

## Profiling international migrant labours by socio-demographic characteristics and motivational factors: The case of tourism and hospitality industry



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### ABSTRACT

Purpose of this study is to profile the international migrant labours who are legally working in the tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia. Langkawi has been chosen to present the scope of the study due to the fact that it is a world tourist destination. The profile presents a various pattern of international migrant labours socio-demographic characteristics and factors motivating them to work in the industry. It is noted that majority of the international migrant labours who are working in the tourism and hospitality industry in Langkawi consists of male within the range of 18 – 30 years old and single. Interestingly, majority of them are Indonesian, having a certificate and mostly educated from secondary school. Majority of them also contributes as semi-skilled labours. Regardless of various sectors in the tourism and hospitality industry, the international migrant labours enjoy working in the accommodation sector. Most of them have been working for 1 – 5 years and receiving an income of RM1,000 – RM4,999 per month. The profile also highlights that majority of the international migrant labours want to gain new experience and most of them are also following their friends. Langkawi is chosen as a destination due to the fact that it is a beautiful island, easy to get around and also a peaceful place to work. Further, it is emphasized in the profile that the international migrant labours have chosen to work in the accommodation sector based on high wages factor.

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### 1. Introduction

Malaysia has a growing international labour work force, with the vast majority employed as full-time labours. By March 2004, there was 1.2 million international migrant workers in Malaysia with 77 149 working in the service sectors including tourism and hospitality. There is about 12.5 million international migrant workers in Malaysia with 11 million number of workforce available compared to the year 1995 where only 35% of workforce employed by migrant workers (Hassan, 2009). Further, 1.8 million international migrant workers in Malaysia with the highest percentage was from Indonesia (50.9%), followed by Bangladesh (17%), Nepal (9.7%), Myanmar (7.8%), India (6.3%) and

Vietnam (4.2%) were listed in the Economic Report 2010/2011.

It is noted in the World Bank report (Del Carpio et al., 2013) that the presence of international labours has been a key factor in Malaysia's competitiveness and economic success. Hence, to meet the demands for low-skilled labour in certain sectors of the economy, the Government has supported immigration as part of its high growth strategy while it pursued a longer-term strategy to upgrade the economy and expand the supply of skilled labor particularly in plantations, constructions sector and domestic employment.

According to the Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri Richard Riot, there is an estimated 6.7 million international labours who are working in various sectors in Malaysia with 2.1 million are legal and 4.6 million are unauthorized workers. Generally, there are 2.135 million registered international labours in Malaysia with almost 800,000 legal international labours who are working in unskilled sectors ranging from cleaners, helpers, labourers, service workers and garbage collectors. Further,

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there are also nearly 300,000 international labours who are working in services and sales and machine operators and around 213,000 are employed in the manufacturing industry and related industries.

As stated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2010), Malaysia, Singapore and destination countries in the Middle East desire and require labour forces that are low skilled or willing to embark on low-skilled jobs that their citizens are unwilling to take at the usual wages. The higher demand for these labours in many destination countries has been the main factor that contributes to the rise of irregular migration, with the estimated number of undocumented migrant workers considerably higher than the number of documented migrants.

Ajis et al. (2014) highlighted that the countries in Asia can be considered as the major providers of foreign immigrants, especially in the perspective of employment in this world. The entry of international labours is more than often related with three assumptions, which are economic liberation, non-effective law on border enforcement non-uniformity in economic opportunity. Hence, migrant labours are expected to be a part of social process which is more than often associated with issues like economic market, the change of policies in importing countries and transnational offering of labour as well as the rights of migrant labours.

It is a fact that the international migrant labours have contributed to the Malaysia economic growth. Additionally, the arrival of international labour in Malaysia is to help meet the shortage of labour of the various economic sectors of the country. The numbers of international labours have increased from year to year whereby assisting companies to save costs by employed labors in lower scale salary (Mohamed et al., 2012). However, their arrival if not controlled, will decrease the local population's employment opportunities and creating negative impacts of the migration into the country (Hassan, 2009).

