asian crisis, but its economy has since turned around, with economic performance and outlook second only to Singapore's. A wealthy middle class has emerged and incomes have grown rapidly over the last decade. The preceding discussion in the previous section has indicated S.W.O.T of Malaysia which can be summarized as followed:

Strengths

- Product diversity
- Market development potential
- Excellent transportation network
- Strong financial supports for destination branding and identity "Malaysia Truly Asia"
- Service and facility standards

Weaknesses

- "Diverse" Marketing and product development
- Lacking singular identity
- The composition of tourist arrivals from different countries is limited
- Skills shortage

Opportunities

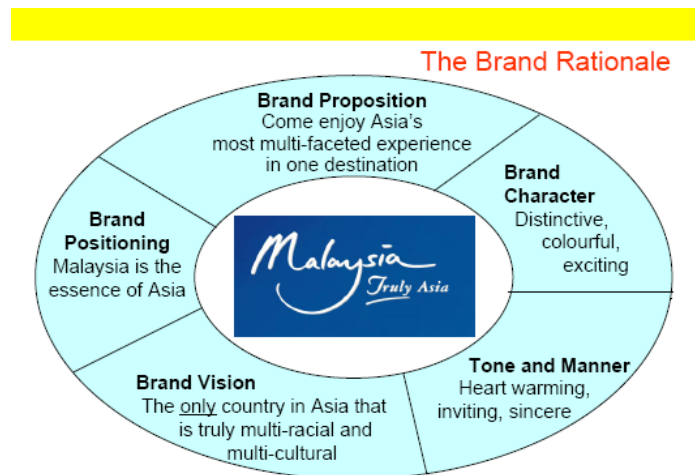
- Harness the strengths
- Address the weaknesses
- Emerging markets and new travellers in Asia
- Booming Asia Pacific tourist industry
- Technology
- Political stability

Threats

- Pandemic Diseases
- Natural disasters
- Economic crisis
- Competition

5.5 Target Marketing and Destination Positioning

Malaysian branding strategies have been a remarkably successful case. The composition of this professionally completed task includes all significant parts. Being a diverse yet harmonious country, Malaysia highlights this as its uniqueness. Under this strong brand image and positioning, Malaysia succinctly develops its marketing and promotional campaign. Colourfully done in its marketing materials well represent this award winning print advertisements and TV commercials. It is therefore deemed appropriate to further foster this strongly built image.



In year 1999-2003

Launch Thematic Print



Beach

CityScape

Eco

Launch Thematic Print



Culture



Shopping



Cuisine

Building a destination as a more colourful and exciting seems necessary since it is found from the interview that majority viewed Malaysia as being less happening and vibrant in comparison to other countries in Asia. Despite the fact that Malaysia possesses stunning tourist sights, including, to list but a few the natural, architectural and cultural, Malaysia does have its problems. Highlights posted by the interviewees include the following points:

- Compared to Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, the tourist information system is not so well developed. Quite often when making an inquiry at Tourist Information one is presented with the standard brochures and no additional information but always found them friendly.
- The most important issue that needs to be resolved is the refusal of taxi drivers in Malaysia to use meters and their high tendency to overcharge. This is about not using meters, NOT about using meters then using a longer route.
- You may have heard of the KLIA Express, where for RM35.00(one way) can take you in less than 30minutes to KL Sentral; but unless one is checking into KL Hilton or Le Meridien, there is the taxi to dealt with to get to your other hotel(s), more so with luggages-the monorail or LRT is out of the question. So the company behind KLIA Express-ERL, have come out with their KLIA VIP Service (Flying porter service). For a

fee of RM100.00, and if you are staying in Westin, Regent, Park Royal, Impiana KLCC, JW Marriott and Ritz Carlton, a passenger arriving in KLIA will be paged and greeted by ERL ambassador upon arrival at the Baggage Reclaim Hall (also is KLIA Express ticket booth), assisted with baggage, and escorted all the way onboard the KLIA Express to KL Sentral by the "flying porter" service and transferred to these hotels in a limousine. Of course as a regular user of the KLIA express, avoid the taxi problem by taking the LRT service to PJ. For those who wish to avoid the taxi hassle just take either the LRT or Monorail or the public bus service.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendation: IMAGE AND THEMES

Both countries are unique in terms of the diversity of activities and tourism development options they offer. In contrast to other destinations in ASEAN, the development focus can be on the entire countries rather than just one primary tourist attraction. From a thematic perspective, the attention is drawn to the authentic cultural and natural resources of the countries. The primary challenge will be to maximize the opportunities for visitors to enjoy these resources in an environmentally-responsible, culturally-sensitive manner that is sustainable over the long-term. This section suggests some development themes for achieving this.

The uniqueness and diversity of the two countries can be enjoyed in a variety of ways by many different segments. For the case being analysed, a young traveler will be selected in order to provide a clear domain of positioning and theme development. This clear selected target group will also help elucidate what kinds of attractions should be promoted.

6.1 Loa PDR: Image Positioning

Laos is truly the 'Hidden Heart of Asia' and offers travellers an unparalleled glimpse of old South East Asia. Tourists come to Laos to experience its rich cultural and natural heritage. The population of Laos comprises a large number of different ethnic groups, many of whom, to date, maintain largely traditional lifeways, particularly in the more remote mountainous regions. Tourists seeking a fascinating, memorable experience, visiting this country will always be enriched and seemingly lost in time. Therefore the theme selected for Loas is experience which others cannot match with a tagline of "Only in Laos"

Only in Lao "Where people who run things can stop running"

Only in Lao "Where young at heart can feel young"

Only in Lao "Where the world is beautiful"

Only in Lao "where you are not a tourist"

Made Only in Lao

Highlights of “Only in Laos” Experience

The main renowned tourism products of Lao PDR are the world heritage site of Luang Prabang, Wat Phou world heritage site in Champasak, waterfall and 4,000 islands in the South, and the mysterious Plain of Jars in Xiengkhuang. If your trip around ASEAN has been hectic, then arriving Laos should be the time for you to relax and enjoy plenty of fun eco-friendly activities.



Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang is the primary attraction for most international leisure tourists and is featured in most tours to the country. Tourists use this most visited tourist location as their principal starting points of the journey either through the Northern part or to the Southern part of Laos. A recommended day tour circuit is to use Luang Prabang as your base to enjoy



a varied and broad range of historical, natural and religious sites. You could prepare to spend at least 3-4 days in this gorgeous amazing relaxing beautiful fantastic Luang Prabang.



Some said it is the most picturesque city you could imagine.

Luang Phabang is a city surrounded by mountains at the junction of the Mekong and its tributary, the Khan River.

Luang Phabang has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1995 to protect the town's 32 precious historic temples, the former Royal Palace and Classic French colonial building from being destroyed by modernity or over-developing.

Being a small town, you can reach everywhere by foot and practically any types of accommodations you choose to stay will be well located. It is definitely more to Luang Phabang than just glittering temples. Being a truly living culture, you could just simply enjoy Laos' every day-to-day life. You could easily spend your days strolling around the adorable city,

nibbling baguette sandwiches, staying warm in bookstore/cafe's, and perusing stall after stall of local artisan crafts.



Laos's food is known to be one of the most diverse and delicious in Asia. All over Loas you will find good inexpensive food available in markets or small shops. If you are looking for something more like home then you can also find French, Italian, or Indian restaurants amongst others. A traditional Laos dish is steam cooked sticky rice

with the well known papaya salad “tamahung”.

Made “Only in Laos”

While you are strolling around, stall after stall, don’t forget that your trip can also help sustain Laos economy and provide villagers with income by purchasing their work. Throughout the country you can eat delicious home-grown foods, dress in stylish handmade cottons and silks and buy unique souvenirs giving lasting memories of the people you meet, and inspiring your friends and family to visit Laos. While you shop, chat with the locals and try to speak their language. Getting an instant and constant smile and a laugh from local Laos will seal your memories so beautifully. Laos’s people everywhere are so nice and friendly. You will pick up a friendly greetings “Sabaidee” before you know it!



The Surrounding Area in Luang Prabang

You could choose to be more adventurous and physically involved by having a full day bike trip to see an elephant park and a waterfall. Take a 30 km trip North of Luang Prabang to Khuang Si waterfall, a beautiful spot for picnics, swimming and relaxing.





You could also decide to head south about 25 Km to Tham Ting cave. The caves are well known Buddhist site and a place of pilgrimage with 5000 statues. To get to the caves take a slow boat 1.5 hours or a car/tuk-tuk about one hour.

Morning Alms Giving

The morning monks' round (in Lao: Tak Bat) is a living Buddhist tradition for the people of Laos. Because of its beauty, the morning glory has become a major tourist attraction, especially in Luang Prabang. If you wish to participate in this meaningful religious practice, please protect its dignity and its beauty by carefully observing the ritual in silence, and contributing an offering only if it is meaningful for you and you can do so respectfully. Take those memories home with you and time to add more on, you could now take a trip to the capital city of Laos, **Vientiane**. On the way, make a stopover enjoying the vibrant town called Vang Vieng.



Vang Vieng

Vang Vieng (population about 25,000) is located about a 4 hour bus ride north of the capital city of Vientiane or about 7 hours south of the town of Luang Prabang. This is a truly city catering for both young and young at heart. You can find internet cafes, guesthouses, bars, trekking companies. These are all fairly new establishments as it has only been the past 5 or 6 years that Vang Vieng has seen such an influx of tourists. There are people here from all over the world - you can't help but meet people!



Vang Vieng is set along the banks of the Nam Song River. Hardly any visitor can insist the "tubing" trip. Basically this is Laos' most popular tourist activity, anyone who's been to this country has most likely done this. You can rent tubes, then starting at the top of this very very slowly moving river, and

float down all day. There were lots of places to stop off, eat or drink, or even to stop for the rope swings! Along the way you can enjoy Vang Vieng's the most incredible rock formations. They are jagged limestone karsts that tower above the jungle - steep walls which have somehow eluded the jungles grasp. In the morning hours a fine mists hovers just above the jungle at the base of these formations. In the evenings they form an incredible back drop for picture taking during the "golden hour." The scenery will be wonderful and stunning. The water is nice and calm with dragon flies buzzing all over the place. They are amazing colours, hot pinks, blues and yellows.

Vientiane

As a capital of Lao PDR, the primary gateway for air travelers, and the location of the Friendship Bridge over the Mekong to Thailand. It is a city of interesting and beautiful corners rather than grand elegance. Easily the most spectacular is Wat Xiang Khouan, the Buddha Park, that is the foremost Buddhist monument in Laos and features as part of the national emblem. There are a

lot of large statues in this park that are very good for photographs.



One of the more famous statues is the very large reclining buddha. There are not only buddhist statues here, there are also some hindu statues as well. The multi-armed Buddha also stands out. Make sure to crawl inside of the

"mouth" of the largest statue/building. Once inside you can see several floors of additional statues, and an awesome view of the park. You can take some very good pictures from up here which can include most of the statues in only a few photos.

The mysterious [Plains of Jars](#)

After a few days exploring in the capital city, you might like to head to Xieng Khouang province, situated in the north of Laos. Much of the province was heavily bombed during the Vietnam war and old war scrap is used in building houses throughout the province. It is becoming

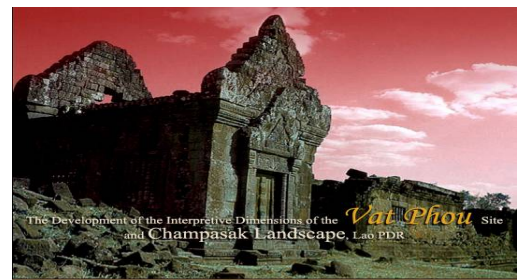


more and more famous among tourists to Southeast Asia, as it is the place to view the mysterious [Plains of Jars](#). The best way to reach Xieng Khouang - as we did - is to fly from [Vientiane](#), the capital of Laos.

Heading South

For those who would like to explore the South of Laos, you could now head down to Champasak province. Of all 7 provinces in the South, Champassak is the most famous for tourism. It will take about 11 hour bus ride south from Vientiane along where the Mekong lies. You can also fly there from only a few other places. Its areas join with Dan Chong Mek of Ubon Ratchathani of Thailand in the west, and with Kampongthom province of Cambodia in the south. Champasak offers many interesting attractions: spectacular Khmer ruins at Wat Phu, the stunning cluster of islands new the Cambodia border known as Si Phan Don (meaning 4,000 islands).

