

Experiences of Family Vacation with Children Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Leisure or Work

Percutian Keluarga bersama Kanak-kanak Autisme: Riadah atau Kerja

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the travel and tourism industry is to make all travellers happy. The activities in the sector consistently promote multitudinous benefits, such as wellness, rejoicing, and recuperation. The motivation for family tourists is to indulge in tourism activities that can instil family and social values through a family vacation. However, the vacation experience usually differs for families of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) compared to regular families of regular children. The development difficulties in the intellectual and social communication of children with ASD involving a spectrum of emotion, namely happy, frustrated, distressed, and restlessness require special attention from their caregivers during vacation. The purpose of this paper was to analyse vacation experiences in families of children with ASD based on the literature of previous studies. The findings indicated that family vacation promotes self-improvement and opens room for learning about the real world in these targeted children. Nonetheless, the meaning of vacation to the parents of these children exudes notions of conflict and complication that locate mixed feelings. The study aimed at increasing the understanding on family tourists with children of special needs with different characteristics that may benefit the tourism providers and the autism therapists to collaborate on various innovative partnerships, producing platforms to facilitate a safe and enjoyable vacation experience to the targeted family as they travel together. Consequently, this effort can help dispel neglect in the social inclusion aspects regardless of the tourists' physical or developmental conditions.

Keywords: Tourism; family vacation; autism spectrum disorder (ASD); developmental difficulty; children.

ABSTRAK

Matlamat industri pelancongan adalah memastikan semua pelancong bergembira. Aktiviti-aktiviti yang terkandung di dalam sektor ini secara konsisten membentuk pelbagai faedah, seperti, kesejahteraan, kegembiraan, dan pemulihan. Motivasi bagi para pelancong keluarga adalah untuk menikmati aktiviti-aktiviti pelancongan yang dapat membentuk nilai kekeluargaan dan sosial melalui percutian keluarga. Walaubagaimanapun, pengalaman bercuti kebiasaannya berbeza di kalangan keluarga-keluarga yang mempunyai kanak-kanak yang didiagnosis dengan gangguan spektrum autisme (ASD) berbanding dengan keluarga-keluarga yang mempunyai kanak-kanak tumbesaran normal. Kesukaran perkembangan dalam intelektual dan komunikasi sosial yang dihadapi oleh kanak-kanak ASD melibatkan spektrum emosi, iaitu gembira, kecewa, tertekan, dan kegelishan memerlukan perhatian yang khusus daripada para penjaga mereka semasa bercuti. Matlamat artikel ini adalah untuk menganalisa pengalaman-pengalaman bercuti di kalangan keluarga yang mempunyai kanak-kanak ASD berdasarkan literatur kajian-kajian yang lalu. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa pelancongan keluarga dapat mendorong peningkatan diri dan membuka ruang untuk belajar mengenai dunia sebenar kepada kanak-kanak yang disasarkan ini. Walaupun begitu, erti percutian kepada ibu bapa anak-anak ini adalah suatu konflik dan rumit yang menunjukkan perasaan bercampur-baur. Kajian ini diharapkan dapat meningkatkan pengetahuan keperluan khas kumpulan pelancong keluarga yang mempunyai ciri-ciri berbeza yang dapat memberi manfaat kepada pihak penyedia dan ahli terapi carakerja untuk berkolaborasi dalam pelbagai platform inovasi perkongsian, menyediakan platform untuk memudahkan percutian yang selamat dan menyeronokkan kepada keluarga yang disasarkan semasa mereka melancong bersama. Oleh itu, usaha ini dapat membantu membendung pengabaian dalam aspek penyertaan sosial tanpa mengira keadaan fizikal atau keadaan perkembangan pelancong.

Kata kunci: Pelancongan; percutian keluarga; gangguan spektrum autisme; kesukaran perkembangan; kanak-kanak.

INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism industry promotes travelling to and staying in an unusual environment that offers a good time through relaxation, leisure, sight-seeing, visitation of friends and relatives (VFR), meeting participation, incentive, convention and exhibition (M.I.C.E), and other kinds of business activities. The promotion of good time is analogous to the definition of the term 'tourism' by Goeldner & Ritchie (2012) as the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes. The emphasis is clear that the tourism process allows the tourists or visitors to enjoy various forms of transportation, range of accommodation, variety of foods and beverages, an assortment of attractions, and copious entertainments and activities.