A study by Bachtiar et al. (2015) suggested that the contribution of professional international labours to outputs' growth is relatively small compared to middle and heavy industries that intensively utilize physical capital even though the demand for it is still beneficial. In contrast, the demand for skilled and technical-supervisor international labours for the food, beverage and tobacco industries are still needed due to technological development in the production process.

In spite of the large number of international migrant labours and the problems associated with their presence, the Malaysian government is yet to come up with a comprehensive policy on the issue. Mohamed et al. (2012) also emphasized that the issue of international labours has received increase media and national attention. Additionally, the Government has been collecting labour force data for an extended period of time. However, the data on international migrant labours who are working in

the tourism and hospitality industry is not properly recorded. Furthermore, previous studies did not focus on developing the international migrant labours profile. It is also noted that there has been limited research on the nature and consequences of employment of international labours in Malaysia.

There has been a report on profiling the international migrant labours who are working in Malaysia by Del Carpio et al. (2013). However, the report presents a profile of the labours in various sectors such as constructions, transportation, teaching professionals and medical officers. Even though the report has presented related data on international migrant labours in the tourism and hospitality industry, the numbers are in general context within the scope of service sectors. Hence, the purpose of this study is mainly to profile the international migrant labours who are legally working in the tourism and hospitality industry specifically in Langkawi by their socio-demographic characteristics and motivational factors.

Langkawi has been chosen based on the fact that it is the world known tourist destination. It is important to study and understand the international migrant labours characteristics and motivational factors through answering few questions for instance:

- What are the socio-demographic characteristics of the international migrant labours who are working in the tourism and hospitality industry in Langkawi?
- What factors motivate them to work in the tourism and hospitality industry?
- What factors motivate them to work in the particular sector in the tourism and hospitality industry?
- What factors motivate them to choose Langkawi?

The profiling of the international migrant labours by their socio-demographic characteristics and motivational factors would eventually assist the Workforce Department particularly in designing and preparing new policy for the Work Act 1955 and the Immigration Act 1959.

## 2. Literature review

Tourism can bring about migration within the labour force, through the creation of employment opportunities. In fact, the migration of labours to the tourism destination is common to both developed and developing countries. However, the developed countries of tourist destinations may be in a stronger position to absorb new migrants due to their more diversified and stable economic base. On the level of the individual, migration can be seen as an investment in human resources and is often motivated by low levels of income in rural areas. Permanent migrants are those who make a permanent move to the new area for tourism employment, whereas circular migrants return to

their home base periodically or after a certain time. Permanent migrants add considerably to urbanization pressures while, in general, circular migrants, although contributing greatly to and benefitting from tourism employment, do not.

In the tourism industry itself, an excess of 11,194,418 people are employed worldwide and presented approximately 5 per cent of the world's total travel and tourism workforce. Monk and Alexander (1986) in their study found that migrants to Margarita Island, Venezuela, are the main beneficiaries of tourism-generated employment, since many of the newly-created jobs are either inaccessible to the poorer segments of the local population or unattractive to the better off segments.

Further supporting this claim, Lee-Ross and Pryce (2010) highlighted that one of the complexities of tourism employment is that establishments that may have a mainstay of domestic and international tourists will also be used by locals, especially during the off season. In fact, the presence in large numbers of migrant workers in such hospitality organizations is of consequence for tourism academics as it carries implications for both destination image and the tourist experience of the destination.

Many migrants are found to share a number of characteristics: they tended to be young, predominantly male, had more than primary level education, and came from wide socioeconomic strata. Earliest study by Todaro (1976) emphasized seven research priorities which would help to explain migration and its impact on the development of developing countries namely:

- Migrant perceptions, expectations and experiences and how these are formulated.
- Characteristics of non-migrants, potential migrants and return migrants.
- Importance of employment probabilities and expected income.
- Wage and employment probability elasticities, and urban unemployment.
- Short- and long-term social and economic impact of migration on source and destination areas.
- The relationship between education and migration.
- Migration, income distribution, and population growth.

