

Successful Strategic Practices in Building Malaysia's Country Brand

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Abstract: *An analysis of the macroeconomic indicators for Malaysia show that tourism represents a gold mine: in just a few years, the number of tourists has tripled and revenue from this area have increased in only 16 years, over eight times, and the country has reached the top 10 most visited countries in the world. This paper describes the brand campaign "Malaysia Truly Asia" and presents the vectors that generated a "blast" of positive effects: increased awareness and visibility of Malaysia internationally, created a clear and easily identifiable image of the country, the positioning of Malaysia as a leading destination in the region, diversifying tourism markets, encouraging and promoting domestic tourism. It is analysed the impact of this campaign particularly in terms of number of visitors, tourism revenue, visibility and prestige through the awards received.*

The paper addresses a multitude of best practices from the perspective of strategic opportunities transformed into strong points in a good ratio result / effort.

Keywords: *country brand, tourism, marketing strategy, promoting campaign, strategic analysis, competitive advantage.*

JEL: *M3; M31; M38.*

Introduction

The globalisation process has outlined the countries' need for creating a strong image, a brand based on four dimensions (tourism, exports, foreign investments, and foreign politics) (Anholt, 2005).

The image of a country's brand can mould its economic, political and cultural destiny, influencing the people's decisions in relation to buying, investing, changing residence and travel. Thus, the brands have become a „shortcut" for winning decisions (Vicente, 2004, p. 33). In a global world, people (employees, clients, partners, and competitors) are connected via open networks (e.g. internet) and management has to take this fact into account. Therefore, the managerial objectives, resources, relationships and methods used are all changing. Furthermore, business processes are changing due to the information and communication technology development, and their widening acceptance in day-to-day life (Plumb & Zamfir, 2011, p. 127).

The image of a country can be understood as a sum of beliefs and impressions of people about different places (Vicente, 2004, p. 4), representing a

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product of the mind that tries to process and gather essential information from the data set available for a particular place (Kotler, Haider, Rein, 1993, p.35). Even when a country does not manage its name as a brand, people form their own picture about each country, image that can be activated by simply saying the name of that country.

Building a brand image is a difficult, complex, sensitive process (Nistorescu & Barbu, 2008, p. 12). A country's image represents the result of a cumulative effort in the long term, which requires consistent and stable marketing strategies (Vicente, 2004, p. 33). The effectiveness of such strategies is a source of competitive advantage; a positive image is promoting tourism, exports, foreign direct investment and foreign policy. Increasingly strong competition in international markets requires the creation of a country image on each of the four dimensions listed above, but at the same time, requires building an integrated image. In practice, the emphasis of each country in each campaign aimed to promote its own image, in relation to the four dimensions varies, depending on its competitive advantages, and the essence of its existing image.

Most images formed about countries are stereotypes, extreme simplifications of reality that are not necessarily correct (Leclerc, Schmitt, Dube, 1994, p. 263). The leisure industry and the media plays an important role in shaping people's perceptions about certain places, especially about those that have a negative image. Not only certain categories of products such as perfumes, electronics, wine, cars and software are associated with certain places, but also diseases (like AIDS) epidemics, political upheavals, human rights violations, attacks on the environment, racial conflicts, economic crises, poverty and violent crimes.

Finally, it must be said that at the beginning of the 21st century, some things are clear: the issue of country branding is more and more important for many nations. In a world subject to globalization, branding is starting to be an inevitable target for countries that want to survive. In these circumstances, the country brand is no longer an alternative, but a necessity, it is not seen anymore as a function performed individually by the state, associations of private companies, but as an integrated and concentrated effort of all stakeholders and if the brand is effectively implemented, it can provide a certain power:

- Politics: the state has a better image on global level;
- Culture: thriving cultural products, the writers are translated and promoted, the history presents interest to foreigners;
- Sport: there are resources to discover and grow talents;
- Education: the education system produces intellectual elite;
- The society as a whole is developing.

1. Malaysia...

Malaysia is a country located in Southeast Asia which consists of two distinct territories (regions): the south part (the Malaysian Peninsula and adjacent islands) and the north part (the island of Borneo). The two regions are separated by the South China Sea and are situated at 650 km of each other².



Figure 1. Map of Malaysia³

(Source: asiaonline.com.au)

Malaysia has an area of 329,758 km² and a population of 27.17 million inhabitants⁴. The country is a federal constitutional monarchy composed of 13 states (11 states are located in the peninsular part and two are located on the island of Borneo) (Marzuki, 2010, p. 85) and one federal district that includes the capital Kuala Lumpur, the administrative centre of Putrajaya and the Labuan Island (located south-west of the state of Sabah).

Malaysia is a country with high a income per capita, one of “Southeast Asian tigers”⁵, due to the faster pace of economic development. In 25 years,

² <http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaezia>

³ The Malaysian Peninsula is bordered to the north by Thailand and to the east by the South China Sea. Through the Malacca Strait, it has maritime borders with Indonesia and Singapore in the south and west. The insular part of Malaysia is located in the southwestern part of the South China Sea, south and north of Indonesia, Brunei, having a maritime border with the Philippines.

⁴ <http://www.tourism.gov.my/en/about/facts.asp>

⁵ Four states have been generically named the “Asian Tigers”: Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. In the early ‘70s, they were called the “new exporting countries” and their spectacular rate of economic growth has led to a new phrase: “Asian miracle”. Over time, the term *tiger* began to be applied to any country with a tremendous growth due to export-oriented trade strategies. In Europe, Ireland is known as the Celtic Tiger, and Estonia the Baltic tiger, while Chile is known as the Latin American Tiger. Besides the four “tigers”, on the global economic scene have also appeared the four “dragons”, respectively the new industrialized Asian countries: South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and China (to which Hong Kong was added). The “tigers” and “dragons” have focused on a successful economic model based on massive investments made primarily by Japan and the “Triad” countries: USA, Canada and Western Europe. In the early ‘60s, some of these countries had a similar stage of economic development as African countries, which largely remained at the same level. Asian Tigers enjoyed some advantages [a well-educated population, better access to international markets (access to coastal and inland rivers), as well as foreign investment], which helped to trigger economic growth. The economies of these countries have

Malaysia has gone from being a developing country to developed country from the economic point of view. It is one of the most developed countries in Southeast Asia. Malaysia's economic strength is based on industry, agriculture, mining and tourism. However, there is still a huge discrepancy between the economic development of the western and eastern parts of the country (Borneo Island), and between major cities and their suburbs⁶.