In the new globalisation era, with increasing travelling capability and disposable income, people are pursuing a better standard of living and quality of life. Travelling is seen as the perfect way to reach the goals commonly defined by a list of motivations, namely to escape or to break from mundane routines, to recuperate, and to reach for emotional and psychological well-being. Meanwhile, for a family institution, participating in a vacation is the best way to promote social values, enrich familial memories, and strengthen the bond among family members. The common family structure consists of a married couple and their children known as the nuclear family (He 2005). When this familial group embark on a vacation, their activity refers to the term 'family vacation'. Schänzel et al. (2005) elucidated the definition further that a family vacation involves leisure travel away from home for more than one day undertaken by a group of family, in that it involves at least one child and one adult. From the parents' perspective, family vacation involves work as well as fun and is characterised as a 'determined vacation' where the focus is on planning and facilitating leisure for health, developmental, and educational benefits of the children and the family as one unit.

For tourism marketers, family tourism makes up a substantial proportion of the tourism market, representing a major aspect of all leisure travel. Moreover, family tourism is one of the most important sectors of the tourism industry around the world, with prominent growth that will shape the forthcoming tourism demand (Schänzel & Yeoman

2015). This tourism subsector is predicted to grow at a faster rate than all other forms of travel (Schänzel & Yeoman 2014). Most vacation researchers have devoted considerable attention to the subject of family vacation driven by the popular sentiment that a family that plays together stays together, in that most family members establish, maintain, and develop relationships with each other through family vacation activities (Habibah et al. 2019; Capistrano & Bernardo 2018 particularly Filipino mothers in New Zealand, with their visiting relatives (VRs; Lehto et al. 2017; Schänzel & Jenkins 2017 New Zealand. Our findings reveal the importance of family holidays to family leisure for separated families and for non-resident fathers' relationships with their children. Leisure-based holidays shared with their children are special times for these non-resident fathers to have fun, to teach skills and negotiate values, to explore the meanings of their lives, to (re; Schänzel & Lynch 2016; Habibah et al. 2015).

Even though there is a bright future for family tourism, families with children with disabilities such as children with ASD face complexity in managing their children during a family vacation. Unlike people with physical disabilities, the physical appearance of children with ASD does not usually portray and encapsulate their disability corporeally. Instead, their disabilities can be observed through their behaviours, communication and social interaction, and motor skills differences when compared with the peers of their age group (Sarol & Çimen 2015; American Psychiatric Association 2013).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) based in the United States announced that the ratio of prevalence of children with autism was at 1 in 54 in 2016, an increase from 1 in 59 in 2014 (ADDM 2020). In Malaysia, there were almost 9,000 children born with autism every year (NASOM 2019). An increase in the number of children with ASD will indirectly imply a change in the profiles and characteristics of the family institutions. Consequently, it is critical for the tourism providers and marketers to know the questions of what and how to cater to the needs and wants of the families with autistic children during a vacation. Thus, may encourage participation of families with children with autism to take a family vacation and enjoy various benefits from the tourism activities and experiences.

Despite the increase in discussions on autism lately, which administered a sudden, growing

interest among scholars, very little is known about the travel barriers of this significantly large and growing population persons with ASD (Deka et al. 2016) other than the limited literature on recreational participation for those with ASD (Potvin et al. 2013). In view of these gaps, this study aimed to review the literature on the vacation experiences of families (the parents and caregivers included) with autistic children to unfold relevant questions for these targeted families and tourism providers pertaining to the advantages and challenges of a family vacation.

This study employed secondary sources from previously established empirical articles related to tourism-autism studies to analyse the experience of taking a family vacation among families with children with ASD. The empirical samples, which dated from 2010 to 2019, were analysed. Only the targeted parental perspectives and opinions upon vacation were included in the analysis. A combination of several search keywords used were 'family tourism', 'family holiday', 'family vacation', 'family holiday', 'family travel' or 'family leisure', 'autis*', 'autism spectrum disorder', 'intellectual disorder*', 'learning difficult*', and 'development* disorder*'. The articles that did not meet the research scope, such as parents' view upon vacation experience in adult with ASD, the adult with ASD vacation experience, and other articles out of the tourism-autism areas, were removed from the analysis phase.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE CONCEPT OF FAMILY TOURISM

Tourism can induce well-being and quality of life (QoL) with happiness and satisfaction with family and social lives (Kay Smith & Diekmann 2017). The activities in the tourism ring must contend with the broad range of tourist behaviours as it is a vibrant industry that includes myriads of activities, such as leisure, VFR, and performing pilgrimage among others (Yousaf et al. 2018). Compared to any other forms of tourism, family tourism is less about a break from routine to unwind than it is more about devoting time together with family (Backer & Schänzel 2013).