The Wat Phu- Champasak Heritage landscape, a UNESCO world Heritage Site is a major example of both early and classical Khmer architecture dating from the 7th to the 12th centuries. Located 9 kilometres (5 miles) south of Baan Wat Thong, Wat



Phu begins at river level and rises three levels to reach the foot of the mountain. Outside the complex is a large reservoir, which in times past was the site of boat races and ritual bathing. The bathing (and fishing) continues, somewhat less ritualistically. Continuing into the complex, one sees the remains of palaces built by the rulers of the Champasak kingdom towards the end of their dynasty, from which they viewed the annual festivities held on the full moon of the third lunar month, which continue to the present. An East-West axial promenade passes between two large rectangular ritual bathing ponds and leads to the base of the middle level. At the top of a flight of irregular stone stairs, two large worship pavilions flank the central promenade. Scholars have deduced, based on the deities carved into the stone, that the right hand pavilion was used for the male worshippers, and the left for the women-folk. Currently only the right hand structure is open to visitors. Climbing through the small access door, one can view well preserved Hindu

bas-reliefs on the lintels inside the pavilion. Most of the free-standing statuary has been removed or damaged.



Khong Pha Peng waterfalls the "Niagara of the East"

The Phapeng Falls, also known as the Khone Falls are the largest set of waterfalls on the lower Mekong. What they lack in height, they recover in sheer volume. Several of the cascades are visible from a point on the East bank of the

Mekong, about 10 kilometres (6 mi) south of the village of Baan Nakasong. From Don Khone or Don Det, one must travel by boat to Baan Nakasong, and proceed south by land. The falls are an impressive sight, and are best viewed from a pavilion located above the falls. Three separate cascades merge at this spot. Fishermen clamber precariously across the raging torrents on bamboo ladders to lay lines, while birds dive through the spray seeking the smaller fry. Phapeng has its share of roasted chicken vendors, with other local delicacies and plenty of cold beer. A lovely spot for a picnic and a great conclusion to this often arduous but certainly rewarding journey through a unique part of Southern Laos.

The area is also home to one of the rarest large mammal species in the world, the Irrawaddy Dolphin, and unique river wetland habitats. The Mekong rapids on the border with Cambodia, where the astounding force of the water has cut dramatic gorges through the brittle bedrock, are the biggest and widest in SE Asia. A paddle adventure through the Four Thousand Islands offers an experience of a lifetime. It is definitely worth a visit, especially if you add a glimpse of endangered dolphins at Lao-Cambodia border. Here at Don Khone, it is your chance to view the unique and endangered Irrawaddy Dolphin. This mammal can survive in both fresh and salt waters, but it is mainly now indigenous to the lower reaches of large Asian rivers, such as the Mekong and Irrawaddy. Seemingly unafraid of humans, thus a joy to observe, they travel in pods of less than ten, and can be observed in the waters near Don Khone. Every source queried has a different opinion on when and where to find them. Ask a local fisherman to guide you to the *plaa khaa*.



Dolphins watching at Lao-Cambodia border.

The town is lovely. The French architecture adds to the delight. You can easily navigate the town by foot unless you want to head further out. Since the Champasak province has good roads, it is also easy to hire a motorbike (if you know how to ride one!).

You might by now realize the coming end of your journey through wonderful Laos. Memory is a wonderful and magical thing. No matter how heart-breaking the experience was, as time goes by, you tend to remember every little detail of the good parts, and forget about the bad ones. It is also said that memory is like white water in the river -- it comes and goes rapidly; when you try to forget, it lingers; when you try to remember, everything is already different. Dream is the language of your soul, and we've got to have it. Life is still full of surprises, and we've got to make everyday not like all the others. Dear travellers, **experiences you ONLY find in LAOS will last with you forever...**

6.2 Malaysia: Image Positioning



Your trip to ASEAN countries will be incomplete if you don't see the very truly "melting pot" of Asia -Malaysia Truly Asia. The best introduction to this colourful country has been well remarked by the Tourism Malaysia... "Multiculturalism has not only made Malaysia a gastronomical paradise, it has also made Malaysia home to hundreds of colourful festivals. It's no wonder that we love celebrating and socialising. As a people, Malaysians are very laid back, warm and friendly". Cultures have been meeting and mixing in Malaysia since the very beginning of its history. More than fifteen hundred years ago a Malay kingdom in Bujang Valley welcomed traders from China and India. With the arrival of gold and silks, Buddhism and Hinduism also came to Malaysia. A thousand years later, Arab traders arrived in Malacca and brought with them the principles and practices of Islam. By the time the Portuguese arrived in Malaysia, the empire that they encountered was more cosmopolitan than their own. Malaysia's cultural mosaic is marked by these many different cultures, but several in particular have had especially lasting influence on the country. Chief among these is the ancient Malay culture, and the cultures of Malaysia's two most prominent trading partners throughout history--the Chinese, and the Indians. These three groups are joined by a dizzying array of indigenous tribes, many of which live in the forests and coastal areas of Borneo. Although each of these cultures has vigorously maintained its traditions and community structures, they have also blended together to create contemporary Malaysia's uniquely diverse heritage.



Malaysia is geographically and culturally diverse. Malaysia offers two distinct experiences - the mainland [peninsula] and the island of Kalimantan [Borneo]. These are two parts to the country, 11 states in the peninsula of Malaysia and two states on the northern part of Borneo. Cool hideaways are found in the highlands that roll

down to warm, sandy beaches and rich, humid mangroves. One of Malaysia's key attractions is its extreme contrasts. Towering skyscrapers look down upon wooden houses built on stilts, and five-star hotels sit several metres away from ancient reefs. For the perfect holiday full of surprises, eclectic cultures and natural wonders, the time is now, the place is Malaysia. It is the year 2007 when Malaysia will celebrate 50 years of independence. The month of August will be filled with a myriad of parades, cultural performances, street shows and carnivals to commemorate the country's Independence or Merdeka Day on 31st August.

Being an exciting and vibrant destination, you can choose an endless variety of unique travel experiences all year round. For those who like to have it all, let's explore the diversity and wonders of Malaysia, starting your trip by its main entry point from the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.



Malaysia's Dazzling Capital City-Kuala Lumpur

The main gateway into the country is the state-of-the-art Kuala Lumpur international airport (KLIA). A non-stop 28-minute ride on the KLIA express will take you to the KL Sentral Station inner the city. Kuala Lumpur, affectionately known as KL, is an amazing cultural melting pot. Here, you will wander through communities of Chinese, Malays, South Indians, East Malaysian ethnic groups, Thais, Indonesians, Sikhs and a huge community of expatriates. Each community offering its own festivals, food, music, art and fashion while influencing each other's cultures. KL has a lively nightlife scene and a fascinating art and performance culture, which blends contemporary and traditional styles from many backgrounds. To get a snapshot of the city, you might like to explore the city by taking KL Hop-on Hop-off bus.





KL Tower

KL Tower is considered a main feature of the city skyline, the KL Tower is the world's fourth tallest communications tower. To experience the exhilarating view from the KL Tower, you can go to the 335-metre high observation deck on a high-speed lift. From here, the city's eccentric architecture and lush greenery will be laid out before you. You will be amazed to find the Bukit Nanas Forest reserve, also known as the 'Green Lung' of KL City, located just beside the KL Tower. This uniquely 'real' plot of ancient rainforest offers a walking trail and has flora and fauna indigenous to Malaysia. Here, you get the frankly surreal opportunity to see colourful butterflies, insects, monkeys, squirrels and exotic birds in their natural habitat - all within earshot of the hum of downtown traffic!

If you want to add more excitements into your trip, the latest attraction at KL Tower and Bukit Nanas is a reverse bungee called The G-Force will give you “the faint of heart”. You will also get your ride recorded and given to you on a DVD to cherish for many more years to come. On top of the KL Tower is the Seri Angkasa revolving restaurant where you can sample an international buffet spread while watching a continuously revolving view of the Kuala Lumpur skyline.

Khula Lumpur Highlights



Not long after your arrival, you will certainly enjoy an inclusiveness which is more than just a way to break down cultural barriers and foster understanding. It is a positive celebration of a tradition of tolerance that has for millennia formed the basis of Malaysia's progress. If the ultra-modern

architecture and forward-looking citizens of Kuala Lumpur symbolize Malaysia's hopes for the future, then the quiet, seaside city of Malacca, about 150 kilometers to the south, is the guardian charged with the reflective task of preserving its past. Five hundred years ago, an extraordinary empire rose and fell here, its power and dreams suddenly caught off-guard by the dawn of the Colonial Era. The city was so coveted by the European powers that the Portuguese writer Barbarosa wrote "Whoever is Lord in Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice." It was a major port along the spice-route, and its harbor bristled with the sails and masts of Chinese junks and spice-laden vessels from all over the hemisphere. Because the city was originally built of wood, there are no crumbling and stately reminders of the power once wielded by the Malaccan Sultanate, but along shores of the Malacca River the scene has probably changed little.

After the end of your exploration through the mainland, you will surely leave this efficient and thoroughly comfortable, epitomised by the modern, multicultural city life with lots of vivid memories.

With an excellent road links between Thailand and Malaysia through to Singapore, you can also choose to access Malaysia by road via North-South expressway. Upon reaching the mainland, a scenic drive across Penang Bridge will take you to Penang Island. Getting to Penang by rail is also convenient. There are regular rail services from Bangkok to Butterworth.



PENANG 'THE PEARL OF ORIENT'

Penang, often referred to as the Pearl of the Orient, is one of the most picturesque and romantic cities in all of Asia. This tropical island lies in the Indian Ocean, just off the north-west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Penang received its name from the Pinang, or Betel Nut tree, once commonly found on the island.

Established as the first British trading post in the Far East in 1776, Penang today is a bustling metropolis reflecting a uniquely exotic blend of East and West.

While driving through the Penang Bridge, one of the longest in Asia at 13.5 km, you will feel the touch of the beach resorts which will offer guaranteed heat and mostly sun, with clear seas and fine sand.



On Penang Island sits the capital, Georgetown, a city steeped in history and tradition yet sparkling with progress and modern development. Certain sections of Penang present a quaint picture from the past where narrow side streets, trishaws, temples and traders plying their goods, seem to



The food in Panang is widely regarded as the best in Malaysia.

belong to a forgotten era. Penang is a shopper's paradise for goods old and new, at bargain prices. The island also boasts some of the best food in the region, ranging from fabulous Chinese, Malay and Nyonya cuisines to foodstall favourites like nasi kandar, char kway teow and penang laksa, all As fabulous as its beaches are, some of Penang's deeper mysteries should also be experienced. According to local folklore, the Snake Temple, dedicated to a Buddhist healer-priest, was inhabited by snakes who crawled out of the jungle on the night of the temple's completion. The snakes are still there today. The Kek Lok Si temple, at Air Itam, is reputed to be the most beautiful and largest temple complex in Southeast Asia. Its seven-story pagoda, over 90 feet high, is a harmonious blend of Chinese, Thai, and Burmese architecture and craftsmanship.

Other worthwhile stops are the delightful Penang Bird Park, the romantic peak of Penang Hill, Fort Cornwallis, the site of Light's first landing, and the Pantai Aceh Forest Reserve (crisscrossed with beautiful trails leading to isolated beaches). If you start your journey here in Penang, you can now choose to head to the dazzling capital city or if your mood is now fine-tuned with the clear sea and fine sand, then consider Langawi or Borno. Difficult decision must be made now either to travel across to Malaysian Borno or to take ferries to Langkawi at Port Swettenham in Penang. Both are your best choices.

Langkawi

The Island of *Mystical Legends*

Off the coast of Kedah is a cluster of 99 islands with the best of many worlds; beautiful beaches, world-class infrastructure, mangroves rich in flora and fauna, ultra-cheap duty-free shopping and fascinating legends.

Ask anyone in Langkawi about the tragic legend of a beautiful young lady named Mahsuri, and you'll hear a tale of love, jealousy and a curse that was placed upon the island by her for seven generations. Today, the seventh generation of Langkawi's inhabitants has long come and gone, but people here still believe that the prosperity and blessings the islands enjoy today and the passing of the curse is not a pure coincidence. The mysticism of this legend can be felt in many parts of this island, especially at Makam Mahsuri (Mahsuri's Mausoleum) where the famous legendary figure is said to be buried. Langkawi is not only geared towards tourism.