Malaysia is a multicultural society formed from Malaysians (60%), Chinese (25%) and Indians (10%), so that everything, from art, continuing with the architecture, gastronomy and daily life is under the influence of these nationalities.

2. Malaysia's branding strategy

Malaysia has made efforts to attract tourists since the early '60s. In 1972, the Tourism Development Corporation Malaysia (TDCM) was created, an agency under the control of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

In the '80s and '90s efforts were made to promote tourism in Malaysia, but the country failed to differentiate itself on the world stage of tourism. Thus, the state tried to position the country as a fascinating destination, full of diversity, but this message could easily fit to other countries in the region. Malaysia's image abroad was that of a country that had a brand without any character or strength in comparison with other countries such as Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia.

Analysts believed that the country did not have a unique image in the minds of tourists and that there was nothing that set it apart from other Asian countries also because of its racial diversity. Thus, unlike China, Japan, India or Singapore, when people thought about Malaysia they did not find significant arguments to attract them as tourists, business people or potential residents, and the country was known abroad more for its political battles and corruption. This was the essence of a survey conducted by the Malaysian government when it launched the project of building a country brand (Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, 2007). However, according to the same study, foreigners who visited Malaysia considered it an "unpolished gem which stands to be discovered, with some important competitive advantages such as the beautiful beaches and resorts, a very



fueled a long time global demand for raw material (oil), followed by electronic equipment. The Asian crisis of 1997, followed by fluctuation of foreign capital, have massively affected the ability of the "tigers" to redress the economic situation, so that today they seem to be "a race of endangered felines", as an economist from the World Bank declared (<http://stiri.rol.ro/Tigrii-asiatici-un-model-economic-depasit--110850.html>).

⁶ At present, Malaysia is working towards achieving the vision of becoming a developed country by 2020 in which the development of urban areas has become the main agenda for development (Sufian & Mohamad, 2009, p. 108).

good cost / quality ratio, a well-built infrastructure and trained personnel, able to speak several foreign languages” (Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, 2007). Also, the investigations revealed that the country's strategic location at the heart of Southeast Asia is an important asset, and consequently the state represents a major option for multinationals wishing to establish regional headquarters.

2.1 Creating the brand

The Malaysian tourism industry suffered in 1998-1999 due to the Asian financial crisis that led to:

- A decrease in the number of tourists (in 1997, Malaysia was visited by 6.21 million tourists, while in 1998 only 5.55 million tourists were recorded);
- Rise of unemployment;
- Bankruptcy of a large number of tour operators and travel agents;
- Reduction of the national budget for promotion in this area;
- Cancellation of many tourism airline routes.

In these circumstances, in 1999, the Malaysian Government has hired the TBWA-ISC⁷, an agency within the TBWA group⁸ based in Kuala Lumpur, to change this image and reposition the Malaysian country brand. “We had more than three weeks to prepare the proposal for the campaign. So we decided to go back to origins and to focus on one element that we can talk about until exhaustion”.

At that time the general opinion was that Malaysia does not have any unique feature because of its diversity of nationalities. We were not on the same line with this view. We saw a strong point in what others sought to be a disadvantage. We saw Malaysia's ethnic diversity as the main and most important element that makes this country unique and thus, we celebrate diversity. No other country combines the three major races of Asia (Malay, Chinese and Indian) such as Malaysia and furthermore, other ethnic groups into a single destination.

Therefore, no other country offers so many cultural sites, culinary variety, festivals, customs and traditions of these great Asian civilizations. On this philosophy Malaysian brand was created: *Malaysia: Truly Asia*⁹, which promises to deliver a unique experience, grouping elements from all across Asia”¹⁰.

⁷ Integrated Strategic Communications (ISC)

⁸ TBWA Worldwide (www.tbwa.com) is one of the most dynamic international advertising networks with 258 branches in 75 countries and employing 11,000 people. Among its clients one can find companies such as: ABSOLUT, Adidas, Apple, Beiersdorf, Henkel, Infiniti, Mars, McDonald's, Michelin, Nissan, Pernod Ricard, Pioneer, Samsonite, Standard Chartered Bank, Singapore Airlines and Sony PlayStation. TBWA is part of Omnicom Group Inc., one of the top networks in the field of marketing and communication. Omnicom companies provide advertising services, media, strategy, promotional and direct marketing, public relations and other specialized communication services for over 5,000 clients in more than 100 countries (http://www.iqads.ro/stire_9254/campania_tbwa_malaysia_truly_asia_a_primit_aurul_la_premiile_ame.htm)

⁹ Other the years, Malaysia tried to promote itself by using other logos: “Beautiful Malaysia”, “Only Malaysia”, and “Fascinating Malaysia”.

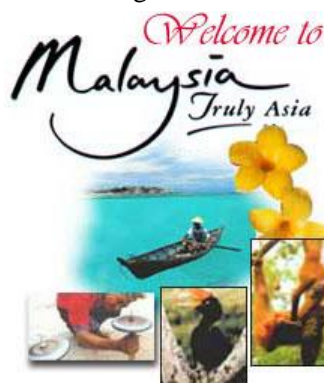
¹⁰ Austen Zecha, the President of ISC.



Figure 2. Logo and slogan for the brand “Malaysia: Truly Asia”

(Source: concordworldtravels.com)

The brand has been disputed by some experts who have argued that tourists looking for a truly multicultural experience will want to see, first, countries like India or China (where the Asian culture was born). Others have argued that the projected image in people's minds when mentioning Asia is one of misery, poverty and cheap labour, and therefore the name of the continent should not be remembered in the name of the brand. However, over time, one noted that other cities and countries have also promoted themselves by using messages which made reference to Asia [for example, Hong Kong was declared *Asia's World City* and Singapore used the New Asia slogan] (Sya, 2004).