The success of family tourism lies in good tourism outcomes and positive family values that benefit humanity and society (Schänzel & Yeoman 2015). The way children are brought up today determines

the shape of the future adults reflected as family 'culture', the culture that denotes a progressing way of life (Whittington 2014; Hassan et al. 2012). Moreover, research conducted by Park et al. (2020) showed that children who took more vacation trips acquired better academic achievements.

Vacation has become an important yearly agenda for most family institutions, therefore, the planning process is curated in advance. Factors such as the values of the offers and services provided at the destination have an impact on the decision-making of choice of destination (Srncic et al. 2016). The important areas of family vacation decision-making as suggested by Jenkins (1978) include the search for information, selecting destinations, confirming whether to take the children, duration of stay, travel date, mode of transportation, vacation budgets, activities, and the type of accommodation.

Parents' holiday-related choices are driven by their desire to provide the best experiences for their young children, a stark contrast in those parents of older children—the latter tend to seek for an effective compromise for their own needs that take precedence (Therkelsen 2010). Additionally, most studies on family vacation suggested that the mother plays a prominent role in the decision-making process (Barlés-Arizón et al. 2013), especially in choosing the travel destination (Rojas-de-Gracia et al. 2018). However, the initiators, ones who express the desire to go for a vacation, are usually the children who influence their parents' decision on vacation activities (Jamal et al. 2019; Demirdelen et al. 2019). Turkey, this study aims to intend to understand children's vacation perceptions and preferences. Design/methodology/approach: Students were asked to write a short composition describing where they would love to go for vacation (either in Turkey or abroad; Kozak & Karadag 2012). Moreover, these parents would be willing to add additional budgets to activities to ensure the contentment of their children (Curtale 2018).

Contemporary family vacation studies discovered that there was an increasing power in children's role upon vacation decision-making (Khoo-Lattimore et al. 2018). Despite that, children cannot be considered as a homogenous group, particularly those with ASD (Sedgley et al. 2017), and still, in many families with dependent children, decision-making is usually based on the concept of 'helicopter parenting' where parents 'hover' above the lives of their children (Schänzel & Yeoman 2015).

THE CHALLENGES OF VACATIONING WITH CHILDREN WITH ASD

In general, persons with disabilities (PWDs) represent a significant segment of the tourism market (Zenko & Sardi 2014) even in the advanced societies. The paper aims to discuss these issues. Design/methodology/approach: With a requisitely holistic approach in dialectical systems theory and an overview of relevant literature, the common characteristics of tourists with disabilities are briefly described. A dialectical systemic analysis was used to determine whether people with disabilities want to travel and what their requirements are. A questionnaire was used to identify their recent travelling experiences; tourism organizations were interviewed about their experiences, too. A model of a travel agency, specialized for people with disabilities, is presented. Findings: The usual approach to people with special needs is too one-sided. A more requisitely holistic approach to understanding their needs in tourism, based on existing literature and an empirical analysis, is presented. A more innovative management of tourism organizations is proposed, increasing social responsibility (SR; Agovino et al. 2017). In the social context, there is a need to include the PWDs in future tourism research to provide a better understanding in assessing their needs and combating isolation and loneliness in providing inclusive tourism (McCabe 2020). To date, the PWDs rights to access and take part in tourism in a particular country depend on the government priorities and cannot be met without enforcement of the legislation and policy (Cloquet et al. 2018).

Current researches on the inclusion and accessibilities of PWDs in leisure, recreation, and tourism focus on the aspects of infrastructure facets such as accessibility to the lavatory, parking, footpath, ramp, lift, and wayfinding and signs that cater for the individuals with physical impairment (Hooi & Yaacob 2019; Connell & Page 2019). Besides, the hotel accessibility assessment focuses on the accessibility of public spaces, guest rooms including the bathrooms, recreational areas, and food and beverage areas (Tutuncu 2017).