Many of the islanders are farmers, fishermen and entrepreneurs. Experience the beautiful countryside and the peaceful landscape of paddy fields by renting a car and taking a leisurely drive around the island.

Some of Langkawi's most rustic and memorable views are along the road that circles the island. You'll pass small villages with wooden houses framed by palm trees, and children pedalling their old bicycles on an errand. Aside from experiencing the local lifestyle, there is no shortage of things to do in Langkawi. Head up the thrilling new cable car to the summit of Mount Mat Cincang - Langkawi's second highest mountain - for an unrivalled view of the entire main island and beyond. You can also visit the Field of Burnt Rice, the Hot Springs, Telaga Tujuh (The Seven Wells) and the Beach of Black Sand. Boat tours are organised to Tasik Dayang Bunting, (Lake of the Pregnant Maiden), Gua Cerita (Cave of Stories) and the Gua Langsir (Curtain Cave). And if you're more outdoorsy, why not go trekking through the pristine rainforest that blankets most of Langkawi, or go on a boat tour of the mangroves, go diving, or play a round of golf at some of the 5-star resorts. Langkawi also has an underwater world, containing an underground tunnel that runs through a giant aquarium, that has gotten rave reviews.



BORNEO'S PARADISE

Malaysian Borneo is the place to do the really wild thing in a primitive environment, with exotic Dayak tribes, an ancient and endangered jungle sporting ancient creatures such as the orang utan, as well as mountains and spectacular caves. If you skip Sarawak, you'll miss something very special of your trip to ASEAN.

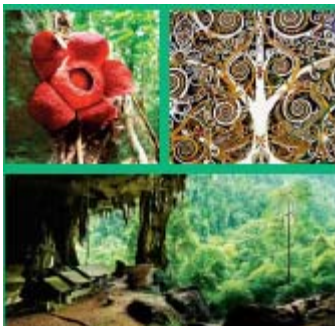
Sarawak Highlights

Land of the Hornbills



The state has a superb system of national parks, beautiful beaches and a diverse thriving tribal culture. Situated on the north-western coast of Borneo, the Land of Hornbills offers you an unmatched rich rainforests, pepper plantations, and the diverse cultures of its indigenous people. Sarawak shares its borders with Indonesia's Kalimantan province in the south and Brunei and Sabah in the north-east. Sarawak is Malaysia's largest state, covering an area of 124,450 sq.km. with one of the most pleasant cities in all of Asia, Kuching, as its capital. Kuching, situated on the Sarawak River, offers lots of colonial heritage and is attractive and walkable.

Two-thirds of its land is covered in rainforests and its population of 1.7 million is made up of 23



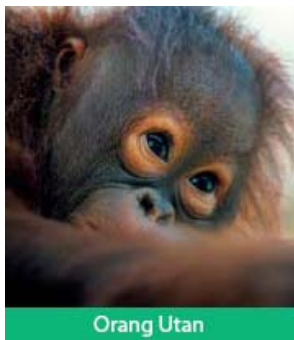
ethnic groups. Sarawak's indigenous peoples have a strong sense of identity and have made their mark in government, education and the media. A unique history has given Sarawak a character of its own, distinct yet very much a part of Malaysia. Sarawak the southern province also offers regular short-haul flight from Kuala Lumpur through the main entry point of the capital city of this state- Kuching international airport. You must visit many of its national

parks and the world's most extreme diversity of flora and fauna here. Mountains range above extensive jungle waterways, edged with gorgeous beaches. Abundance of wildlife can also be found here.

Your must visit national part is Bako National Park, Sarawak's oldest national park was established in 1957, covers a modest 27 sq. km., and is about 37km from Kuching. It's known for its extraordinary natural scenery, habitats, plants and wild life. Its most



significant feature are secluded coves and rugged rocky headlands with magnificent steep cliffs that overlook the South China Sea. Bako is famous for being the most accessible place in



Sarawak to see the rare, human-looking proboscis monkey. Alternatively, you could visit the Matang wildlife centre about 35km from Kuching, located in Kubah National Park, this large enclosed area of rainforest is home to endangered wildlife. There is a training programme here that teaches Orang Utans, who have been orphaned or rescued from captivity, how to survive in the wild. Visitors will be able to see lots of Orang Utans here, especially during feeding time.

Besides these adorable primates, there are also Sun Bears, Sambar Deer, Civet cats as well as three large aviaries that house Sea Eagles, Hornbills and other birds in Sarawak. Jungle trekking is also possible as there are four jungle trails here, the Pitcher Trail (takes about 2 hours), the Sungai Rayu Trail (about 3 - 4 hours), the Sungai Senduk trail (about 1 hour) and Sungai Buluh trail (about 2 hours). Picnic spots, an information centre, accommodation facilities, a car park and a small canteen are available at the park HQ.

Sabah

Land Below the Wind



It is called the 'Land Below the Wind' because it lies below the typhoon belt. Sabah occupies the eastern part of North Borneo and is East Malaysia's second largest state with an area of 74,500 sq.km. Sabah has the South China Sea on the west and the Sulu and Celebes Seas on the east.

Mountainous and largely carpeted by lush tropical rainforests, its population of nearly two million is made up of 32 colourful ethnic communities. Kota Kinabalu, the capital, lies in a fertile lowland plain where most commercial and administrative activities are concentrated. But the 'real' Sabah can best be found in its countryside.

International access to Malaysia's eastern gateway is through Sabah's capital, Kota Kinabalu, which receives flights from Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Kuching, Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila, Brunei, Jakarta, Seoul, and Taipei.

Kinabalu Park

For many visitors, the primary attractions of Sabah are its outstanding national parks. A must visit national park is Kinabalu National Park, listed as a UNESCO Heritage Site,



due to the diversity of plant life and wildlife there. The Park covers an area of 754 sq km and is made up of Mount Kinabalu, Mount Tambayukon and the foothills. It was gazetted to preserve this valuable natural environment. The mountains have a fascinating geological history, taking 'just' a million years to form. The mighty Mount Kinabalu is actually a granite massif that was later thrust upwards through the crust of the surface. Subsequent erosion removed thousands of feet of the overlying sand and mud stone, exposing this massif. During the Ice Age, glaciers running across the summit smoothed it out, but the jagged peaks that stood out above the ice surface remained unaffected, retaining the extremely ragged surfaces. This rugged mountain is the focal point of the National Park.

Kinabalu Park provides a challenging climb, where you can find hidden hot springs in cool high altitudes. Sipadan island off the south eastern coast of Sabah, has been one of the top five dive sites in the world for years. This is attributed to unique underwater goegraphy that encourages proliferation of wildlife. Leatherback turtles, barracuda and white tipped sharks are a common sight while diving in Sipadan. Sabah possesses a number of other attractions as well, all of which are worth exploring.

You as a traveler will run from one surprise to another in Malaysia where traditional and modern go hand in hand. Diversity in harmony from the blazing city of Kuala Lumpur, then to smaller towns with traditional architectural style, picturesque villages set against spectacular landscape of matchless beauty to the modern premier resorts will, without any doubt, be quite an impressive experience, full of surprises and astonishing contrasts for any traveler from any part of the world. Malaysian's natural, historical, cultural assets and values altogether constitute an enormous potential and creates the infinite diversity of tourist resources of ASEAN today. With infinite diversity of these natural, historical, cultural resources, values and attractions, Visit Malaysia year 2007 can offer a wide range of tourist products with a selling appeal to anyone, any segment of travel and tourism market and in fact Malaysia can and is a truly ASIA.

<p>Tourism Malaysia 17th Floor Menara Data' Onn Putra World Trade Centre 45, Jalan Tun Ismail 50480 Kuala Lumpur MALAYSIA</p> <p>Tel : 603-2615 8188 Fax : 603-2693 5884 Email : enquiries@tourism.gov.my Website : www.tourism.gov.my Tourism Infoline : 1-300-88-5050</p>	 The logo for Tourism Malaysia features the words "TOURISM" and "MALAYSIA" in a blue, sans-serif font. A stylized red and white graphic element, resembling a flower or a traditional motif, is positioned between the two words. A small red and white graphic element is also present above the "A" in "MALAYSIA".	 The logo for Visit Malaysia 2007 features the words "Visit Malaysia" in a blue, cursive font. Below the text is a stylized illustration of a hibiscus flower with five petals in red, yellow, green, and blue. The year "2007" is written in a red, cursive font to the right of the flower. Below the logo is the text "Celebrating 50 Years of Nationhood".
		<p>The Visit Malaysia Year 2007 (VMY 2007) logo design is a stylised illustration of the hibiscus or <i>Bunga Raya</i>, Malaysia's national flower. The logo carries the slogan 'Celebrating 50 Years of Nationhood' to highlight the golden anniversary of the country's independence. It carries with it the idea of self-governance and freedom.</p>

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Appendix

1. List of Questions for Interviews
2. List of travel agents interviewed
3. Photos taken during with the participants of the two focus groups
 - a. List of participants for Laos case
 - b. List of Participants for Malaysia case
4. Photos taken during the results validation with Laos's key informants and Malaysian key informants
5. Photos taken during the results validation with Malaysian key informants
6. Letter of acknowledgement of this study and result from Laos and Malaysia
7. Articles extracted from the full report
8. Researcher CV

List of Questions and General Themes discussed:

Five crucial questions were answered. These are:

1. Identify 5 key words which came to their mind when they think of the destination?
2. Explain and share their real experiences in comparison to their perceived view
3. What are the top 5 activities they think are a “must do” ?
4. Top five places they think of the country and think of these five places
5. What attributes should a destination use to differentiate itself to make the best use of its resources?

List of travel agents interviewed

Name	Organisation
Mr Wanchai Thavornthaveekul, Incentive Manager	Destination Asia
Mr. Samart Sidaoruang, Product Manager	N.S Travel & Tour Co., Ltd
Cees Vissers, Manager	Four Wings Travel
Leena Pichaikul, Manager	Sunny Tour Co., Ltd
Surawat Akaraworamat, General Manager	Goodluck Express Co., Ltd

Photos taken with the participants of the two focus groups held on 19 December 2006

a. List of participants for focus groups



MS Pimchanok Wichawet	Mr Seksan Somchaimongkol
Ms Pariyanud Trinikorn	Ms Rachaya Anekthanarajkol
Ms Sutheera Torsuikanok	Ms Patraporn Saipikul
Ms Pathinee Chaisawantwong	Ms Wiyada ketjinda
Ms Koytip Pindech	Ms Kusuma Tantasukitwanich
Ms Supaporn Kidsubmass	Ms Darunee Meechai
Ms Supaporn Eamsunate	Ms Patcharat Aksuma
Mr Wittawat Autawanapakas	Ms Kamolwan Sukdee

Photos taken during the results validation with Laos's key informants



Mr Thavipheth Oula, Deputy Director General,
Planning and Cooperation Department, Lao
National Tourism Administration

Khun Phanith Rashbouth, Lao National Tourism
Administration meeting held on the 31st of January
2007

Dinner discussion held with a team of
Planning and Cooperation
Department and related key
informants from tourism industry
Held on the 31st of January 2007 at
Don Chan Palace, Vientiane



Photos taken during the results validation with Malaysian key informants



Datuk Dr. Victor Wee, Secretary General, Ministry of Tourism Malaysia Meeting held on the 10th of January 2007 at his office in Kuala Lumpur.

Head of Visit Malaysia Year 2007 and her team at her office in Kuala Lumpur



Meeting held with a group of travel agents staff in Penang on the 5th February 2007

Letter of Acknowledgement
of
the study and result from Laos and Malaysia

Mr. Khom Duangchantha
Director
International Relation Division
Lao National Tourism Administration
N/005, Lane Xang Avenue
Vientiane Lao PDR

RE: ASEAN Image Positioning Project

To whom it may concern:

This letter is to support a proposed ASEAN cooperative guidebook. In consultation with key informants in Lao PDR, Dr. Jutamas Wisansing has identified key themes and tourism main attractions and unique experience tourists can find while visiting Laos. These will be featured in the ASEAN guidebook 2007.

It is agreed that under the agenda of ASEAN cooperative framework, a unique experience under the tagline of “Only in Laos” will be promoted as a main marketing campaign.