The allowed Malaysia to differentiate itself from other competing tourist destinations, by creating a position which reflected not only the country's racial diversity, but also the diversity of landscapes, culture and history, which together make up a complete experience of the Asian continent.

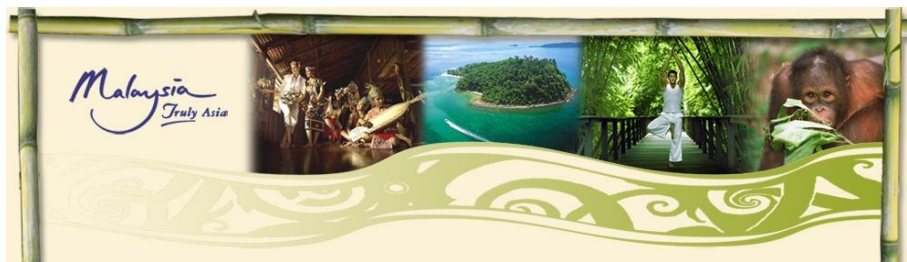
The branding strategy was based on:

- encouraging the formation of a culture dedicated to quality and innovation, both among companies and the general public;
- coordinating branding efforts of member states (as I mentioned at the beginning of the study, Malaysia is made up of several states) with those for building an image for a national brand;
- coordinating efforts of all stakeholders (from various levels of government, the private sector to the simple citizen).

The advantages of creating a strong country brand for Malaysia could be summarized as follows:

- Increase public awareness and international visibility of Malaysia;
- Create a clear and easily identifiable image of the country;
- Position Malaysia as a leading destination in the region;
- Diversify tourism markets;
- Stimulate and promote domestic tourism.

2.2 Promoting campaigns



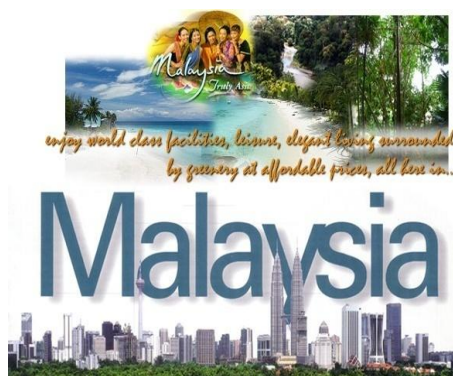
The campaign *Cuti-Cuti Malaysia* was launched in September 1999 to encourage domestic tourism and it relied on direct sales of travel packages offered by various tour operators to consumers.

In 2000, ISC launched an aggressive global campaign¹¹, accomplished on different channels:

a) Mass-media:

- *TV and cinema.* Five videos were produced for promoting the “Beaches in Malaysia”, “Health & Welfare”, “Wedding & Honeymoon”, “Paradise Bay”, “Ecotourism”, which were broadcasted on CNN.

- *Print media (specialized magazines,* for example, Traveller, National Geographic, Fortune, Time and Newsweek, and in 2006, the list was completed by the prestigious magazine The Economist).



¹¹ In 2005 Malaysia was involved in 57 promotional activities on all the major foreign markets: exhibitions and fairs, seminars and workshops. For promoting on the domestic market 905 promotional events were planned.



Figure 3. Press layouts

The ads used as protagonists five girls representing the nationalities of Malaysia – Malay, Chinese, Indian, Sarawak and Sabahan. They were the symbols of the campaign and aimed to suggest the diversity of Malaysia and its characteristic of truly representing the whole of Asia.

The campaign:

- presents Malaysia as a land of many cultures, wonders and attractions and invites tourists to experience the uniqueness of the country during their stay there;
- represented Malaysia by its white sandy beaches, its lush forests, exotic destinations, events, festivals and celebrations.

“When choosing the promotional materials different aspects of the country were used for different markets because it is very important to identify correctly the target markets. For example, it is meaningless to describe Malaysia as a shopping haven for residents of New York or Paris or to show the people of South America Malaysia's tropical forests”, the ISC President explained.

b) Outdoor advertising



c) Direct marketing:

- *Online.* In November 2005 the website www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my (subsequently transformed into <http://www.tourism.gov.my/>) was launched. It

focused on the markets from Europe, North America and Australia where the virtual environment is the main mean of information.



Figure 4. Malaysia's first tourism website: www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my
(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2006). Annual Report 2005, p. 44)

Over time, Tourism Malaysia launched online campaigns on various websites like: yahoo.com, lonelyplanet.com, eurosport.com, cnn.com, amazon.com, geocities.com, excite.com, lycos.com.

- Posters and flyers of various dimensions;
- Banners placed on websites specialized in tourism and travel.





Figure 5. Campaign banners

The campaign incurred costs of USD 40.2 million in the first two years from its launch and maintained constantly to around USD 25 million a year for the subsequent years.

→ *Malaysia Welcomes the World (MWW)(2006)*

Malaysia Welcomes the World (MWW) represents a program launched by the Ministry of Tourism with the following aims:

- Preparing the country for the campaign Visit Malaysia Year 2007;
- Improving the hospitality of the Malaysian people;
- Changing the Malaysians' way of thinking and applying tourism;
- Improving the residents' communication skills.



“Citizens of Malaysia are friendly and well known for their welcoming spirit, but we cannot take this thing as such and therefore, we must ensure that tourists are welcomed in our country wherever they go. This campaign will spread the message to all levels and will make everyone to know the importance of treating foreigners in the best possible way”¹².

In December 2006, the minister of tourism has launched the first luxury “double-decker bus service” in Kuala Lumpur, which meant the tour of the city with commentaries and guides recorded in eight languages.

The campaign slogan was *The Time is Now, The Place is Malaysia* and acted as a call to action for Visit Malaysia 2007.



¹² Tourism minister: Datuk Seri Tengku Mansor.

→ „Visit Malaysia 2007”

The year 2007 marked Malaysia's 50th anniversary of independence and sovereignty, reason for which 2007 was declared the “year of tourism” and the campaign *Visit Malaysia 2007 (VM 2007)*¹³ was launched.