Past studies indicated that the PWDs' intention to take vacation were driven by their desire to escape for relaxation and enjoyment, but unfortunately, travelling imposed requirements that were beyond the PWDs' ability (Allan 2015). In understanding the perceptions of trust in the families on accessing leisure services for the children with disabilities, the discovery denotes the fact that the families have very few winning experiences with the disabled structural provision (Emira & Thompson 2011).

In PWDs, the growing population of the persons living with ASD cannot be ignored (Hasnah et al. 2013). According to the American Psychiatric Association, ASD is a lifelong, pervasive developmental disability that affects an individual's neurological and biological systems. The ASD symptoms based on the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) have two domains: social communication skills impairment and restrictive and repetitive behaviours and interests (Maye et al. 2017; O'Brien 2016). Studies indicated that the ASD condition developed during prenatal whilst the symptoms usually appeared at the age of 12 months. Many individuals, however, experienced significant delays in diagnosis, which had indirectly caused the delays in access to autism-related support services. Some of them became asymptomatic between the age of 18 and 36 months old (Weir et al. 2020; Ozonoff et al. 2010).

Due to the difficulties in children with autism or intellectual disability, they showed a tendency to participate less in social and recreational activities in comparison with their non-ASD peers (Solish et al. 2010). Evidently, vacation experiences that involve out-of-routine activities at unusual environments can be distressing to the children with ASD. Auditory overload, crowds, queuing, and high-security check at the airport can provoke a significant level of anxiety, potentially overwhelming and leading to a meltdown (Neo & Flaherty 2018). Persons with autism pose a great variation, yet there are a few common challenges usually exhibit in the daily life of almost all autistic persons (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. The Challenges of Autistic Tourists to be Considered in Vacation Determinants

Challenge	Concern	Possible affect during vacation
Sensory demands	Vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, balance, muscular feedback.	May be overwhelming during the trip, at different level depending one's level of stress.
Stereotyped or repetitive behaviour	Repeatedly flap arms, flick fingers, grind teeth, walk on toes, rock their body back and forth while sitting, lining up objects.	Extremely interested in detailed information on 'how-it-works' and this stereotyped or repetitive behaviour challenge may increase during trip due to change in custom and surroundings.
Change in routine	Consistency in their environment.	Change in their daily custom during vacation can be disturbing.
Communication challenges	Mute, very slow language development. Good in visual information rather than audio input.	Difficulty to express their preferences, needs and wants.
Social interaction	No/less eye contact with others. Resist attention and avoid people. Not understand social cues, gestures and facial expression.	Increase desire to be isolated or be alone. Increase in repetitive behaviour to escape from confusion.
Sleeping problems	Difficulty in getting sleep/sleep through night.	Lead to bad mood due to lack of sleep during the trip.
Medical problems	Seizures and gastrointestinal disorders – chronic constipation, diarrhea or vomiting. Mental health – depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety and schizophrenia.	Can jeopardies daily and social activities during the vacation.

TOWARDS A FAMILY-FRIENDLY VACATION

In family vacation, the stress often relates to the inadequate accommodation facilities at the visited destination (Backer & Schänzel 2013). This destination needs to be family-friendly. A family-friendly concept delineates a place where designated facilities are in place with a focus on the family's safety and leisure. This concept is also operative in meeting and satisfying the family members' needs during their vacation with good hotel facilities including family rooms, swimming pool, babysitting rooms, playground and children club, fun and recreational places such as theme parks, children menus availability, and changing rooms for babies, other than babysitting facility at shopping malls (Habibah et al. 2015).

The Person with Disability Act 2008 outlined the requirement of mainstream development in Malaysia to accommodate accessibility needs for persons with impairment so that inclusive and barrier-free tourism activities can support social equality (Hooi & Yaacob 2019). However, for the family tourists who travel together with their autistic children, they need a manageable attraction space, commodious environment, interactive kiosks or screens at the attraction venues to catch the attention of the special children, safe environments to allow the children some independence, and a quiet space or calming room (Langa et al. 2013).