Yours sincerely

Mr. Khom Duangchantha
Director
(Attached list and signature of all key informants)

Datuk Dr. Victor Wee
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Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC)
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50695 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

RE: ASEAN Image Positioning Project

Dear Dr. Victor,

This letter is to support a proposed ASEAN cooperative guidebook. In consultation with key informants in Malaysia, Dr. Jutamas Wisansing has identified key themes and tourism circuits for Malaysia.

It is agreed that under the agenda of ASEAN cooperative framework, Malaysia “Truly Asia” should remain as a main marketing campaign which reflects Malaysian’s diverse attractions and rich tourism resources.

Yours sincerely
Datuk Dr. Victor Wee
Secretary General

Articles

**Context of the Tourism Industry and Market Conditions:
Implications for Loas PDR Tourism Development**

By

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Abstract

This article aims at providing a current context of tourism industry and market conditions. Based upon this macro picture, implications will be drawn particularly for the development of Loas tourism. Focusing on this board perspective will help identify current situation of Loas tourism position, its strengths and weaknesses will also be elucidated.

Despite the nature of its preliminary content, this overview is necessary as the country realizes that the present lack of national capacity to plan, implement and sustainably manage cultural and nature tourism activities places the natural and cultural heritage at risk of being degraded. Tour packages and campaigns being promoted to the market will also be reviewed. This study will first analyse current situation. Based on the analysis, selected involved parties will be consulted to identify a 'theme' towards destination positioning development.

Key words: Context of tourism industry, Loas tourism and Destination Positioning

Introduction

The Lao PDR's tourism industry is expanding rapidly and offers a key opportunity to earn significant foreign exchange. Statistics compiled by the National Tourism Authority (NTA) indicate that the number of international arrivals in the year 2000 was 737,208, increasing from 37,613 just 9 years prior. The Lao authorities recognize the importance of its abundant natural and cultural assets, and actively promote them in an effort to draw international visitors to areas of natural bounty.

This article aims at providing a current context of tourism industry and market conditions. Based upon this macro picture, implications will be drawn particularly for the development of Laos tourism. Focusing on this board perspective will help identify current situation of Laos tourism position, its strengths and weaknesses will also be elucidated.

Despite the nature of its preliminary content, this overview is necessary as the country realizes that the present lack of national capacity to plan, implement and sustainably manage cultural and nature tourism activities both inside and around the country's many national protected areas (NPA's) places the natural and cultural heritage at risk of being degraded. Tour packages and campaigns being promoted to the market will also be reviewed. This study therefore will first analyse current situation. Based on the analysis, selected involved parties will be consulted to identify a 'theme' towards destination positioning development.

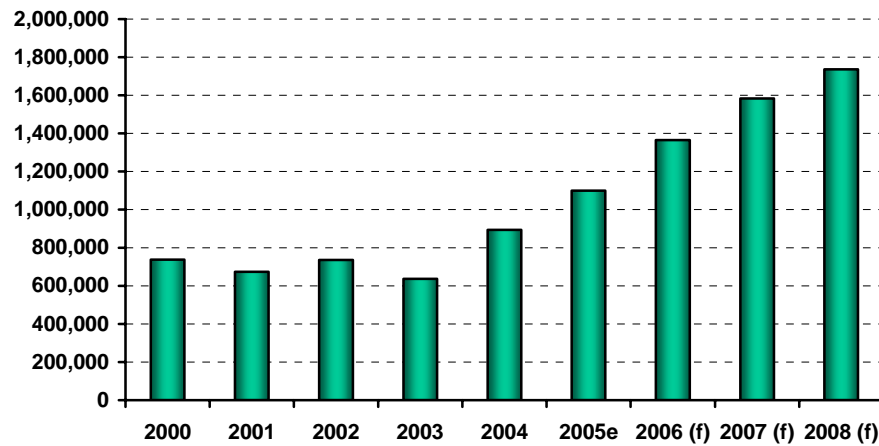
Tourism in Laos



Map of Laos

Laos has seen substantial increase in visitor arrivals since 1995, and although individual markets have fluctuated, the overall trends have been encouraging. Figure 1 depicts the growth and number of tourist arrivals. However, it should be noted that the existing statistical data include same-day visitors with overnight visitors. Thailand has been and more likely remains as the top generating market for Laos with tourists from USA, France, China, Japan and United Kingdom also being fast growing markets for Laos.

Figure 1: Tourist arrivals



Source: Lao National Tourism Administration, 2004

Tourists come to Laos to experience its rich cultural and natural heritage. The population of Laos comprises a large number of different ethnic groups, many of whom, to date, maintain largely traditional life ways, particularly in the more remote mountainous regions. Laos also has an abundance of natural forest cover home to a vast number of bird and animal species, some of whose survival is threatened by forest utilization and hunting. Given this solid base of exotic appeal, tourism is now the largest earner of foreign exchange for the Lao government. Recognizing its importance to Lao's economic development, international donor and lending agencies are actively supporting the growth in tourism – for example, the Asian Development Bank is investing \$12 million in assisting both tourist infrastructure development, such as roads and airports, and the capacity to manage a growing number of visitors.

Since the early 1990s Lao PDR has adopted an increased engagement within the region and internationally. It joined ASEAN in 1997 and is committed to tariff reduction under the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) to be phased in by 2008. There is growing engagement with other nations on key regional issues such as human trafficking, drug prevention and quarantine. The Lao PDR currently hosts the Mekong Secretariat. The Government has also begun the accession process to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Lao is an active partner in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation Program. This programme has strategic importance in terms of potential exports to rapidly industrialising neighbouring countries. The ADB initiatives designed to enhance economic relations within the six countries is contributing an improvement in infrastructure such as roads and the promotion of freer flow of goods and services in the sub-region. The Lao PDR is the poorest GMS country and its integration into ASEAN and the GMS provides both challenges and opportunities. The level of social and economic development this integration and engagement will

bring to its people will depend on how the government manages the multiple transitions it faces in the political, social and economic spheres.

The regulations that have restricted tourism in Laos have been progressively reduced and tourists can now travel relatively freely around the Country. The main gateway and business centre is currently concentrated in two principal regions. These are Vientiane and the province of Luang Prabang as the prime tourist area.

Context of Global, Regional and Subregional Tourism Trends

Tourism continues to be a fast growing, powerful and efficient hybrid industry. However, the global tourism industry has had to face a series of external shocks: the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the war in Iraq, the SARS outbreak in Asia and most recently, the December 2004 tsunami in South and Southeast Asia. Despite the difficulties, global international arrivals have recovered substantially since 2004. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), global international tourism arrivals increased by 10 and 6 percent in 2004 and 2005, respectively, after declining by 1.2 percent in 2003.

Table1 Global International Arrivals by Region Visited

Year	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Europe	270.4	316.4	389.6	387.8	397.3	399.0	415.0	443.9
Americas	92.8	109.0	128.2	122.2	116.6	113.0	124.0	133.1
Asia & Pacific	57.7	85.0	114.9	120.5	131.1	119.3	153.3	156.2
Africa	15.2	20.7	28.6	29.2	29.9	30.8	32.8	36.7
Middle East	9.8	13.8	24.3	24.0	27.9	28.8	34.8	38.4
World	445.9	544.9	685.6	683.7	702.8	690.9	759.9	808.0

Source: World Tourism Organization (2005). *WTO World Tourism Barometer*. Vol. 3 No. 1.

The most recent United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) publications estimate total world international tourist arrivals in 2005 at around 808 million, with the Asia-Pacific region as the second-most visited region in the world after Europe. Significantly, the Asia Pacific region has been the fastest growing tourism destination region in the world. All in all, the Asia-Pacific region accounted for 156.2 million arrivals (19.33 percent of total world international tourism) in 2005.

The UNWTO forecasts that total international tourism arrivals are likely to increase to around 1 billion by 2010, and 1.6 billion arrivals by 2020. In turn, international tourism is expected to generate a value of \$1 trillion in 2010 rising to \$2 trillion by 2020. Given the robust global outlook and based on the impact of developments in the

subregional transportation road, air, rail and water networks, coupled with simplification of border processing procedures and normal promotions activities by the private and public sector, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) forecasts that international tourism arrivals to the Greater Mekong Subregion (of which, Lao PDR is part of) will likely increase by 11 percent per annum to 30.6 million arrivals by 2010 and by around 8.5 percent per annum to 46.1 million by 2015 (ADB, 2005. GMS Tourism Sector Strategy Final Report).

Tourism Initiatives in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is a geographic area in Southeast Asia comprised of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and two provinces of China – Guangxi and Yunnan. The six member countries see the GMS mechanism as a venue for regional cooperation towards the achievement of common development goals. Working with development partners such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the member countries of the GMS have endorsed a framework for cooperation designed to: (i) strengthen connectivity; (ii) integrate national markets to promote economic efficiency and private sector development; (iii) enhance human development through capacity building at the subregional level especially the participation of women and ethnic groups in regional economic development; and (iv) improve the ways in which the natural biodiversity resources of the GMS countries are managed, protected and their value enhanced. Related to these, the governments of the six GMS countries have agreed on eleven flagship programs:

1. The North-South Economic Corridor (NSEC) Development.
2. The East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) Development.
3. The Southern Economic Corridor (SEC) Development.
4. Telecommunications Development.
5. Regional Power Interconnection and Trading Arrangements.
6. Facilitating Cross-Border Trade and Investment.
7. Enhancing Private Sector Participation and Competitiveness.
8. Developing Human Resources and Skills Competencies.
9. A Strategic Environment Framework.
10. Flood Control and Water Resource Management.
11. GMS Tourism Development.

Several of these programs have direct implications and benefits for Laos' tourism development. For example, one specific project that will likely have a direct impact on tourism in SE-Asia will be the development of the Southern Economic Corridor (SEC) road connecting Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Expected to be completed by 2009, the expressway will create a fast overland link between Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City, passing through important tourist destinations such as Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh in Cambodia. Laos must capitalise on this newly established infrastructure. Better link of the region means better flow of tourists within the

region. Based on similar infrastructure developments in the other economic corridors, the ADB (GMS Tourism Sector Strategy Final Report, 2005) expects normal average traffic to increase at around 7-8% per annum until the new road is opened in 2009. Then, ADB anticipates a one-time upward shift for 2010 of up to 61% above the previous year's traffic. This spike in traffic is anticipated to also result in increased demand for destinations along the Corridor that will have the attractions as well as tourist facilities and services to encourage visitors to both stay and move within ASEAN countries.

Specific to the tourism sector, the GMS Tourism Development flagship program has also identified priority projects along the Southern Economic Corridor designed to facilitate cross-border travel between the countries, as well as to stimulate tourism activity in support of the GMS countries Millennium Development Goals of sustainable development, poverty alleviation and heritage conservation. Thus, through the newly-created Mekong Tourism Coordination Office (MTCO), the member countries will be promoting the subregion as a single destination and encouraging tourists to visit multiple countries in the region. These initiatives will have direct impacts to accelerate the tourism development in Laos.

Tourist Market Trend: Experiential, learning, and enrichment travel

Creating outstanding and memorable experiences has become central, not just to the leisure and entertainment industries, but to an increasing number of businesses, as companies seek to build the emotional involvement that goes with them.

(The Experience Profit Cycle, The London Business School 2003)

A key innovation in today's tourism business is experiences. In today's environment, of ever more sophisticated tourists, those who deliver memorable tourist experiences consistently create superior value and competitive advantage. Experiential, learning, and enrichment travel are terms emerging as being the factors predominantly influencing traveler's choices. The demand is growing for travel that engages the senses, stimulates the mind and wellness, includes unique activities, and connects in personal ways with travelers on an emotional, physical, spiritual or intellectual level. An opportunity is at the forefront for destinations to diversify their tourism offer through building holistic, themed travel journeys, rather than merely packaging a series of attractions and special events. Responding to this demand, it is vital that Laos Tourism Authorities are putting in place innovative and outstanding designs which are geared to attracting new customers, repeat guests, and meeting the needs of niche and mainstream markets interested in experiential or learning travel (World Travel and Tourism Council 1991).

The proposed themes and tourist activities, which are abundant in Laos, should be centered as *experience providers* which sequence and stage carefully choreographed activities, gastronomy, personal encounters, and

authentic experiences, designed to create long lasting memories, engaging travel, and increase customer loyalty.