The authorities aimed at:

- Attracting 20.1 million tourists. In 2006, the country had been visited by a number of 17.4 million tourists, most of them from Asia (Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei, China, Japan and India). Of the tourists coming from other regions, Australia tops with 265,000 visitors, followed by the United Kingdom with 240,000 and the U.S. with 150,000;

- Earning RYM 44.5 billion from tourism (approximately USD 13 billion). In 2006, Malaysia's earnings from tourism amounted at RYM 36.2 billion and thus, tourism had been the most important source of revenue for the Malaysian Government, which had invested heavily in this sector. Thus, it had allocated RYM 1.8 billion for the tourism industry, according to the Ninth Malaysian Plan (2006-2010).

The preparations for VMY 2007 officially began on 31 December 2005 (when the logo of the campaign was launched). Throughout 2006, the Malaysian government and the tourism industry have worked together to ensure that the program, which was officially launched in January 2007, will be a success.

A special logo has been created for this campaign: it represented a stylized picture of a hibiscus flower (Malaysia's national flower since 1960).



Figure 6. Visit Malaysia 2007 logo and slogan

(Source: <http://www.tourism.gov.my/>)

¹³ Malaysia has organized three campaigns on the pattern of “visit year” in 1990, 1994 and 2007. The first campaign, “Visit Malaysia 1990” was a huge success and the country recorded a total of 7.4 million tourists, a real increase compared to the 4.8 million tourists recorded in the previous years of the campaign. The increase was about 56%, and revenues have reached the figure of RYM 4.5 billion. This campaign aimed to introduce the country to the list of possible holiday destinations, as an option in the itinerary of tourists. The campaign emphasized on raising awareness regarding Malaysia. The 1994 campaign attracted 7.13 million tourists who spent about RYM 8.3 billion.



The logo is simple in design, full of colour, with its central motif the name of the state – Malaysia – handwritten and bolded to highlight the unique beauty of the country, its warm and welcoming atmosphere, its magic diversity and full of discoveries to be made, but also it seeks consistency with logo design of the country's brand – Malaysia: Truly Asia.



The words "Visit 2007" handwritten and with similar formatting are used to strengthen and complete the word "Malaysia". The red color contrasts with the blue of the word "Malaysia", with the aim of highlighting it.



The blue line provides both visual cohesion, and cohesion and unity to the nation. It symbolizes the history and also the continuity of this nation in full progress. The five petals of the flower symbolize the five major nations of Malaysia.



The heart is placed in the centre of the logo, symbolizing the welcoming of visitors with open arms and hearts. Also, it is the main and most prominent petal of the flower.



The five points of stamina symbolize the states' 50 years of independence. The image shows hope and happiness, reflecting the growing importance of this state.



The logo is accompanied by the slogan "Celebrating 50 years of nationalism/independence" which suggests self-government and freedom, pointing out the 50 years of independence of the state.

The symbols of the colours are also important for the logo:



Red represents vitality, openness and hospitality for which Malaysians are recognized worldwide.



Green highlights the rich tropical heritage, parks and nature reserves, in a word: biodiversity which Malaysia has to offer to the world.



Blue represents the sky, sea, fun and recreation.



The yellow represents monarchy, faith in God, sovereignty of the law and the country's stability.

Orange suggests progress, prosperity and the opportunities which the country has to offer.

Internationally, the campaign was active in several target markets: Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, USA, UK, and Australia. Several channels were used:

a) Mass-media:

- *TV and cinema.* For 2007 and 2008 18 videos were recorded for promoting the country as a whole and also specific fields like: "Wonders of the Cities" (KL), "Cultural marvels", gastronomy, health, beaches etc. They were broadcasted on CNN, BBC, Discovery Channel, CNBC, National Geographic, Sky News, Star Channel, ESPN, Eurosport, TVBI, MTV, LCI, TF6, Pro7 and Sat1.

- *Print media (specialized magazines)*



Figure 7. Press layouts

(Source: www.visitmalaysia.com)

b) Direct marketing:

- *Online.* The Internet campaign Visit Malaysia supported the efforts of the Ministry of Tourism to attract visitors to Malaysia. This was the first campaign of its kind in the world, where citizens have been actively involved, being invited to play a role in promoting the country through a focused and unified effort. Thus, every citizen with access to the Internet was invited to send emails to friends from abroad to tell them about the beauty of Malaysia. The slogan for this cyber campaign was Think Holiday, Think Malaysia.

The website:

- Was the focus of the promotional campaign;
- Was a guide which provided visitors with a selection of top destinations within Malaysia, according to their travel preferences:
 - *Island Life;*

- *City Excitement;*
 - *Adventure;*
 - *Culture and Heritage.*
 - Provided information on a wide range of activities practiced in Malaysia, including diving, caving, spa, relaxation;
 - Presented a list of events and festivals which were to take place during the year and offered visitors many opportunities to experience nature adventures, cultural experiences and great shopping sprees;
 - Offered visitors a multimedia experience in Malaysia, allowing them to watch commercials and videos with true stories of tourists who visited the country. This was very important because the very tourists confess that Malaysia is a safe and beautiful country;
 - Was available in English, Spanish, French, German, Italian and Russian;
 - Recorded over 300,000 visitors a month.
- On this website one can also find press releases related to major tourist events organized by the Ministry of Tourism and Tourism Malaysia, which were distributed to local and foreign mass-media.
- *Posters and flyers* of various dimensions;
 - *Banners* placed on websites specialized in tourism and travel.



Figure 8. Campaign banners
(Source: www.visitmalaysia.com)

• *Brochures:*



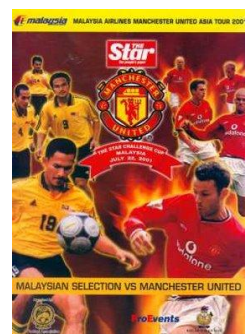
Figure 9. Brochures

(Source: <http://www.tourism.gov.my/corporate/images/E-Magazines/TMNewsletterIssue1.pdf>)

b) *Promotional merchandise* (e.g. the 50,000 DVDs recorded).

c) *Partnerships, events and festivals:*

• Tourism Malaysia has resorted to various partnerships with local and international organizations in order to promote the country as a destination of international stature in the field of sports. In 2006 for example, Malaysia's Tourism Agency has signed an agreement with two football clubs in the English Premier League: Chelsea (for the 2005-2006 season) and Manchester United (for the 2006-2007 season). These partnerships have been supported by other major international events (Formula 1 Grand Prix of Malaysia – “Petronas Grand Prix”, the Langkawi Cycling Tour and the yachting “Monsoon Cup”).