The future obstacle to accommodating an inclusive accessibility needs for every family with special needs children includes the glaring projection of family-friendly vacation as the norm in 2050, which will be exclusively for the wealthy family groups. As a consequence, there will be a wide disparity between the wealthy and the poor and between the divisions of travel services in future family tourism (Whittington 2014). Despite that, accessible tourism is expected to be a promising industry (Naniopoulos et al. 2016). Beyond the negative impact with the disparity, it will serve a golden opportunity for tour operators to being niche players with a competitive edge in the market by offering specialised tourism products and services to the special need tourists (Özogul & Baran 2016) this paper describes the circumstances, social, politic, economic consequences and key decisions that thereby Turkey would be recognized, preferring, establishing on the intention of purchased and suggested positive word of mouth among people. Findings According to European Commission (EU).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Past studies on tourism and disability too often assumed that the obstacles, barriers, and constraints that the disabled children faced were representative

across all people with disabilities. This study, however, observed the developmental impairment specifically from the lens of their caregivers, their parents through their first-hand experiences in handling and dealing with specific behaviours of children with ASD during avacation. Family plays a critical role during the early lives of children with disabilities (Aizan Sofia et al. 2016), especially their mothers. The mothers were found optimistic in facing life challenges, controlling their emotions, and positively accepting the conditions of their children with disabilities. Such mothers with positive-minded upon the children's disabilities put a higher priority on the life and well-being of the children (Sivabalan et al. 2018).

Children with ASD deserve social inclusion. All children from all walks of life deserve and have the rights to participate in recreational activities to promote a quality life, offering the individual a sense of freedom, pleasure, and intellectual transformation (Stacey et al. 2018) standard deviation = 0.75. Plus, it is important to note that recreational participation in structured and unstructured activities such as play, sports, watch theatre, crafts, and tourism is one of the domains in the assessment tools of occupational therapy in autism (Bumin et al. 2015). The recreational participation among the children with autism, such as in museum visits, can improve life quality (e.g. having fun and relaxation), develop social communications and interactions, reduce inappropriate behaviours, create interest to engage and participate in activities, and improve fine and gross motor skills (Lussenhop et al. 2016; Amet 2013).

The families with children with ASD might not be able to optimise the advantage of vacation due to their autistic children's response towards an unusual environment. However, their effort in trying to open the doors to mental development and social improvements for their special ones is commendable.

The perceptions of others towards these autistic children's behaviour at tourism sites and public areas for not knowing the state of impairment, as well as the inaccessible accommodation and other issues with the tourism facilities, pressure the vacationing parents.

The tourism experience usually exhibits the opportunities to seek for novelty in exploring the natural landscape and man-made fascinations, indulging in local foods, cultures, traditions, events, festivals, and visits to historical buildings and monuments. In family tourism, VFR (Habibah & Hamzah 2012; Backer & King 2017), frequenting theme parks, participating in beach activities, climbing and hiking, and boating and fishing are among the popular choice of activities (Wu & Wall 2016). On the other hand, behind all these activities underlie unpleasantness and discomfort for children with ASD whilst the other siblings with typical development are not negatively impacted. Such is the dilemma for the parents in designing a wholesome family vacation experience.

The challenging behaviours of children with ASD signify the aspects of the physical environment, social environment, communication difficulty, and co-existing mental or physical disorders (Buckley 2017) and, in that regard, the tourism experience may act as a trigger to these children's unpredictable behaviours. The following Table 2 highlights several studies observing the scenarios in having a family vacation with autistic children. It outlines both the fulfilling and challenging experiences that these families experienced. Knowledge on the state of children with ASD and the best approach in forming efficient tourism products and services delivery is important in solving these targeted families' discomfort issues during vacation as it provides a basis for designing a pleasant tourism environment and experience for all, regardless of the tourists' impairment category.

TABLE 2. Vacation Experiences of the Families Travel Together with their Children with Autism