Although many studies suggest positive outcomes from employing foreign labours, some negative consequences for the industry have also been identified. Choi et al. (2000) and Williams and Hall (2000) argued that this ongoing relationship between migration, migrant labour and tourism employment continues partly because a mobile international workforce offers a solution to labour shortages where the local workforce is not willing to engage in low pay, low status and seasonal employment.

Furthermore, the employment of international labours in tourism and related service sectors

presents a series of opportunities alongside challenges for migrants, employers and host communities. Few studies also highlighted that migration has been argued as a source of innovation where if it is properly managed, the organizations can benefit from cultural diversity (Devine et al., 2007; Williams, 2007).

Additionally, migrants are also found to become a source of community tension, particularly if they are perceived to be a burden on community resources, to represent competition for jobs or if they do not integrate into the host society and thus seem to challenge social norms (Rogers et al., 2009). Migrants' lack of integration may be intensified by tourism employment, for example when employment patterns restrict social mobility or when organizations reinforce the formation of ethnic enclaves and social closure. It is also argued that tourism employment may offer opportunities for greater social inclusion and help to facilitate migrant adaptation to the host culture.

### 3. Methodology

The study was an exploratory study to profile the international migrant labours. Hence, it involved a quantitative method where questionnaire had been developed to gain major information for the purpose of profiling them by their socio-demographic characteristics and investigating their motivational factors.

#### 3.1. Data collection

The primary data of the study was acquired through distributing questionnaire to target respondents. It is considered as main means to collect primary data and enable researcher to reach large number of respondents at lowest cost with high flexibility. To achieve this objective, Langkawi was chosen to represent the scope of the study. This is due to the fact that Langkawi is known as the world tourist destination, thus it consists of many tourism and hospitality sectors. The service sectors categorized under the tourism and hospitality within the area of Pantai Cenang, Langkawi were involved as unit of analysis of the study. This included of 3, 4 and 5 star hotels, fast food service restaurants, visitor attractions sites, transportation and international cuisine restaurants. Pantai Cenang was selected as it represents major tourism spots and activities in Langkawi.

The human resource managers or related officers at the sectors were personally approached by the research assistant asking their participation in the study. Upon their agreement to participate in the study, the survey questionnaires were handed in and they were asked to distribute the questionnaires to their international workers. The completed questionnaires were collected by the research assistant within 2 weeks. On the other hands, the secondary data in the study was assessed and analysed using all other sources such as literature

search and reports from various parties. Literature search also covered relevant online journal articles through online databases and also the reports from newspapers and published statistics.

### 3.2. Population and sample

The target population of the study was the international migrant labours who are legally working in the tourism and hospitality industry in Langkawi. Since there is no exact number of the international migrant labours who are working in the service sector specifically in Langkawi, the number of population was determined according to the general number of international migrant labours in Malaysia as stated by the Department of Statistic of Malaysia in 2012. There was 291,997.44 international migrant labours working in the service sector and using a table of sample size provided by [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#), 384 respondents was selected to represent the sample. The study applied a purposive sampling technique where only the international migrant labours legally working in the tourism and hospitality industry was selected. The selected technique eventually enabled researches to obtain questionnaires quickly and economically ([Sekaran and Bougie, 2010](#)). To obtain a balance number of questionnaires distributed to the sectors, the sample size was determined as 400 respondents and 20 sectors were selected for the study. Hence, each sector was provided with 20 questionnaires to be filled up by the respondents. Since there is no exact number of tourism and hospitality sectors in Pantai Cenang, the sample were randomly approached by the researcher.