• On 20 January 2006, MasterCard and Bank Islam launched on the market the product named “Tourist Friend MasterCard”; the owners of such a card benefited from various discounts and promotions for the period they were spending in Malaysia.



• The Malaysian Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor, headed a delegation for the launch of the VMY 2007 campaign in the United Kingdom and participated in the edition no. 27 of the 2006 World Travel Market.

- The Flower Festival;



Figure 10. A poster for the Flower Festival

(Source: <http://www.tourism.gov.my/corporate/images/E-Magazines/TMNewsletterIssue1.pdf>)

- The Great Discounts Festival;
- The International Jazz Festival.

The Malaysian Government spent approximately MYR 600 million (i.e. Ringgit Malaysia currency) for promoting.

By taking into account the aspects considered the most important in attracting people to visit a particular country, the 2007 Malaysian country brand provided the following results:

- In terms of accommodation possibilities, Malaysia was ranked 10th among the world's most powerful country brands;
- Linked to the variety of culinary experiences, Malaysia was ranked 8th in the ranking of the most powerful country brands.

Visit Malaysia 2007 campaign was in force until 31 August 2008.

→ *Malaysia: Truly Asia and Zoom! Malaysia* campaigns (2008)



Zoom! Malaysia was launched in May 2008 under the slogan *More to visit, Many more to discover*, as the extension of the *Cuti-Cuti Malaysia* campaign. It aimed to promote new domestic destinations, encouraging residents to plan their vacations in different areas of the country.

The title of the campaign was a catchy phrase that transcends language, culture and racial barriers, with the purpose of “persuading tourists to look in a different manner at Malaysia”¹⁴.

Promotion was achieved primarily through print media and online. The focus was on online promoting thanks to the growing number of people who use the Internet to obtain information about various destinations and also to make other arrangements related to travel.

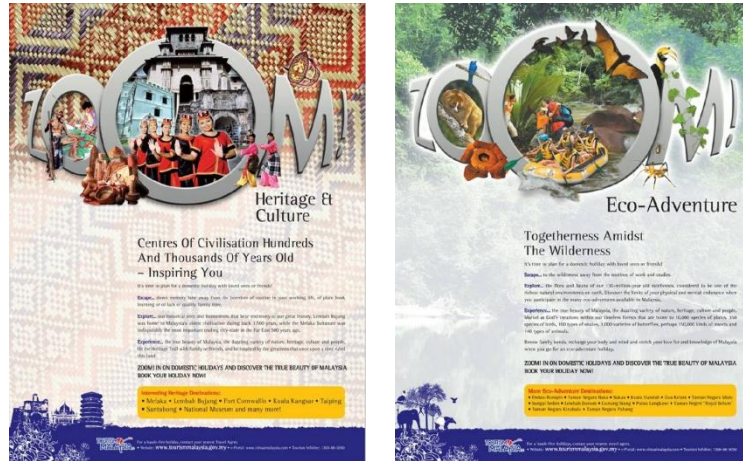


Figure 11. Press layouts



Figure 12. Zoom! Promoting Malaysia using an airplane fuselage picture (Air Asia airliner)

(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2009). Annual Report 2008, p. 51)

¹⁴ <http://travelmalaysiaguide.com/zoom-malaysi/>

Internationally, *Malaysia - Truly Asia* was used in all the advertising campaigns.

As advertising environments the following were used:

- *Printed media:*



Figure 13. 2008 press layouts for the European and American markets (spa, honeymoon, adventure tourism)

- *Brochures:* Tourism Malaysia printed 12 million brochures in the languages of the main target markets. The brochures were distributed through the tourism offices of Tourism Malaysia, the network of tourism information centres, hotels, the country's diplomatic missions and other similar organizations.

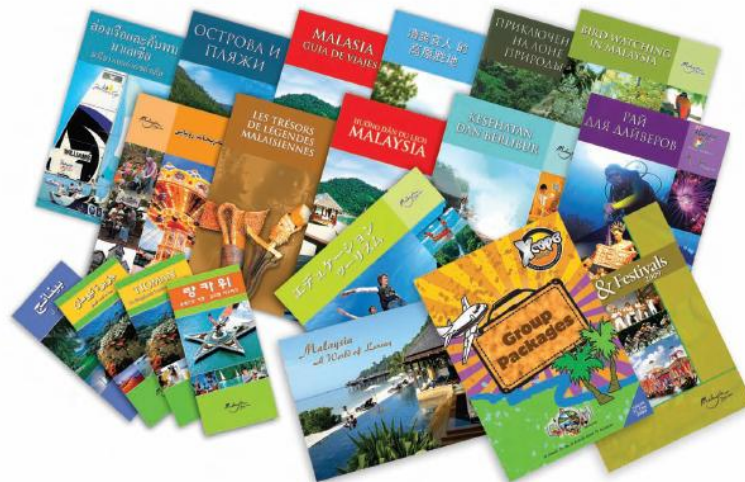


Figure 14. Brochures

(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2009). Annual Report 2008, p. 53)

- *Promotional merchandise*: two million souvenirs were manufactured (paper bags, toys, freezer magnets, umbrellas, shawls).



Figure 15. Promotional objects

(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2009). Annual Report 2008, p. 56)

→ *Malaysia: Truly Asia and the Cuti-Cuti! Malaysia campaigns (2009).*

In 2009, a new campaign was launched – *Cuti-Cuti! Malaysia* – meant to replace *ZOOM! Malaysia*.

This new campaign was launched with the purpose of encouraging the country's own inhabitants to choose the national tourism destinations and to determine them to travel also after the official tourism has ended.