The types of visitor experiences in demand included:

- Reaching into the community in ways that enable travelers to meet local people and participate in day-to-day community experiences. The three most popular vehicles were via kitchen parties, home visits, and farm visits;
- Experiential, hands-on, or interactive activities that destinations have included in their tours through innovative use of their core assets;
- Special access and behind-the-scenes tours that go beyond the traditional tourism offer, are unique and in some cases, not available to mass market travelers;
- Learning and discovery that is participatory, involves two-way communication and interaction with locals, and fosters personal growth. These opportunities were not perceived to be value added, rather it was a core expectation of travelers; and
- Travel that promotes shared experiences with family, friends and fellow travelers.

(World Tourism Organization, 2005)

Tourist Demographic trend

In the next 30 years, the fastest growing age segment will be the older than age 55 group, which is forecasted to increase more than 50% (from 20.9% of the population in 1990 to 30.9% in 2020). Because people are living longer, have healthier lives, and have higher levels of discretionary income, the older than age 55 segment will provide major opportunities for Laos (World Travel and Tourism Council 1991).

The Rise of Incentive Travel

The appreciation of travel incentives as a business tool has continued to increase in recent years. It becomes a global management tool that uses an exceptional travel experience to motivate and/or recognise participants for increased levels of performance in support of organisational goals. The common theme of incentive travel reward programs is that they present participants with unique experiences and recognition for high achievement. Although the existing infrastructure available in Laos may not be comparable to other countries in Asia which the business travellers (i.e meeting and conferences) require, identifying unique activities especially for incentive opens up a promising opportunity. This is valid when taking the demand for more adventure and participative activities.

Generation-X: More Adventure

Generation-X incentive winners will continue to want more adventure – ‘extreme’ activities in their incentive programmes. Certain groups seek ‘Extreme Incentives’ - the rugged outdoors, the thrill of adventure, the adrenaline rush. Such programmes are designed to increase competition among participants, who face a more challenging business environment and who need to learn how to take more risks and think more creatively. These incentives appeal to a very active, youthful group, particularly highly competitive sales and marketing executives, who live for the thrill and enjoy pushing themselves to the limit.

Social and Environment Responsibility

A new generation of corporate incentive participants is less comfortable with the conspicuous consumption that often characterises such events. This is particularly the case when they take place against a background of disadvantaged communities or in developing countries. There are many encouraging examples of recent C & I events that have included an opportunity for participants to actually interact with local people and do something to help them during the trip:

- Football matches with local children
- Raising money for a local school or hospital, through sponsorship or through an auction at a gala dinner
- Environmental improvement projects

The Use of Spas

Spas are increasingly being used as rewards in incentive programmes and as a way to energize or relax corporate meeting attendees – men as well as women. The spa has become an amenity that guests as well as meetings planners expect at hotels and resorts. Many companies are realizing that a spa-based incentive is a wise investment in the well-being of their employees. By combining healthy food, exercise, beauty treatments, and seminars on topics such as stress relief, relaxation, and aromatherapy, time spent at a spa can rejuvenate the mind and body - meaning that participants will be more productive when they get back to the office. Meeting and Incentive groups with large budgets are increasingly arranging for participants to sign up for such treatments and charge them to the company.

Understanding these global tourism context and market conditions should help Laos Authorities identify market opportunities. It is important to capitalize on the emerging trend and position the destinations’ attractiveness effectively in the marketplace.

Situation Analysis (SWOT)

In spite of high-quality attractions and the increased tourism infrastructure, the review indicated there remain a number of significant marketing barriers. The following issues and impediments were identified and perceived:

- A lack of knowledge of the destinations
- no direct access to major markets except from Thailand
- Limited circuit development
- Very poor image of domestic air services
- Limited accommodation outside tourist prime areas

Based on the above issues, SWOT analysis was conducted and summarised.

Strengths

- Quality of the cultural and nature-based experience available
- Friendly Laos people
- Product and market development potential
- Emerging Transportation network
- Ease of combining Laos with major neighbouring tourist destinations
- Nearby important regional markets (i.e Thailand, Singapore, China)
- Strong support from cooperative framework (i.e ASEAN, GMS)

Weaknesses

- Poor international recognition
- Management and institutional capacities
- Service and facility standards
- Lack of professional skills in some sectors of the tourism industry
- Lack of owned financial capacity
- Harnessing the private sector
- Marketing and product development
- Controlling mechanism for tourism development
- Too many cooperation frameworks

Opportunities

- Harness the strengths
- Address the weaknesses
- Emerging markets and new travellers in Asia
- Synchronizing with other cooperation frameworks

Threats

- Pandemic Diseases
- Natural disasters
- Economic crisis

Based on these findings, a theme will be proposed along with key highlighted recommendations.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Laos is truly the 'Hidden Heart of Asia' and offers travellers an unparalleled glimpse of old South East Asia. Tourists come to Laos to experience its rich cultural and natural heritage. The population of Laos comprises a large number of different ethnic groups, many of whom, to date, maintain largely traditional lifeways, particularly in the more remote mountainous regions. Tourists seeking a fascinating, memorable experience, visiting this country will always be enriched and seemingly lost in time. Therefore the theme selected for Laos is experience which others cannot match with a tagline of "Only in Laos"

Only in Lao "Where people who run things can stop running"

Only in Lao "Where young at heart can feel young"

Only in Lao "Where the world is beautiful"

Only in Lao "where you are not a tourist"

Made Only in Lao

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Components of Destination Branding: A Case of Malaysia

by

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Abstract

All products require a "branding" effort to successfully compete for customers. Destination branding has been widely studied and researched. Combining all the attributes associated with the place (i.e. its products, and services from various industries such as agriculture, tourism, sports, arts, investment, technology, education, etc.) under one concept will express a unique identity and personality of the destination and differentiate it from its competition. Malaysian branding strategies have been a remarkably successful case. This article will highlight Malaysia as a case example for branding a destination. Being a diverse yet harmonious country, Malaysia highlights this as its uniqueness. Under this strong brand image and positioning, Malaysia succinctly develops its marketing and promotional campaign. Some examples of these materials are illustrated. Identifying its unique tourism products and together bundled them as a destination positioning will also be discussed.

Key words: Destination Branding, Malaysia case study, Positioning

Introduction

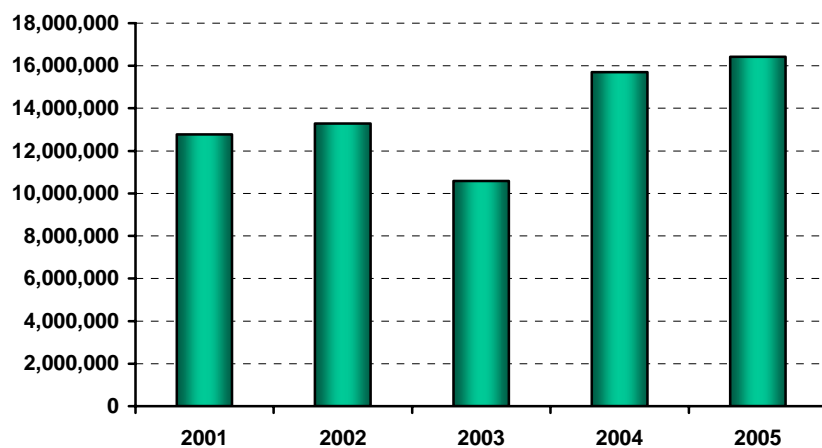
Malaysian branding strategies have been a remarkably successful case. This article will highlight Malaysia as a case example for branding a destination. Being a diverse yet harmonious country, Malaysia highlights this as its uniqueness. Under this strong brand image and positioning, Malaysia succinctly develops its marketing and promotional campaign. Some examples of these materials are illustrated. Identifying its unique tourism products and together bundled them as a destination positioning will also be discussed.



Malaysia is geographically and culturally diverse. Malaysia offers two distinct experiences - the mainland [peninsula] and the island of Kalimantan [Borneo]. These are two parts to the country, 11 states in the peninsula of Malaysia and two states on the northern part of Borneo.

It has been recorded that despite natural disasters and regional instability, Malaysia continued to benefit from the Asian tourism boom, with tourist arrivals reaching almost 17 million, matching the target set by the Malaysian government at the beginning of the year 2005. Singapore remained the top country for tourist arrivals, accounting for 57% of the total in 2005. Malaysia is also among the top three countries for the most number of tourist arrivals among the 53 commonwealth countries according to the World Tourism Organisation. Tourist arrivals for Malaysia rose by more than 160% between 2000-2005, an astonishing achievement for tourism. Within this period, the market was able to recover rapidly from the 2003 SARS outbreak, recording a 48% leap in arrivals in 2004 after its 2003 drop.

Tourist arrivals



Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2006

The Malaysian tourism industry is one of the major foreign exchange earners second only to its manufacturing industry. The country's tourism receipts of about RM34 billion in 2005 represented an increase of 15 % from RM30 billion in 2004. Singaporean tourists were the biggest contributors, followed by Thailand and Indonesia. Tourist receipts in Malaysia accounted for approximately 7% of Malaysian GDP.

The Malaysian tourism board played an important role in boosting growth of the travel and tourism industry. In 2005, Tourism Malaysia embarked on a mission to promote Malaysia as a top Meeting, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibition (MICE) venue. The tourism board campaign of 'Meet and Experience, Malaysia Truly Asia' portrayed Malaysia as a peaceful, colourful and festive multicultural nation with many diverse religions, cultures and ethnics differences living together in perfect harmony, a tourism experience encompassing the whole of Asia within one comprehensive destination. Events such as Petronas Malaysia F1 Grand Prix, Le Tour de Langkawi, Langkawi International Maritime and Air Show Exhibition (Lima) and other world-class events further enhanced the image of Malaysia as a desirable holiday destination.

The strength of foreign currencies, including the Euro and Singapore dollar, in relation to the Malaysian Ringgit, attracts many travellers to Malaysia. The value for money factor is particularly attractive for visitors from India, Thailand, and Singapore, who form over 60% of Malaysia's total tourist arrivals. This image has also been fostered by budget airways. Domestic and outgoing tourism continued to grow robustly despite added surcharges due to rising fuel prices. The continuing price war between budget carrier AirAsia and the national carrier Malaysian Airline System (MAS) managed to keep the rise of transportation charges to a minimum. The never-ending expansion of budget airlines within the region provided more choice for the outgoing tourist but also facilitated in the growth of tourist arrivals by providing low-cost no-frills air transport to the inbound tourist.

Malaysia was shielded from the full force of the tsunami at the end of 2004, and is among one of the few nations within the region with a minimal threat from terrorism. Malaysia managed to pull in tourists originally meant for other troubled nations, typically those of Indonesia and Thailand. Malaysian beaches and island resorts provided safe heavens and an alternative destination for tourists intended for Bali, which had experienced a bout of recent anti-western terrorism.

The Concept of Destination Branding

All products require a "branding" effort to successfully compete for customers. Destination branding has been widely studied and researched. Combining all the attributes associated with the place (i.e. its products, and services from various industries such as agriculture, tourism, sports, arts, investment, technology, education, etc.) under one concept will express a unique identity and personality of the destination and differentiate it from its competition. Most importantly, branding requires a vision and mission about the destination and its future success.

In a case of Malaysia, cultures have been meeting and mixing since the very beginning of its history. More than fifteen hundred years ago a Malay kingdom in Bujang Valley welcomed traders from China and India. With the arrival of gold and silks, Buddhism and Hinduism also came to Malaysia. A thousand years later, Arab traders arrived in Malacca and brought with them the principles and practices of Islam. By the time the Portuguese arrived in Malaysia, the empire that they encountered was more cosmopolitan than their own.

Malaysia's cultural mosaic is marked by these many different cultures, but several in particular have had especially lasting influence on the country. Chief among these is the ancient Malay culture, and the cultures of Malaysia's two most prominent trading partners throughout history- the Chinese, and the Indians. These three groups are joined by a dizzying array of indigenous tribes, many of which live in the forests and coastal areas of Borneo.

Although each of these cultures has vigorously maintained its traditions and community structures, they have also blended together to create contemporary Malaysia's uniquely diverse heritage. This image has led Malaysia to select a cultural diversity as its brand image and positioning. The promotional materials reflect this diversity by featuring different races and ethnic groups in Malaysia (depicted in figure 1).

