

## ***The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Growth of Singapore Tourism***

**Pinaki Dutta**

TMC Educational Group

On-going research

### **Abstract**

*Singapore has a unique socio-cultural heritage where modern lifestyle is combined with traditional cultural values. As the tourism industry grows much faster than expected, Singapore invests in some upcoming tourism projects such as 'The Marina Bay Sands (100,000 square metres of MICE space, over 2500 luxury hotel rooms and two state-of-the-art theatres that will host a range international and local programmes), Resorts World at Sentosa (Asia's first and only Universal Studios outside of US), Singapore Flyers, Formula 1 Grand Prix and casinos. These upcoming projects will attract more tourists and change the lifestyle of Singaporeans.*

*This research project aims at critically analysing the impact of cultural factors on the growth of Singapore tourism. Can people with different culture backgrounds in Singapore be able to adapt to socio-cultural changes due to the rapid growth of tourism and globalisation?*

**Keywords:** Casino, globalisation, integrated resort, socio-cultural, Singapore, tourism

### **Introduction**

During the British occupation, Singapore quickly became an international emporium through its unique market policies which were different from the surrounding areas under Dutch control. Since 1970, Singapore adopted a regional model for its economic growth with a

variety of segmentations such as economic zones, public housing, town planning, and technological up-grades. Modern public transportation with effective environmental and traffic management, cleanliness and successful demographic transition (Haley and Low, 1998) also contributed towards its modernisation.

Apart from the rapid economic development, Singapore has attracted streams of migrants from different countries which have enriched Singapore's socio-cultural landscape. Zukin (1995) explained that culture has become a business hub for cities and that it has formed the basis of a city's tourist attraction and provided a unique competitive edge to the host country.

### ***Social-cultural factors***

When modernisation came to the western society, many people suffered from various impacts on their lifestyle. It mostly affected the family and then the individual. In many countries, for example, United States, over half of all marriages end in divorce, leaving the nuclear family being replaced by a myriad of forms - such as single parent, a stepfamily, a blended household and even co-habiting couples (Tan Tsu Wee, 1999).

In Asian tradition, most want to live in a traditional nuclear family. New westernisation in many developed Asian countries like Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia or Korea was not changed much of this scenario. The close family ties make Asian teenagers less rebellious than western teenagers. Asian parents tend to be more demanding, expect more mature behaviour from their children and they are also more protective towards their welfare and friendship. The parents have more influence on their children's lives - their decisions and behaviour. That

does not mean that Singapore youths are not behaving badly.

As Singapore becomes a popular tourism destination among the Asian countries with fast growing economy, its societal and ethnic Asian cultural values have also changed in recent years. As it mentioned earlier, Singapore's strategy to promote tourism through multi-culture is now facing challenges from the multi-cultural society itself.

### ***Multi-ethnic environment***

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) promoted Singapore under the slogan of "Instant Asia" - emphasizing the multi-cultural character of the city with the presence of traditional Chinese, Malay and Indian neighbourhoods. The policies of the strategy were changed after 1983 when tourist arrivals surprisingly declined after a decade of double digit growth. With this decrease, Singapore Government quickly changed its policies to invest more money in restructuring Singapore with modern infrastructural facilities and improvement of old attractions. As tourism is considered a major contributor to the Singapore economy, the government has initiated the preservation of historic places and ethnic neighbourhoods under urban renewal policies. Local Singaporeans believe that much of the old charm of these neighbourhoods has been lost due to redevelopments (Lew, 1992).

In Singapore, the multi-racial make-up becomes increasingly complex. This is due to two social trends - inter-racial marriages and more foreigners taking up Singapore citizenship. Singaporeans who identify themselves purely along racial lines are the minority in these days.