For internal and external promotion the following environments were preferred:

- a) *Mass-media (print and on-line);*



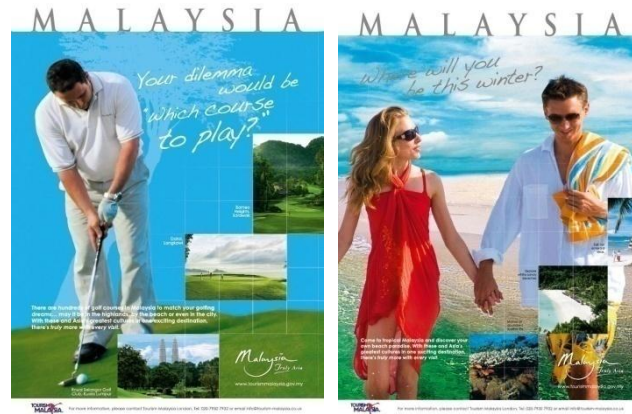


Figure 16. 2009 press layouts for the European and American markets (traditional cuisine, SPA, scuba diving, golf and beaches)



Figure 17. 2009 press layouts for the Asian markets (shopping and Putrajaya)

b) *Outdoor promoting:*



Figure 18. The European outdoor campaign
(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2010) – Annual Report 2009, p. 43)



Figure 19. Busses in Manchester and Birmingham with the Malaysian brand (UK)
(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2010). Annual Report 2009, p. 42)

c) *Direct marketing:*

- The website was organized into two main sections: “visitors” (available at present in English and Malay) and “business”. In 2009, the website recorded 2,710,054 visitors, of which 75% were first time visitors.

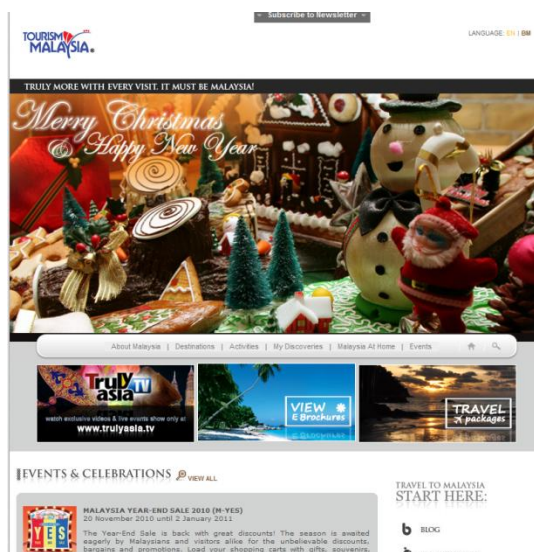


Figure 20. The Malaysian portal for tourism
(Source: <http://www.tourism.gov.my/>)

On the website were also uploaded the press releases related to major tourism events organized by the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism and the Malaysia Travel Agency (Tourism Malaysia). These were distributed to local and foreign mass-media.

- *Offline.* Tourism Malaysia sent in 2009 monthly newsletters to 53,538 subscribers, which contained the press releases and the events planning.
- *Social networks.* Malaysia is present on Twitter (1,002 visitors in 2009) and Facebook (533 friends in 2009). It also has a blog on its official website (10,371 visitors in 2009) where those interested can share their experiences lived in

Malaysia. These networks help users obtain the latest information about various destinations around the country, thus helping them in planning their trip.



Figure 21. The Malaysian tourism pages on Facebook and Twitter
(Source: *Tourism Malaysia (2010). Annual Report 2009*, p. 76)

d) Promotional objects:



Figure 22. 2009 promotionnel marchandises
(Source: *Tourism Malaysia (2010). Annual Report 2009*, p. 58 and 60)

e) BTL events:

- Related to big price discounts, culinary festivals, “The colors of Malaysia”;
- 17 trips to which 187 mass-media representatives (both foreign and local) participated in, and which had the purpose of sharing knowledge about Malaysia’s tourist attractions;
- 30 press conferences for presenting various events taking place in the country in the year 2009.

BTL advertising costs amounted to RYM 2,3 million.



Figure 23. Promoting events organized by Malaysia in 2009

(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2010). Annual Report 2009, p. 47)

The 2009 advertising budget was in amount of RYM 68 million.

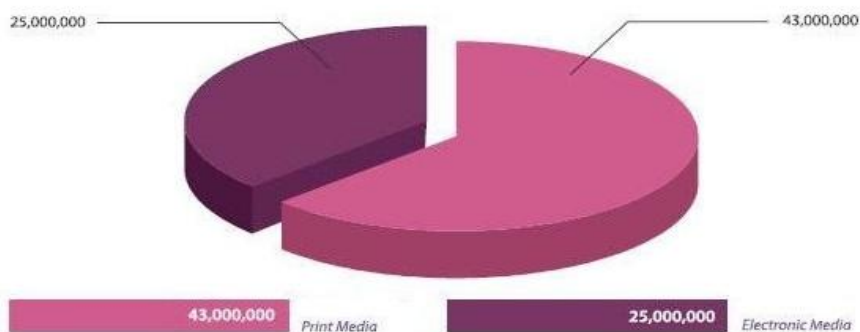


Figure 24. Marketing budget for 2009 (UK)

(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2010). Annual Report 2009, p. 51)

→ *Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H)*

Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) program was based on the *Silver Hair Programme* which the government introduced in 1996 to persuade foreign retirees (aged over 50) to choose Malaysia as their second home. The aim was that foreigners who would retire here to participate in reviving the economy (for example, it is expected that visits to relatives and / or friends would encourage the Malaysian economy).





Figure 25. The MM2H program
(Source: <http://www.tourism.gov.my/>)

The target markets were especially Japan, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Bangladesh and China.

Table 1. Top ten country markets for the MM2H program in 2009

Crt. no.	Country	Pensioners participating in the MM2H program in 2009
1	Iran	212
2	Japan	169
3	UK	162
4	China	114
5	Pakistan	103
6	Bangladesh	86
7	Australia	61
8	South Korea	54
9	Indonesia	53
10	Singapore	53
	Other countries	511
	TOTAL	1.578

(Source: Malaysia My 2nd Home Secretariat, <http://www.mm2h.gov.my>)

3. Target markets

In the market research activity, ISC used three main sources for obtaining the profiles of the target groups:

- Malaysia's tourism offices located abroad which have more detailed information regarding what their clients want from a holiday destination;
- The studies provided by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA);
- Information from the ISC bureaus from over 58 countries.