Figure 1 Malaysia Thematic Print



It also has been well discussed that destination branding is not just about the visual and verbal elements used in a logo or slogan. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) usually face challenges with selecting verbal elements to include in a brand name and tagline, as well as selecting visual elements to use in a logo. However, branding is not only about these elements. It is about the philosophy and the values that form the brand. The verbal and visual elements of a destination brand should represent the values and identity of a destination and capture the perceptions of its visitors.

When a brand is established in a consumer's mind it can trigger associations with smaller destinations within the area the brand represents. But first there is a need to establish a consistent brand identity. In the case of a country, the brand name provides an umbrella for the country's other destinations, as well as other business entities, which benefit from its greater exposure. For example, a shopping related business located in a primarily outdoor recreation destination will benefit from the overall increase in traffic in the area caused by the overall attractiveness of the larger destination. A brand also relies on how much the smaller entities in a destination embrace and support it in order to reinforce the brand identity to the visitors and increase its reputation. In the case of Malaysia, it was found that there are diverse tourism attractiveness which were featured as a component of its brand. Figure 2 shows that there are at least 3 primary reasons for visiting Malaysia of which tourists could enjoy: culture, shopping and cuisine.

Launch Thematic Print



Culture

Shopping

Cuisine

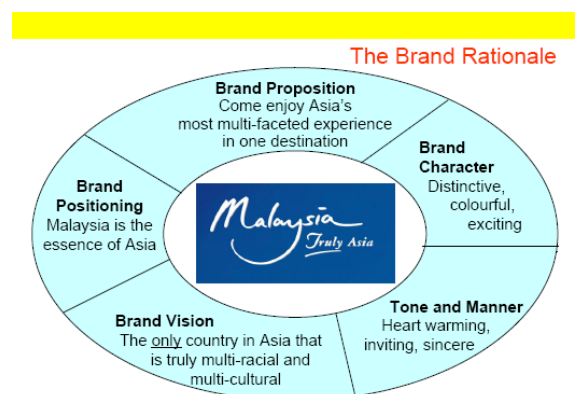
Important Issues on Branding

The literature also suggests that the following issues must be considered carefully.

- Branding creates that first idea about a destination in the consumer's minds
- Branding efforts should be based on visitors' perceptions about the destination
- A mission and vision are necessary in destination branding
- A destination brand exists in the mind of the consumer who, if satisfied, remains loyal and does not switch.

Situation Analysis (SWOT) and the Brand Rational

Malaysia suffered one of the worst collapses in the region during the Asian crisis, but its economy has since turned around, with economic performance and outlook second only to Singapore's. A wealthy middle class has emerged and incomes have grown rapidly over the last decade.



Strengths

- Product diversity
- Market development potential
- Excellent transportation network
- Strong financial supports for destination branding and identity “Malaysia Truly Asia”
- Service and facility standards

Weaknesses

- “Diverse” Marketing and product development
- Lacking singular identity

The composition of tourist arrivals from different countries is limited

Opportunities

- Harness the strengths
- Address the weaknesses
- Emerging markets and new travellers in Asia
- Booming Asia Pacific tourist industry
- Technology
- Political stability

Threats

- Pandemic Diseases
- Natural disasters
- Economic crisis
- Competition

The current situation of Malaysia was taken into consideration as it is believed that branding is not just a logo or trademark. It incorporates many components that work together to form the destination brand concept. Destination branding is about how tourists perceive the destination in their minds. It is about capturing the distinct elements of the destination in the brand and communicating these elements through the brand's components: identity, essence, personality, image, character and culture. Managing these components in order to create a unique position of the destination brand in the consumer's mind is called brand positioning. A destination brand can be leveraged by creating a new “product” under the same umbrella name to increase the customer base and by co-branding.

Building a destination as a more colourful and exciting seems necessary since it is found from a review of travel advises posted widely in the internet that majority viewed Malaysia as being less happening and vibrant in comparison to other countries in Asia. Despite the fact that Malaysia

possesses stunning tourist sights, including, to list but a few the natural, architectural and cultural, Malaysia does have its problems. Highlights posted by the interviewees include the following points:

- Compared to Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, the tourist information system is not so well developed. Quite often when making an inquiry at Tourist Information one is presented with the standard brochures and no additional information but always found them friendly.
- The most important issue that needs to be resolved is the refusal of taxi drivers in Malaysia to use meters and their high tendency to overcharge. This is about not using meters, NOT about using meters then using a longer route.
- You may have heard of the KLIA Express, where for RM35.00(one way) can take you in less than 30minutes to KL Sentral; but unless one is checking into KL Hilton or Le Meridien, there is the taxi to dealt with to get to your other hotel(s), more so with luggages-the monorail or LRT is out of the question. So the company behind KLIA Express-ERL, have come out with their KLIA VIP Service (Flying porter service). For a fee of RM100.00,and if you are staying in Westin, Regent, PArk Royal, Impiana KLCC, JW Marriott and Ritz Carlton,a passenger arriving in KLIA will be paged and greeted by ERL ambassador upon arrival at the Baggage Reclaim Hall (also is KLIA Express ticket booth), assisted with baggage, and escorted all the way onboard the KLIA Express to KL Sentral by the "flying porter" service and transferred to these hotels in a limousine. Of course as a regular user of the KLIA express, avoid the taxi problem by taking the LRT service to PJ. For those who wish to avoid the taxi hassle just take either the LRT or Monorail or the public bus service.

Brand image and positioning is a set of unique brand associations that represent what the brand stands for. These associations imply a promise to customers from organization members. In this case, the promise branding has established must be able to capture the actual experience tourists may have during the trip. Because the character or the actual travel experience is related to its internal constitution, how it is perceived in terms of integrity, trustworthiness and honesty (Upshaw, 1995). This is also related with the promise of the brand to deliver the experience associated with its name. Vegas' brand essence is the ultimate entertainment and gaming extravaganza destination.

Do not try to be all things to all people!

This is not differentiating the destination brand from the competition. Create a unique position in the minds of the consumers. The positioning of a brand is associated with the concepts of

brand image and brand associations. A brand association is anything “linked” in memory to a brand (Aaker, 1991, p. 109.)

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*Malaysia Truly Asia
Malaysia Welcomes The World
Visit Malaysia Year 2007*



By Dr. Jutamas Wisansing

Your trip to ASEAN countries will be incomplete if you don't see the very truly "melting pot" of Asia - Malaysia Truly Asia. The best introduction to this colourful country has been well remarked by the Tourism Malaysia... "Multiculturalism has not only made Malaysia a gastronomical paradise, it has also made Malaysia home to hundreds of colourful festivals. It's no wonder that we love celebrating and socialising. As a people, Malaysians are very laid back, warm and friendly". Cultures have been meeting and mixing in Malaysia since the very beginning of its history. More than fifteen hundred years ago a Malay kingdom in Bujang Valley welcomed traders from China and India. With the arrival of gold and silks, Buddhism and Hinduism also came to Malaysia. A thousand years later, Arab traders arrived in Malacca and brought with them the principles and practices of Islam. By the time the Portuguese arrived in Malaysia, the empire that they encountered was more cosmopolitan than their own. Malaysia's cultural mosaic is marked by these many different cultures, but several in particular have had especially lasting influence on the country. Chief among these is the ancient Malay culture, and the cultures of Malaysia's two most prominent trading partners throughout history--the Chinese, and the Indians. These three groups are joined by a dizzying array of indigenous tribes, many of which live in the forests and coastal areas of Borneo. Although each of these cultures has vigorously maintained its traditions and community structures, they have also blended together to create contemporary Malaysia's uniquely diverse heritage.



Malaysia is geographically and culturally diverse. Malaysia offers two distinct experiences - the mainland [peninsula] and the island of Kalimantan [Borneo]. These are two parts to the country, 11 states in the peninsula of Malaysia and two states on the northern part of Borneo. Cool hideaways are found in the highlands that roll down to warm, sandy beaches and rich, humid mangroves. One of Malaysia's key attractions is its extreme contrasts. Towering skyscrapers look down upon wooden houses built on stilts, and five-star hotels sit several metres away from ancient reefs. For the perfect holiday full of surprises, eclectic cultures and natural wonders, the time is now, the place is Malaysia. It is the year 2007 when Malaysia will celebrate 50 years of independence. The month of

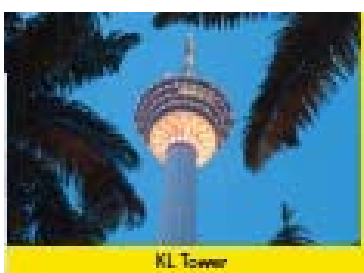
August will be filled with a myriad of parades, cultural performances, street shows and carnivals to commemorate the country's Independence or Merdeka Day on 31st August.

Being an exciting and vibrant destination, you can choose an endless variety of unique travel experiences all year round. For those who like to have it all, let's explore the diversity and wonders of Malaysia, starting your trip by its main entry point from the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.



Malaysia's Dazzling Capital City-Kuala Lumpur

The main gateway into the country is the state-of-the-art Kuala Lumpur international airport (KLIA). A non-stop 28-minute ride on the KLIA express will take you to the KL Sentral Station inner the city. Kuala Lumpur, affectionately known as KL, is an amazing cultural melting pot. Here, you will wander through communities of Chinese, Malays, South Indians, East Malaysian ethnic groups, Thais, Indonesians, Sikhs and a huge community of expatriates. Each community offering its own festivals, food, music, art and fashion while influencing each other's cultures. KL has a lively nightlife scene and a fascinating art and performance culture, which blends contemporary and traditional styles from many backgrounds. To get a snapshot of the city, you might like to explore the city by taking KL Hop-on Hop-off bus.



KL Tower

KL Tower is considered a main feature of the city skyline, the KL Tower is the world's fourth tallest communications tower. To experience the exhilarating view from the KL Tower, you can go

to the 335-metre high observation deck on a high-speed lift. From here, the city's eccentric architecture and lush greenery will be laid out before you. You will be amazed to find the Bukit Nanas Forest reserve, also known as the 'Green Lung' of KL City, located just beside the KL Tower. This uniquely 'real' plot of ancient rainforest offers a walking trail and has flora and fauna indigenous to Malaysia. Here, you get the frankly surreal opportunity to see colourful butterflies, insects, monkeys, squirrels and exotic birds in their natural habitat - all within earshot of the hum of downtown traffic!

If you want to add more excitements into your trip, the latest attraction at KL Tower and Bukit Nanas is a reverse bungee called The G-Force will give you "the faint of heart". You will also get your ride recorded and given to you on a DVD to cherish for many more years to come. On top of the KL Tower is the Seri Angkasa revolving restaurant where you can sample an international buffet spread while watching a continuously revolving view of the Kuala Lumpur skyline.

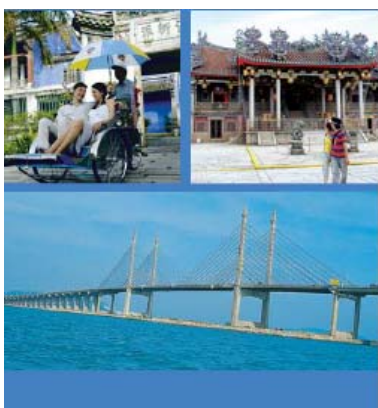
Khula Lumpur Highlights



Not long after your arrival, you will certainly enjoy an inclusiveness which is more than just a way to break down cultural barriers and foster understanding. It is a positive celebration of a tradition of tolerance that has for millennia formed the basis of Malaysia's progress. If the ultra-modern architecture and forward-looking citizens of Kuala Lumpur symbolize Malaysia's hopes for the future, then the quiet, seaside city of Malacca, about 150 kilometers to the south, is the guardian charged with the reflective task of preserving its past. Five hundred years ago, an extraordinary empire rose and fell here, its power and dreams suddenly caught off-guard by the dawn of the Colonial Era. The city was so coveted by the European powers that the Portuguese writer Barbarosa wrote "Whoever is Lord in Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice." It was a major port along the spice-route, and its harbor bristled with the sails and masts of Chinese junks and spice-laden vessels from all over the hemisphere. Because the city was originally built of wood, there are no crumbling and stately reminders of the power once wielded by the Malaccan Sultanate, but along shores of the Malacca River the scene has probably changed little.