### 3.3. Instrument design

Since the purpose of the study was to develop a profile of international migrant labours who are working in the tourism and hospitality sector, a self-administered survey questionnaire was used as research instrument. This type of questionnaire was chosen because of its ease of use and it provides the most possible alternative for measuring unobservable constructs such as attitudes, values and personalities. Further, according to [Sekaran and Bougie \(2010\)](#), survey questionnaire is an efficient data collection mechanism to ensure relevancy and consistency of information gathered as the responses are objective, standardised and comparable. Additionally, the questionnaire was designed and presented in simple and unbiased wordings. The purpose was to make sure that the respondents can easily understand the questions and provide answer based on their own perception.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections namely Section A and Section B. Section A consisted of respondent's socio-demographic profiles such as gender, age, marital status, country of origin, educational level, qualification, skills level, proficiency in English, job in sector, job position, number of years working in the sector and income

per month. Section B consisted of three major questions asking the respondents on the factors motivating them; (1) to work in the tourism and hospitality industry, (2) to work in the particular sector in the tourism and hospitality industry and (3) to choose Langkawi.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The study used the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) with descriptive and inferential analysis to identify patterns and general trends in the dataset of this study. Descriptive analysis refers to the transformation of raw data into a form that make them easier to understand and interpret. Hence, descriptive analyses such as frequency counts, percentages and cumulative percentages were employed in this study to develop the profiles of international migrant labours as in Section A. In addition they were also used to describe items in Section B of the questionnaire.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Socio-demographic characteristics

[Table 1](#) depicts the profile of international migrant labours by the socio-demographic characteristics. A total of 258 useable questionnaires out of 400 were obtained, representing 64.5% response rate. It is indicated that 70.5% respondents are male and the remaining 29.5% are female. As for the age distribution, the survey showed that 2.7% are below 18 years old, 69.4% are between 18 to 30 years old, 27.1% are between 31 to 50 years old and the remaining of 0.8% are above 50 years old. The survey also asked the respondents their marital status and the findings highlighted that most respondents are single (51.9%). Meanwhile 40.3% are married, 4.3% are divorced and another 3.5% provided as other category.

The respondents were further asked to state their country of origin. The findings of the survey indicated the highest percentage is from Indonesia (21.3%). The findings then revealed that 17.8% respondents are from India, followed by 15.9% respondents from Bangladesh, 12.4% from Philippines, 8.5% from Thailand, 2.7% from Pakistan and 0.4% from Vietnam. However, the findings also indicated that 20.9% respondents are from other countries such as Nepal, United Kingdom and few are from Maldives. The respondents were also asked to indicate their educational level and the findings emphasized that majority are educated from secondary school (41.1%), followed by high school (38.4%), college (13.6%) and university (7.0%).

Additionally, majority of the respondents have possessed a certificate (50.8%). In fact, most of them have also possessed diploma/higher diploma (43.0%) and followed by undergraduate degree (5.0%) and postgraduate degree (1.2%). As for the skills level, the findings indicated that 66.3% of the

respondents are semi-skilled while the rest is unskilled (33.7%).

**Table 1: International migrant labours socio-demographic characteristics**

Items	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	182	70.5	70.5	70.5
Female	76	29.5	29.5	100.0
<b>Age</b>				
Below 18 years old	7	2.7	2.7	2.7
18 – 30 years old	179	69.4	69.4	72.1
31 – 50 years old	70	27.1	27.1	99.2
Above 50 years old	2	0.8	0.8	100.0
<b>Marital status</b>				
Single	134	51.9	51.9	51.9
Married	104	40.3	40.3	92.2
Divorced	11	4.3	4.3	96.5
Others	9	3.5	3.5	100.0
<b>Country of origin</b>				
Bangladesh	41	15.9	15.9	15.9
Philippines	32	12.4	12.4	28.3
Indonesia	55	21.3	21.3	49.6
India	46	17.8	17.8	67.4
Pakistan	7	2.7	2.7	70.2
Thailand	22	8.5	8.5	78.7
Vietnam	1	.4	.4	79.1
Others	54	20.9	20.9	100.0
<b>Educational level</b>				
Secondary school	106	41.1	41.1	41.1
High school	99	38.4	38.4	79.5
College	35	13.6	13.6	93.0
University	18	7.0	7.0	100.0
<b>Qualification</b>				
Certificate	131	50.8	50.8	50.8
Diploma/higher diploma	111	43.0	43.0	93.8
Undergraduate degree	13	5.0	5.0	98.8
Postgraduate degree	3	1.2	1.2	100.0
<b>Skills level</b>				
Unskilled	87	33.7	33.7	33.7
Semi-skilled	171	66.3	66.3	100.0
<b>Proficiency in English</b>				
Very little	44	17.1	17.1	17.1
Little	63	24.4	24.4	41.5
Good	93	36.0	36.0	77.5
Very good	58	22.5	22.5	100.0
<b>Job in sector</b>				
Accommodation	106	41.1	41.1	41.1
Transportation	3	1.2	1.2	42.2
Food and beverages	84	32.6	32.6	74.8
Visitor attractions	27	10.5	10.5	85.3
Others	38	14.7	14.7	100.0
<b>Job position</b>				
Administration	16	6.2	6.2	6.2
Customer service	195	75.6	75.6	81.8
Security service	15	5.8	5.8	87.6
Others	32	12.4	12.4	100.0
<b>Number of years working in the sector</b>				
Less than 1 year	63	24.4	24.4	24.4
1 – 5 years	159	61.6	61.6	86.0
6 – 10 years	31	12.0	12.0	98.1
More than 10 years	5	1.9	1.9	100.0
<b>Income per month</b>				
Less than RM1,000	40	15.5	15.5	15.5
RM1,000 – RM4,999	215	83.3	83.3	98.8
RM5,000 – RM9,999	2	0.8	0.8	99.6
More than RM10,000	1	0.4	0.4	100.0