The main geographical regions for promotion were the following:

- Asia (Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan);
- North America (USA and Canada);
- Oceania (Australia and New Zealand);
- The northern and western regions of Africa;
- The Middle East (United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia);
- Europe (UK, Ireland, Russia, the Baltic States, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, Sweden and Italy).

Table 2. Top 10 target markets, 2007-2008

Crt. no.	Main target markets	2007	2008	Change from previous year
1	Singapore	10.492.692	11.003.492	+ 4,9
2	Indonesia	1.804.535	2.428.605	+ 34,6
3	Thailand	1.625.698	1.493.789	- 8,1
4	Brunei	1.172.154	1.085.115	- 7,4
5	China	789.568	949.864	+ 20,3
6	India	422.452	550.738	+ 30,4
7	Japan	367.567	433.462	+ 17,9
8	Australia	320.363	427.076	+ 21,6
9	Philippines	327.140	397.884	+ 33,3
10	UK	276.213	370.591	+ 34,2

(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2009). Annual Report 2008)

Table 3. Top 10 target markets, 2009

Crt. no.	Main target markets	2008	2009	Change from previous year
1	Singapore	11.003.492	12.733.082	15,7
2	Indonesia	2.428.605	2.405.360	-1,0
3	Thailand	1.493.789	1.449.262	-3,0
4	Brunei	1.085.115	1.061.357	-2,2
5	China	949.864	1.019.756	7,4
6	India	550.738	589.838	7,1
7	Australia	427.076	533.382	24,9
8	Philippines	397.884	447.470	12,5
9	UK	370.591	435.091	17,4
10	Japan	433.462	395.746	-8,7
	Other		2.575.847	
	TOTAL	22.052.488	23.646.191	7,2

(Source: Tourism Malaysia (2010). Annual Report 2009)

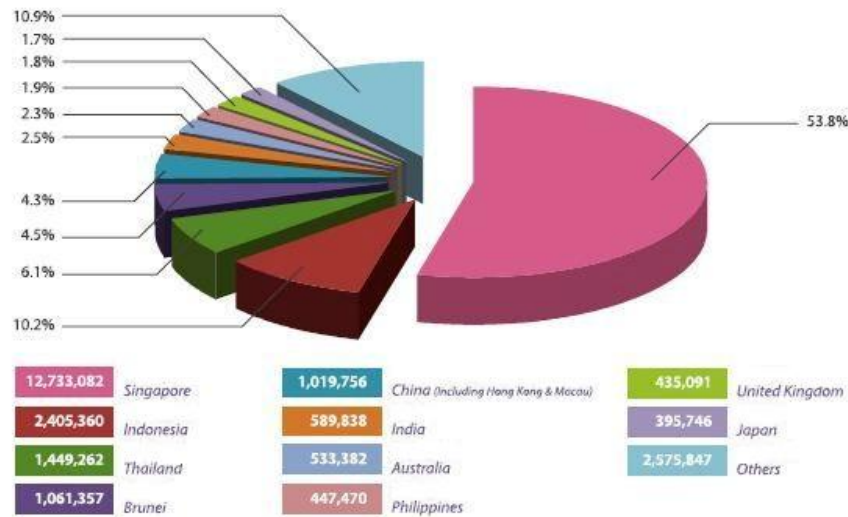


Figure 25. 2009 target markets

(Source: *Tourism Malaysia (2010). Annual Report 2009, p. 19*)

In order to maintain the market share, the Malaysian authorities focused on the domestic tourism, but they also oriented towards the European niche markets (e.g. ecotourism) or regions located closer to Malaysia (such as China and India).

For the Malaysian tourism industry the main role was also played by the infrastructure. Consequently:

- Freedom of movement for air traffic originating from Asia and the increase in the budgets of airlines have led to:
 - A rise in the number of tourists from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and India;
 - A rise in the number of tourists from the Middle East. Consequently, Malaysia has become an “oasis” for Muslim tourists, but also an alternative to their traditional escapade to London;
- The Trans-Asia railway line which will link Singapore to China and will have a length of 5,500 km, crossing Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos is a project which will have a significant impact in all of Asia.

4. Results of the branding campaign

The results of the campaign are impressive from the economic and financial points of view.

4.1 Number of tourists and revenues from tourism

In 1999 the number of foreign tourists who visited Malaysia was significantly lower than for other neighbouring countries.



Figure 26. Number of tourists in the 1999-2000 period
 (Source: *Tourism Malaysia (2001). Annual Report 2000, p. 12*)

With the launching of the campaign, the number of tourists visiting the country has tripled: from 5.5 million in 1998 to 15.7 million in 2004 and 22.1 million tourists in 2008.

A similar increase occurred in the case of the revenues from tourism at national level, reaching USD 14 billion in 2008 from USD 4 billion in 1999 (a third of what Singapore – a much smaller country by its territory size – recorded in the same year).

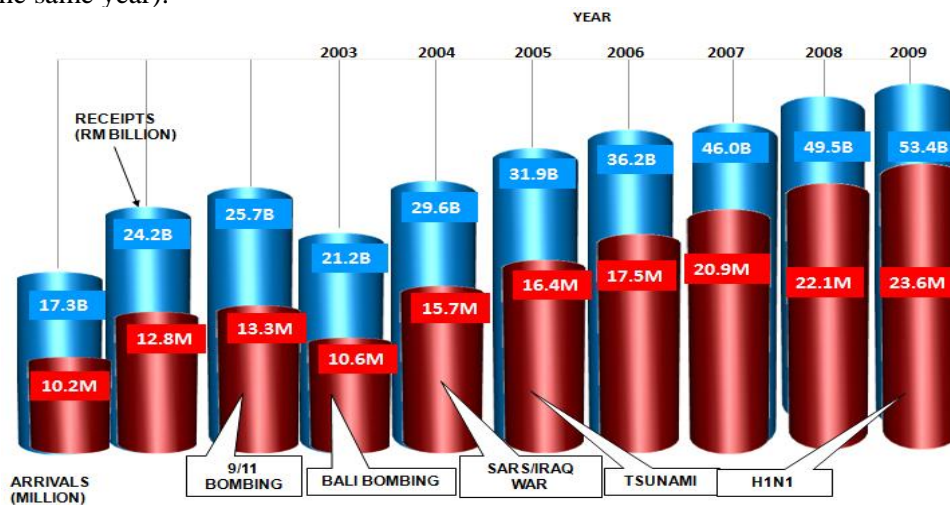


Figure 27. The number of tourists and revenues for the 2000-2009 period

(Source: *Tourist Arrivals, Please refer to PowerPoint presentation available at: http://www.tourism.gov.my/corporate/trade.asp?page=marketing_training&subpage=powerpoint*)