After the end of your exploration through the mainland, you will surely leave this efficient and thoroughly comfortable, epitomised by the modern, multicultural city life with lots of vivid memories.

With an excellent road links between Thailand and Malaysia through to Singapore, you can also choose to access Malaysia by road via North-South expressway. Upon reaching the mainland, a scenic drive across Penang Bridge will take you to Penang Island. Getting to Penang by rail is also convenient. There are regular rail services from Bangkok to Butterworth.



PENANG 'THE PEARL OF ORIENT'

Penang, often referred to as the Pearl of the Orient, is one of the most picturesque and romantic cities in all of Asia. This tropical island lies in the Indian Ocean, just off the north-west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Penang received its name from the Pinang, or Betel Nut tree, once commonly found on the island. Established as the first British trading post in the Far

East in 1776, Penang today is a bustling metropolis reflecting a uniquely exotic blend of East and West.

While driving through the Penang Bridge, one of the longest in Asia at 13.5 km, you will feel the touch of the beach resorts which will offer guaranteed heat and mostly sun, with clear seas and fine sand.



On Penang Island sits the capital, Georgetown, a city steeped in history and tradition yet sparkling with progress and modern development. Certain sections of Penang present a quaint picture from the past where narrow side streets, trishaws, temples and traders plying their goods, seem to



The food in Panang is widely regarded as the best in Malaysia.

belong to a forgotten era. Penang is a shopper's paradise for goods old and new, at bargain prices. The island also boasts some of the best food in the region, ranging from fabulous Chinese, Malay and Nyonya cuisines to foodstall favourites like nasi kandar, char kway teow and penang laksa, all As fabulous as

its beaches are, some of Penang's deeper mysteries should also be experienced. According to local folklore, the Snake Temple, dedicated to a Buddhist healer-

priest, was inhabited by snakes who crawled out of the jungle on the night of the temple's completion. The snakes are still there today. The Kek Lok Si temple, at Air Itam, is reputed to be the most beautiful and largest temple complex in Southeast Asia. Its seven-story pagoda, over 90 feet high, is a harmonious blend of Chinese, Thai, and Burmese architecture and craftsmanship.

Other worthwhile stops are the delightful Penang Bird Park, the romantic peak of Penang Hill, Fort Cornwallis, the site of Light's first landing, and the Pantai Acheh Forest Reserve (crisscrossed with beautiful trails leading to isolated beaches). If you start your journey here in Penang, you can now choose to head to the dazzling capital city or if your mood is now fine-tuned with the clear sea and fine sand, then consider Langkawi or Borno. Difficult decision must be made now either to travel across to Malaysian Borno or to take ferries to Langkawi at Port Swettenham in Penang. Both are your best choices.

Langkawi

The Island of Mystical Legends

Off the coast of Kedah is a cluster of 99 islands with the best of many worlds; beautiful beaches, world-class infrastructure, mangroves rich in flora and fauna, ultra-cheap duty-free shopping and fascinating legends.

Ask anyone in Langkawi about the tragic legend of a beautiful young lady named Mahsuri, and you'll hear a tale of love, jealousy and a curse that was placed upon the island by the her for seven generations. Today, the seventh generation of Langkawi's inhabitants has long come and gone, but people here still believe that the prosperity and blessings the islands enjoy today and the passing of the curse is not a pure coincidence. The mysticism of this legend can be felt in many parts of this island, especially at Makam Mahsuri (Mahsuri's Mausoleum) where the famous legendary figure is said to be buried. Langkawi is not only geared towards tourism. Many of the islanders are farmers, fishermen and entrepreneurs. Experience the beautiful countryside and the peaceful landscape of



paddy fields by renting a car and taking a leisurely drive around the island. Some of Langkawi's most rustic and memorable views are along the road that circles the island. You'll pass small villages with wooden houses framed by palm trees, and children

pedalling their old bicycles on an errand. Aside from experiencing the local lifestyle, there is no shortage of things to do in Langkawi. Head up the thrilling new cable car to the summit of Mount Mat Cincang - Langkawi's second highest mountain - for an unrivalled view of the entire main island and beyond. You can also visit the Field of Burnt Rice, the Hot Springs, Telaga Tujuh (The Seven Wells) and the Beach of Black Sand. Boat tours are organised to Tasik Dayang Bunting, (Lake of the Pregnant Maiden), Gua Cerita (Cave of Stories) and the Gua Langsir (Curtain Cave). And if you're more outdoorsy, why not go trekking through the pristine rainforest that blankets most of Langkawi, or go on a boat tour of the mangroves, go diving, or play a round of golf at some of the 5-star resorts. Langkawi also has an underwater world, containing an underground tunnel that runs through a giant aquarium, that has gotten rave reviews.

BORNEO'S PARADISE

Malaysian Borneo is the place to do the really wild thing in a primitive environment, with exotic Dayak tribes, an ancient and endangered jungle sporting ancient creatures such as the orang utan, as well as mountains and spectacular caves. If you skip Sarawak, you'll miss something very special of your trip to ASEAN.

Sarawak Highlights

Land of the Hornbills



The state has a superb system of national parks, beautiful beaches and a diverse thriving tribal culture. Situated on the north-western coast of Borneo, the Land of Hornbills offers you an unmatched rich rainforests, pepper plantations, and the diverse cultures of its indigenous people.

Sarawak shares its borders with Indonesia's Kalimantan province in the south and Brunei and Sabah in the north-east. Sarawak is Malaysia's largest state, covering an area of 124, 450 sq.km. with one of the most pleasant cities in all of Asia, Kuching, as its capital. Kuching, situated on the Sarawak River, offers lots of colonial heritage and is attractive and walkable.

Two-thirds of its land is covered in rainforests and its population of 1.7 million is made up of 23 ethnic groups. Sarawak's indigenous peoples have a strong sense of identity and have made their mark in government, education and the media. A unique history has given Sarawak a character of its own, distinct yet very much a part of Malaysia. Sarawak the southern province also offers regular short-haul flight from Kuala Lumpur through the main entry point of the capital city of this state- Kuching international airport. You must visit many of its national parks and the world's most extreme diversity of flora and fauna here. Mountains range above extensive jungle waterways, edged with gorgeous beaches. Abundance of wildlife can also be found here.



Your must visit national part is Bako National Park, Sarawak's oldest national park was established in 1957, covers a modest 27 sq. km., and is about 37km from Kuching. It's known for its extraordinary natural scenery, habitats, plants and wild life. Its most significant feature are secluded coves and rugged



rocky headlands with magnificent steep cliffs that overlook the South China Sea. Bako is famous for being the most accessible place in Sarawak to see the rare, human-looking proboscis monkey.



Orang Utan

Alternatively, you could visit the Matang wildlife centre about 35km from Kuching, located in Kubah National Park, this large enclosed area of rainforest is home to endangered wildlife. There is a training programme here that teaches Orang Utans, who have been orphaned or rescued from captivity, how to survive in the wild. Visitors will be able to see lots of Orang Utans here, especially during feeding time. Besides these adorable primates, there are also Sun Bears, Sambar Deer, Civet cats as well as three large aviaries that house Sea Eagles,

Hornbills and other birds in Sarawak. Jungle trekking is also possible as there are four jungle trails here, the Pitcher Trail (takes about 2 hours), the Sungai Rayu Trail (about 3 - 4 hours), the Sungai Senduk trail (about 1 hour) and Sungai Buluh trail (about 2 hours). Picnic spots, an information centre, accommodation facilities, a car park and a small canteen are available at the park HQ.

Sabah

Land Below the Wind



It is called the 'Land Below the Wind' because it lies below the typhoon belt. Sabah occupies the eastern part of North Borneo and is East Malaysia's second largest state with an area of 74,500 sq.km. Sabah has the South China Sea on the west and the Sulu and Celebes Seas on the east. Mountainous and largely carpeted by lush tropical rainforests, its population of nearly two million is made up of 32 colourful ethnic communities. Kota Kinabalu, the capital, lies in a fertile lowland plain where most commercial and administrative activities are concentrated. But the 'real' Sabah can best be found in its countryside.

International access to Malaysia's eastern gateway is through Sabah's capital, Kota Kinabalu, which receives flights from Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Kuching, Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila, Brunei, Jakarta, Seoul, and Taipei.

Kinabalu Park

For many visitors, the primary attractions of Sabah are its outstanding national parks. A must visit national park is Kinabalu National Park, listed as a UNESCO Heritage



Site, due to the diversity of plant life and wildlife there. The Park covers an area of 754 sq km and is made up of Mount Kinabalu, Mount Tambayukon and the foothills. It was gazetted to preserve this valuable natural environment. The mountains have a fascinating geological history, taking 'just' a million years to form. The mighty Mount Kinabalu is actually a granite massif that was later thrust upwards through the crust of the surface. Subsequent erosion removed thousands of feet of the overlying sand and mud stone, exposing this massif. During the Ice Age, glaciers running across the summit smoothed it out, but the jagged peaks that stood out above the ice surface remained unaffected, retaining the extremely ragged surfaces. This rugged mountain is the focal point of the National Park.

Kinabalu Park provides a challenging climb, where you can find hidden hot springs in cool high altitudes. Sipadan island off the south eastern coast of Sabah, has been one of the top five dive sites in the world for years. This is attributed to unique underwater goeography that encourages proliferation of wildlife. Leatherback turtles, barracuda and white tipped sharks are a common sight while diving in Sipadan. Sabah possesses a number of other attractions as well, all of which are worth exploring.

You as a traveler will run from one surprise to another in Malaysia where traditional and modern go hand in hand. Diversity in harmony from the blazing city of Kuala Lumpur, then to smaller towns with traditional architectural style, picturesque villages set against spectacular landscape of matchless beauty to the modern premier resorts will, without any doubt, be quite an impressive experience, full of surprises and astonishing contrasts for any traveler from any part of the world. Malaysian's natural, historical, cultural assets and values altogether constitute an enormous potential and creates the infinite diversity of tourist resources of ASEAN today. With infinite diversity of these natural, historical, cultural resources, values and attractions, Visit Malaysia year 2007 can offer a wide range of tourist products with a selling appeal to anyone, any segment of travel and tourism market and in fact Malaysia can and is a truly ASIA.

Acknowledgements:

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<p>Tourism Malaysia 17th Floor Menara Dato' Onn Putra World Trade Centre 45, Jalan Tun Ismail 50480 Kuala Lumpur MALAYSIA</p> <p>Tel : 603-2615 8188 Fax : 603-2693 5884 Email : enquiries@tourism.gov.my Website : www.tourism.gov.my Tourism Infoline : 1-300-88-5050</p>		 <p><small>Celebrating 50 Years of Nationhood</small></p> <p><small>The Visit Malaysia Year 2007 (VMY 2007) logo design is a stylised illustration of the hibiscus or Bunga Raya, Malaysia's national flower. The logo carries the slogan 'Celebrating 50 Years of Nationhood' to highlight the golden anniversary of the country's independence. It carries with it the idea of self-governance and freedom.</small></p>
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Experience you could **only find in Laos**

Asst Prof Dr. Jutamas Wisansing

The Lao People's Democratic Republic, commonly referred to as Laos, could still be a mysterious place for most tourists. A small country at the centre of the Indochinese Peninsula and landlocked by China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar, Laos is truly the 'Hidden Heart of Asia' and offers travellers an unparalleled glimpse of old South East Asia. Tourists come to Laos to experience its rich cultural and natural heritage. The population of Laos comprises a large number of different ethnic groups, many of whom, to date, maintain largely traditional lifeways, particularly in the more remote mountainous regions. Tourists seeking a fascinating, memorable experience, visiting this country will always be enriched and seemingly lost in time.

Only in Laos "Where people who run things can stop running"

Only in Laos "Where young at heart can feel so young"

Only in Laos "Where the world is beautiful"

How to get to Laos

There are many entry points from the neighboring countries, depending on your starting point:

From Thailand by air:

- Bangkok–Luang Prabang by Bangkok Airways (daily, 1h40) or by Lao Airlines (3 times a week)
- Chiang Mai–Luang Prabang by Lao Airlines (5 flights a week, 1h)

From Vietnam by air

- Hanoi–Luang Prabang by Lao Airlines (2 flights a week, 45 min) or by Vietnam Airlines (3 flights a week, 45 min)

You can also find regular flights from Phnom Pen, Siemreap, Kunming and Ho Chi Minh city.