Majority of them also stated that they can speak good English (36.0%) and very good English (22.5%). The remaining stated as can speak little English (24.4%) and very little English (17.1%).

Further, the respondents were asked to provide their working sector. It was noted that most of them are working in the accommodation sector (41.1%), followed by the food and beverages sector (32.6%),

other tourism and hospitality related sectors (14.7%), the visitor attractions sector (10.5%) and the transportation sector (1.2%).

The survey question further asked the respondents to indicate their position in the sector. Majority of them involved in the customer service (75.6%), followed by other positions (12.4%), administration (6.2%) and only few in the security

service (5.8%). As for the question on the number of years working in the sector, the findings highlighted that majority of the respondents have been working for 1 – 5 years (61.6%). This is followed by 24.4% of them have been working less than 1 year, 12.0% have been working for 6 – 10 years and the remaining 1.9% have been working for more than 10 years.

Additionally, 83.3% of the respondents received an income of RM1,000 – RM4,999 per month, followed by 15.5% received an income less than RM1,000 and the remaining received of RM5,000 and more than RM10,000 income per month.

**4.2. Factors motivating them to work in the tourism and hospitality industry**

The respondents were also asked to indicate eight factors that motivate them to work in the tourism and hospitality industry. The factors were categorized as high wages, easy to get job, family concerns, gain new experience, following friends, job promotion and other factors. Table 2 highlighted the findings of this survey. Majority of the respondents agreed that the main factor for them to work in the tourism and hospitality industry is ‘to gain new experience’ (52.3%).

Most of them also agreed that they tend to ‘follow their friends’ (41.1%) and also because of the ‘high wages’ (37.2%). Mostly, the respondents agreed that the factor motivates them to work in the industry is because they, ‘love meeting with people’ (28.3%), ‘easy to get job’ (22.1%), ‘job promotion’ (7.8%) and ‘family concerns’ (7.4%). Only few respondents stated other factors for choosing the industry (5.4%).

**Table 2:** Factors motivating them to work in the tourism and hospitality industry

Items	Frequency	Percent
To gain new experience	135	52.3
Following friends	106	41.1
High wages	96	37.2
Love meeting with people	73	28.3
Easy to get job	57	22.1
Job promotion	20	7.8
Family concerns	19	7.4
Other reasons	14	5.4

**4.3. Factors motivating them to work in the particular sector of tourism and hospitality**

Finally, the respondents were also asked to indicate six factors that motivate them to work in the particular sector of tourism and hospitality industry namely, high wages, an opportunity to be promoted, easy to get job, attractive incentives, no strict policies and other factors. Table 3 depicts the findings of the survey which emphasised that majority of them agreed that the sector was chosen because it is ‘easy to get the job’ (53.5%). Further, most of the respondents also agreed that the sector provides ‘high wages’ (38.0%), ‘attractive incentives’ (29.1%), involve of ‘no strict policies’ (27.9%) and

have more ‘opportunity to be promoted’ (21.3%). Only few of the respondents agreed with other related factors for choosing the particular sector (5.0%).