### ***Development of Tourism***

Although Singapore has a unique location which makes it easier to establish itself as the most popular tourist destination, neighbouring Malaysia has surpassed Singapore as the leading destination in Southeast Asia, followed closely by Thailand and rapidly growing Indonesia. To hold on to its position as the premier tourist destination in Southeast Asia, Singapore to compete in the rapidly changing and increasingly competitive international tourism market - particularly in Asia. Therefore, STB has planned to promote Singapore not only as a Tourism Capital of the region and a memorable destination, but also a tourism business centre. Excellent supporting infrastructure, strong financial services and excellent location make Singapore become a hot tourism hub (Lew, Tan & Ahmed, 1999).

To attract more international tourists, the Government of Singapore has invested more money in the tourism industry. Recently, it initiated some exciting tourism development programmes. These include:

- Two integrated resorts - the Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World at Sentosa island
- The great Singapore Flyer - world's largest observation wheel
- Gardens by the bay with a majestic and unique lush green development within the city
- The Sports Hub - inbuilt with world class land and sea sports facilities
- The National Art Gallery to be launched in 2012 which will add refinement culture, and history to Singapore's existing host of world class attractions.
- The Formula 1 Grand Prix in 2008 (STB, 2008).

### **Background of problem**

What do the above events mean? The impact of tourism in culture covers all aspects of travel where people learn about each other's way of life and thought (McIntosh, Goeldner & Ritchie, 1995). According to Dogan (1989), tourism has been a major source of intercultural contact and it has influenced the socio-cultural structures of most tourism destinations either positively or negatively. The host destination due to the differences reacted in varied ways ranging from active resistance to complete adaptation of western culture (Dogan, 1989). The fundamental of tourism planning and development is to understand the residents' perceptions of tourism impact. Costa and Ferrone (1995) suggested that the development of tourism should be done in a cautious

way for both developing and developed countries. According to McIntosh *et al.*, (1995), the development of cultural factors within a nation is to enhance and attract international visitors. In many countries, tourism is always linked with cultural heritage and lifestyle. A successful tourism destination does not just provide better transportation and hotels but also provides a particular national flavour with traditional way of lifestyle and image of that particular destination. In another word, tourism not only promotes culture but also develops cultural relations and international cooperation.

It is inevitable that more tourists from modern world will bring along activities that are not acceptable by the traditional cultural minded people. Modernisation has some effects among society which either can improve or destroy it. These image transformations can change the whole structure of the society.

### Research questions

This research project will examine (i) the impact of cultural factors on the growth of Singapore tourism, and (ii) whether people with different culture backgrounds in Singapore will be able to adapt to socio-cultural changes due to the rapid growth of tourism and globalisation.

### References

- Dogan, H. (1989), "Forms of adjustment: Socio-cultural impacts of tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 216-236.
- Costa, J., and Ferrone, L. (1995), "Sociocultural Perspectives on Tourism Planning and Development", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 7, No. 7, pp. 27-35.
- Haley, U.C.V., Low, L. (1998), "Crafted culture: governmental sculpting of modern Singapore and effects on business environments", *Journal of Organizational Management*.
- Lew, A.A., Tan Tsu Wee, T., and Ahmed, Z.U. (1999), "Tourism 21: Keeping Singapore on Top in the next Millennium", in Huan, H.D. (eds), "Cases in Singapore Hospitality and Tourism Management", Prentice Hall, Singapore.
- Lew, A.A. (1992), "Perceptions of Tourists and Tour Guides in Singapore", *Journal of Cultural Geography*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 45-52.
- McIntosh, R.W., Goeldner, C.R. and Ritchie, J.R.B. (1995), "Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies, 7<sup>th</sup> edn, Wiley, New York.
- STB (2008), "Upcoming Opportunities". Viewed on 11 Jan 2008, retrieved from <http://app.tourismcareers.sg/main/ACareerInTourism/UpcomingOpportunities/tabid/60>.
- Tan Tsu Wee, T. (1999), "An exploration of a global teenage lifestyle in Asian Societies", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 365-375.
- Zukin, S. (1995), "The Cultures for Cities", Blackwell, Cambridge.