To come into the country by road, you could take the friendship bridge from Nongkhai (Thailand) to Vientiane. The bridge opens from 6:00am to 9:30pm.

Highlights of “Only in Laos” Experience

The main renowned tourism products of Lao PDR are the world heritage site of Luang Prabang, Wat Phou world heritage site in Champasak, waterfall and 4,000 islands in the South, and the mysterious Plain of Jars in Xiengkhuang. If your trip around ASEAN has been hectic, then arriving Laos should be the time for you to relax and enjoy plenty of fun eco-friendly activities.



Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang is the primary attraction for most international leisure tourists and is featured in most tours to the country. Tourists use this most visited tourist location as their principal starting points of the journey either through the Northern part or to the Southern part of Laos. A recommended day tour circuit is to use Luang Prabang as your base to enjoy a varied and broad range of historical, natural and religious sites. You could prepare to spend at least 3-4 days in this gorgeous amazing relaxing beautiful fantastic Luang Prabang.



Some said it is the most picturesque city you could imagine. Luang Phabang is a city surrounded by mountains at the junction of the Mekong and its tributary, the Khan River. Luang Phabang has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1995 to protect the town's 32 precious historic temples, the former Royal Palace and Classic French colonial building from being destroyed by

modernity or over-developing. Being a small town, you can reach everywhere by foot and practically any types of accommodations you choose to stay will be well located. It is definitely more to Luang Phabang than just glittering temples. Being a truly living culture, you could just simply enjoy Laos' every day-to-day life. You could easily spend your days strolling around the adorable city, nibbling baguette sandwiches, staying warm in bookstore/cafe's, and perusing stall after stall of local artisan crafts.



Laos's food is known to be one of the most

diverse and delicious in Asia. All over Loas you will find good inexpensive food available in markets or small shops. If you are looking for something more like home then you can also find French, Italian, or Indian restaurants amongst others. A traditional

Laos dish is steam cooked sticky rice with the well known papaya salad "tamahung".

Made “Only in Laos”

While you are strolling around, stall after stall, don't forget that your trip can also help sustain Laos economy and provide villagers with income by purchasing their work. Throughout the country you can eat delicious home-grown foods, dress in stylish handmade cottons and silks and buy unique souvenirs giving lasting memories of the people you meet, and inspiring your friends and family to visit Laos. While you shop, chat with the locals and try to speak their language. Getting an instant and constant smile and a laugh from local Laos will seal your memories so beautifully. Laos's people everywhere are so nice and friendly. You will pick up a friendly greetings “Sabaidee” before you know it!



The Surrounding Area in Luang Prababang

You could choose to be more adventurous and physically involved by having a full day bike trip to see an elephant park and a waterfall. Take a 30 km trip North of Luang Prababg to Khuang Si waterfall, a beautiful spot for picnics, swimming and relaxing.





You could also decide to head south about 25 Km to Tham Ting cave. The caves are well known Buddhist site and a place of pilgrimage with 5000 statues. To get to the caves take a slow boat 1.5 hours or a car/tuk-tuk about one hour.

Morning Alms Giving

The morning monks' round (in Lao: Tak Bat) is a living Buddhist tradition for the people of Laos. Because of its beauty, the morning glory has become a major tourist attraction, especially in Luang Prabang. If you wish to participate in this meaningful religious practice, please protect its dignity and its beauty by



carefully observing the ritual in silence, and contributing an offering only if it is meaningful for you and you can do so respectfully. Take those memories home with you and time to add more on, you could now take a trip to the capital city of Laos, **Vientiane**. On the way, make a stopover enjoying the vibrant town called Vang Vieng.

Vang Vieng

Vang Vieng (population about 25,000) is located about a 4 hour bus ride north of the capital city of Vientiane or about 7 hours south of the town of Luang Prabang. This is a truly city catering for both young and young at heart. You can find internet cafes, guesthouses, bars, trekking companies. These are all fairly new establishments as it has only been the past 5 or 6 years that Vang Vieng has seen such an influx of tourists. There are people here from all over the world - you can't help but meet people!



Vang Vieng is set along the banks of the Nam Song River. Hardly any visitor can insist the "tubing" trip. Basically this is Laos' most popular tourist activity, anyone who's been to this country has most likely done this. You can rent tubes, then starting at the top of this very very slowly moving river, and

float down all day. There were lots of places to stop off, eat or drink, or even to stop for the rope swings! Along the way you can enjoy Vang Vieng's the most incredible rock formations. They are jagged limestone karsts that tower above the jungle - steep walls which have somehow eluded the jungles grasp. In the morning hours a fine mists hovers just above the jungle at the base of these formations. In the evenings they form an incredible back drop for picture taking during the "golden hour." The scenery will be wonderful and stunning. The water is nice and calm with dragon flies buzzing all over the place. They are amazing colours, hot pinks, blues and yellows.

Vientiane

As a capital of Lao PDR, the primary gateway for air travelers, and the location of the Friendship Bridge over the Mekong to Thailand. It is a city of interesting and beautiful corners rather than grand elegance. Easily the most spectacular is Wat Xiang Khouan, the Buddha Part, that is the foremost Buddhist monument in Laos and features as part of the national emblem. There are a lot of large statues in this park that are very good for photographs.



One of the more famous statues is the very large reclining buddha. There are not only buddhist statues here, there are also some hindu statues as well. The multi-armed Buddha also stands out. Make sure to crawl inside of the "mouth" of the largest statue/building. Once

inside you can see several floors of additional statues, and an awesome view of the park. You can take some very good pictures from up here which can include most of the statues in only a few photos.

The mysterious Plains of Jars

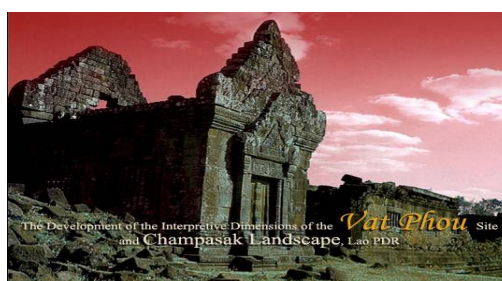
After a few days exploring in the capital city, you might like to head to Xieng Khouang province, situated in the north of Laos. Much of the province was heavily bombed during the Vietnam war and old war scrap is used in building houses throughout the province. It is becoming more and more famous among tourists to Southeast Asia, as it is the place to view the mysterious Plains of Jars. The best way to reach Xieng Khouang - as we did - is to fly from Vientiane, the capital of Laos.



Heading South

For those who would like to explore the South of Laos, you could now head down to Champasak province. Of all 7 provinces in the South, Champasak is the most famous for tourism. It will take about 11 hour bus ride south from Vientiane along where the Mekong lies. You can also fly there from only a few other places. Its areas join with Dan Chong Mek of Ubon Ratchathani of Thailand in the west, and with Kampongthom province of Cambodia in the south. Champasak offers many interesting attractions: spectacular Khmer ruins at Wat Phu, the stunning cluster of islands near the Cambodia border known as Si Phan Don (meaning 4,000 islands).

The Wat Phu- Champasak Heritage landscape, a UNESCO world Heritage Site is a major example of both early and classical Khmer architecture dating from the 7th to the 12th centuries. Located 9 kilometres (5 miles) south of Baan Wat Thong, Wat Phu begins at river



level and rises three levels to reach the foot of the mountain. Outside the complex is a large reservoir, which in times past was the site of boat races and ritual bathing. The bathing (and fishing) continues, somewhat less ritualistically. Continuing into the complex, one sees the remains of palaces built by the rulers of the Champasak kingdom towards the end of their dynasty, from which they viewed the annual festivities held on the full moon of the third lunar month, which continue to the present. An East-West axial promenade passes between two large rectangular ritual bathing ponds and leads to the base of the middle level. At the top of a flight of irregular stone stairs, two large worship pavilions flank the central promenade. Scholars have deduced, based on the deities carved into the stone, that the right hand pavilion was used for the male worshippers, and the left for the women-folk. Currently only the right hand structure is open to visitors. Climbing through the small access door, one can view well preserved Hindu bas-reliefs on the lintels inside the pavilion. Most of the free-standing statuary has been removed or damaged.



Khong Pha Peng waterfalls the "Niagara of the East"

The Phapeng Falls, also known as the Khone Falls are the largest set of waterfalls on the lower Mekong. What they lack in height, they recover in sheer volume. Several of the cascades are visible from a point on the

East bank of the Mekong, about 10 kilometres (6 mi) south of the village of Baan Nakasong. From Don Khone or Don Det, one must travel by boat to Baan Nakasong, and proceed south by land. The falls are an impressive sight, and are best viewed from a pavilion located above the falls. Three separate cascades merge at this spot. Fishermen clamber precariously across the raging torrents on bamboo ladders to lay lines, while birds dive through the spray seeking the smaller fry. Phapeng has its share of roasted chicken vendors, with other local delicacies and plenty of cold beer. A lovely spot for a picnic and a great conclusion to this often arduous but certainly rewarding journey through a unique part of Southern Laos.

The area is also home to one of the rarest large mammal species in the world, the Irrawaddy Dolphin, and unique river wetland habitats. The Mekong rapids on the border with Cambodia, where the astounding force of the water has cut dramatic gorges through the brittle bedrock, are the biggest and widest in SE Asia. A paddle adventure through the Four Thousand Islands offers an experience of a lifetime. It is definitely worth a visit, especially if you add a glimpse of endangered dolphins at Lao-Cambodia border. Here at Don Khone, it is your chance to view the unique and endangered Irrawaddy Dolphin. This mammal can survive in both fresh and salt waters, but it is mainly now indigenous to the lower reaches of large Asian rivers, such as the Mekong and Irrawaddy. Seemingly unafraid of humans, thus a joy to observe, they travel in pods of less than ten, and can be observed in the waters near Don Khone. Every source queried has a different opinion on when and where to find them. Ask a local fisherman to guide you to the plaa khaa.



Dolphins watching at Lao-Cambodia border.

The town is lovely. The French architecture adds to the delight. You can easily navigate the town by foot unless you want to head further out. Since the Champasak province has good roads, it is also easy to hire a motorbike (if you know how to ride one!).

You might by now realize the coming end of your journey through wonderful Laos. Memory is a wonderful and magical thing. No matter how heart-breaking the experience was, as time goes by, you tend to remember every little detail of the good parts, and forget about the bad ones. It is also said that memory is like white water in the river -- it comes and goes rapidly; when you try to forget, it lingers; when you try to remember, everything is already different. Dream is the language of your soul, and we've got to have it. Life is still full of surprises, and we've got to make everyday not like all the others. Dear travellers, experiences you ONLY find in LAOS will last with you forever...

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About Researcher



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Dr. Jutamas holds her PhD from Lincoln University, New Zealand. At the age of only 19, she completed her bachelor degree from Thammasat University, majoring in television production. After a year in the field of drama production, she then decided to go to NZ in 1992.

She completed a Master's degree in commerce and management and also a doctorate in tourism planning and destination marketing from Lincoln University. During those years in NZ, she was involved in establishing Asian Languages Institute. Her roles were related to marketing and promoting Asian culture as well as creating a greater understanding about Asian business and development. She also acted as a Thai Counselor, providing advices to young Thai students living in Christchurch, NZ. She was a founder of a small enterprise-Perfect Link (Thailand-NZ), developing education and business relationships between the two countries.

Her academic pathway started at Prince of Songkla University in 1996. She has now been a tourism lecturer for over 10 years. She has published her works in a number of international tourism journals. She was also selected to represent Thailand at the Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, presenting her research and critical analysis of tourism and hospitality education in Asia. She has been invited by a number of tourism related organizations to share her views and knowledge in her specialized field of tourism and hospitality management.

She has trained a number of participants in Asia. These include planning for MICE and MICE marketing in Taiwan, MICE for educators in Asia, Tourism Management a Regional Approach to the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS) countries (6 members – Lao PDR, Cambodia, China, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Thailand), Tourism Education and Management for China, management essentials for tourism and hospitality in Vietnam, Tourism and Hospitality Marketing for small hotels and for Spa businesses, Service Quality and Hospitality Management as well as personality development for hospitality businesses for many reputable businesses in Thailand.