**Table 3:** Factors motivating them to work in the tourism and hospitality sector

Items	Frequency	Percent
Easy to get job	138	53.5
High wages	98	38.0
Attractive incentives	75	29.1
No strict policies	72	27.9
Opportunity to be promoted	55	21.3
Other reasons	13	5.0

**4.4. Factors motivating them to choose Langkawi**

There were seven factors provided to the respondents regarding Langkawi as the chosen destination. The factors were identified as Table 4 presents the profile of the motivational factors. Majority of the respondents emphasized that the main factor for choosing Langkawi is because of the ‘beautiful island’ (50.8%). Most of them also noted the reason for being as ‘easy place to get around’ (32.9%) and they considered Langkawi as a ‘peaceful place’ (32.2%). Further, the respondents also found that one of the factors is because of ‘friendly people in Langkawi’ (31.4%). The findings also indicated that on average, the respondents also agreed with few more factors such as ‘company concerns’ (24.0%), ‘family concerns’ (12.0%) and other reasons (7.4%).

**Table 4:** Factors motivating them to choose Langkawi

Items	Frequency	Percent
Beautiful island	131	50.8
Easy to get around	85	32.9
Peaceful place	83	32.2
Friendly people	81	31.4
Company concerns	62	24.0
Family concerns	31	12.0
Other reasons	19	7.4

**5. Conclusion**

Four objectives have derived to achieve the purpose of the study; investigating the socio-demographic characteristics of the international migrant labours, investigating the factors that motivate them to work in the tourism and hospitality industry, investigating the factors that motivate them to work in the particular sector within the industry and also investigating the factors that motivate them to choose Langkawi.

The profile of international migrant labours indicates that majority of the labours who are working in Langkawi are male and only few are female with the age between 18 - 30 years old. Both male and female labours are mostly still single. Additionally, the profile shows that most of the male migrant labours were secondary school leavers whilst the female migrant labours were high school leavers. The profile is significant as reported in the study conducted by Del Carpio et al. (2013).

Further, the findings also indicate that most of the international migrant labours in Langkawi migrate from Indonesia. They are considered as semi-skilled labours and can communicate good English. This profile is also significant to the study conducted by [Bachtiar et al. \(2015\)](#). The profile also highlights that majority of the international migrant labours in Langkawi are working in the accommodation sector between 1 – 5 years with income of RM1,000 – RM4,999 per month.

It can be concluded from the profiles that the Indonesian migrate to work in the tourism and hospitality industry in Langkawi because they wanted to gain new experience. They also noted that the tourism and hospitality industry provide them with high wages compared to other industries. More, the international migrant labours have chosen to work in the accommodation sector due to the fact that they considered the sector as easy to get the job and in addition, they also believed the sector can provide high wages to the employees. Interestingly, the profile supports what has been concluded by [Bachtiar et al. \(2015\)](#).

This study only focuses on profiling the international migrant labours who are working in the tourism and hospitality industry by their socio-demographic characteristics. Additionally it also investigates the factors motivating the international migrant labours to work in the industry. In this case, Langkawi has been chosen based on the fact that it is a world known tourist destination which eventually represents a wide scope of tourism and hospitality industry. It is therefore suggested that more studies to be conducted to enhance the knowledge and practical side of recruiting international migrant labours in the industry.

For instance, a further study to investigate the relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics and factors for choosing the industry should be conducted and would assist the sector in planning more strategic approach to recruit the international migrant labours. Another study would be on comparing the differences in factors influencing them to work in the industry according to their country of origin. This study would also provide the particular sector towards better understanding on the factors motivate the international migrant labours to choose the industry. The profiles significantly would contribute to the industry in terms of recruiting the international migrant labours to fill-in the job according to their socio-demographic characteristics and motivational factors.

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