Table 4. The number of tourists and revenues from tourism for the 1998-2009 period

Year	Number of tourists (millions)	Revenues from tourism (RYM billions)
1998	5.5	8.6
1999	7.9	12.3
2000	10.2	17.3
2001	12.8	24.2
2002	13.3	25.7
2003	10.6	21.2
2004	15.7	29.6
2005	16.4	31.9
2006	17.5	36.2
2007	20.9	46.0
2008	22.1	49.5
2009	23.6	53.4

(Source: http://www.tourism.gov.my/corporate/research.asp?page=facts_figures)

In 2010, the World Tourism Organization conducted a study regarding the most visited countries in the 2006 – 2009 period.

Table 5. Top most visited countries in the 2006-2009 period

Crt. no.	Country	Regional market	Foreign tourists arrivals (2009) - mil. -	Foreign tourists arrivals (2008) - mil. -	Foreign tourists arrivals (2007) - mil. -	Foreign tourists arrivals (2006) - mil. -
1	<i>France</i>	<i>Europe</i>	74.2	79.2	80.9	77.9
2	<i>S.U.A</i>	<i>North America</i>	54.9	57.9	56.0	51.0
3	<i>Spania</i>	<i>Europe</i>	52,2	57.2	58.7	58.0
4	<i>China</i>	<i>Asia</i>	50.9	53.0	54.7	49.9
5	<i>Italia</i>	<i>Europe</i>	43.2	42.7	43.7	41.1
6	<i>RU</i>	<i>Europe</i>	28.0	30.1	30.9	30.7
7	<i>Turcia</i>	<i>Europe</i>	25.5	25.0	22.2	18.9
8	<i>Germania</i>	<i>Europe</i>	24.2	24.9	24.4	23.6
9	<i>Malaysia</i>	<i>Asia</i>	23.6	22.0	20.9	17.4
10	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>North America</i>	21.5	22.6	21.4	21.4

(Source: <http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turism>)

In 2009, Malaysia ranked in top ten most visited countries. Thus, the country topped the 9th position, just behind Turkey and Germany. Previously, in 2008, Malaysia topped 11th.

4.2 Visibility and prestige

The campaign *Malaysia: Truly Asia* was used for a case study by major specialists in the field of marketing and branding, such as Al Reis, Jack Trout and Paul Temporal. They show in their book – “The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing in Asia” – that *Malaysia: Truly Asia* is an example of a brand which creates a new dimension by positioning the country as a multicultural destination in one location, in contrast with the mono-cultural destinations like India, China or Thailand.

The key to a successful brand is given by the perception of differences between competing brands and the results confirm that Malaysia has managed to impose itself among so many countries from the region which have similar messages, by communicating a different message through a concentrated brand and especially inspiring.

Consequently, in 2009, Malaysia ranked 36th in the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, rising two positions since 2008.

In another study conducted globally by FutureBrand¹⁵, Malaysia ranked:

- 8th in 2007 in the “Restaurants” section and 10th in “Accommodation options / Resorts”;
- 7th in 2008 in the “Best value for money” section;
- 8th in 2010 in the “Best value for money” section and 9th in the “Restaurants” section.

Table 6. Malaysia's ranking in the Anholt top

Indicator – Malaysia	Ranking 2008	Ranking 2009
General	38	36
1.Culture	44	40
2.Tourism	37	31
3.Population	38	33
4.Government	35	30
5.Exports	33	32
6.Imigration / Investment	35	31

(Source: GfK Roper Public Affairs & Media (2009). *The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands IndexSM 2009 Report*)

4.3 Recognitions

The quality of the campaign *Malaysia: Truly Asia* has been recognized internationally given the 31 specialty awards, of which 18 gold medals – more than any other branding campaign in more than ten years. The campaign won, among others:

- The award for the „Best Asian long term branding and marketing campaign” at the Marketing Awards of Asia (Asian Marketing Effectiveness) provided by the *Media* magazine – the number 1 business and commerce publication in the Asia-Pacific region;

¹⁵ <http://www.futurebrand.com/>

- Gold medal at the world's most famous tourism fair – ITB in Berlin;
- Gold medal for the “Most sustainable brand” awarded by AME.

One can say that at present, Malaysia: Truly Asia is the most awarded country branding campaign, being awarded on average, three international prizes on year for creation, marketing, BTL and direct marketing¹⁶.



Figure 28. Recognitions obtained in 2007 and 2009
(Source: *Tourism Malaysia (2010). Annual Report 2009, p. 92*)

Malaysia also occupied a central spot in the tourism publications:

- *Lonely Planet* placed Malaysia among the top ten places to visit in 2010;
- *New York Times* placed Kuala Lumpur among the world's first 31 must see destinations;
- Readers of *Global Traveler* magazine voted Malaysia as the world's best tourist destination for three years in a row (2006 – 2008).

Conclusions

Malaysia is one of the countries which understood very quickly that tourism is a real gold mine: in just a few years the number of tourists has tripled, while revenue from this area has increased in just 16 years, over eight times. The Malaysians made their hospitality a profession and tourists are welcomed every day of the year as some prominent guests. Traditional cuisine, cruises, tours, rafting, concerts, festivals – are all designed to delight and satisfy even most demanding tourists. In conclusion, we can say that Malaysia has a highly developed tourism industry with a diversity of traditions in a unique mix for tourists from the whole world.

Acknowledgment

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¹⁶ http://www.iqads.ro/stire_9254/campania_tbwa__malaysia__truly_asia__a_primit_aurul_la_premiile_ame.html

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