Source	Advantage	Disadvantage
Freund et al. (2019)	Desire to take vacation if accommodation is accessible to the CWA families.	Fear of complaints and uneasy feelings of other guests upon autistic child behaviour. Interactive constraints of staffs and other guests towards the CWA families. Environmental constrain include activities, dietary needs, check-in and out process, que at restaurant, level of noise at a place (hotel and restaurant).
Walton (2019)	Leisure activities are fruitful setting for home-based intervention.	Unsatisfied with quality of leisure activities. Prefer to do leisure activities at home and in their communities.
Fletcher et al. (2018)	Children with ASD able to stay longer at articular attraction when using the sensory guides. Improve the children with ASD's ability to learn during the visit or family outings rather than only sensory components.	No specific confirmation in duration of visit the attraction because highly depend on the children with ASD's ability to endure in the activities.
Kim et al. (2018)	Family leisure improve family functioning and quality of life for the family. The children with ASD's leisure interest guide the mothers choice of leisure preference. Mothers enjoy observing the children with ASD's participation in recreational activities. Mothers of children with ASD equipped themselves with skills and resources related to leisure in order to provide a safe and healthy leisure environment.	Mothers have lack of time for themselves since they are busy with coordinating and monitoring the children with ASD. Constant commitment to pay attention to the children with ASD prevents mothers' personal preferred activities. Difficulty in finding a helper to sit the children with ASD that would give mothers some time to enjoy their own preferred leisure activities.
Sedgley et al. (2017)	Opportunity for children with ASD to broaden their experiences. Opportunity for the mothers to provide rooms for autistic child learning proses. Autistic child embarks well and have fun on vacation when mothers do take them with save and supportive environment such as family and friends.	Frustrating, going to nice place but no able to enjoy the view because autistic child could not cope with different environment. Airport security checks, flight delays and noisy airport environment make CWA and their parent feel insecure. Public opinion seen does not approve the difficult child behaviour and the way mothers deal with it. Distress to take vacation immediately. Mothers need few weeks planning the vacation. A vacation is never relaxed to the mothers, it is sort of extra work to do.
Deng (2017)	The children with ASD's behaviour had changed since the participation in museum program. Increase the interaction skills of the children with ASD. Increase social communication skills in the children with ASD, overcome their shyness and answer questions more frequently. Contribute to happiness in the children with ASD. Museum environment served better learning experience than classroom environment.	Not discuss.

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Lussenhop et al. (2016)	Fun social family outings. Opportunity for hands-on learning experiences. New or challenging experience for the children with ASD. Promote children with ASD's engagement in interactive activities.	Pre-visit barriers like cost of entrance fee for a very short visit due to unpleasant behaviour (meltdown) of the children with ASD. Loud noises and crowd areas like theatre, could stimulate anxiety and stress for the children with ASD. Difficulties with other visitors who have negative public judgement upon the children with ASD's behaviour. Difficulties within group members e.g. siblings fight with each other during the trip.
Sarol & Çimen (2015)	Reduce in stereotype behaviours. Quality levels of life improved in terms of physical and emotional functionality of children with ASD.	
Amet (2013)	Good vacation quality (among families those have good financial).	Families faced more challenges linked to the autistic child behaviour. Poor vacation quality in ASD family group.
Potvin et al. (2013)	Recreational activities may contribute to health and fitness of ASD children. ASD children show interest in variety of recreational activities.	Autism with high functioning autism (HFA) children took part in recreational activities more frequently alone or with families and closer to home. Very small percentage of autism (HFA) children "active physical" and "skill-based" activities – they have less interest in such activities.
Langa et al. (2013)	Have positive experience with manageable and safe environments at museum. Museum visit contribute enjoyment time devoted with family members. Create interest in the child with ASD to explore new things and promote communication throughout the exploration.	Crowds and long lines contribute discomfort when child with ASD's unpredictable behaviour emerged. Discomfort feeling in children with ASD upon loud noises, bright lights, long queue, crowds. Unpredictable behaviour of child with ASD in public spaces and around new stimuli.
Rizk et al. (2011)	Not discuss.	Leisure became burdensome and to be another demand on mothers' time. Mothers experienced feelings such as guilt, exhaustion, and limited availability of resources.
Solish et al. (2010)	Not discuss.	Children with ASD participate least in social and recreational activities. Require more assistant to participate in leisure activities.

CONCLUSION

This study on the family vacation experiences among families with autistic children primarily investigated the advantages and the disadvantages that the targeted families dealt with when they travelled together for a family vacation. The findings would be able to provide an avenue for tourism professionals to examine the social inclusion aspects further. By including the current researches of this area from leading experts in family tourism and autism, this study would anticipate an addition to an underdeveloped knowledge on the considerations of difficulties to travel with special needs children. There is a need for esteemed scholars to consider researching on the inclusion of the children with autism in the tourism settings in Malaysia. This

need is primarily because, to date, there were only a handful of researches on autism topics conducted in Malaysia. These researches' focal inspection did not give attention to issues of inclusion of children with ASD in tourism but mainly focused on parental challenges upon the upbringing of the autistic child (Chu et al. 2018; Ilias et al. 2018; Kamaralzaman et al. 2018; Ilias et al. 2017; Sitimin et al. 2017), the treatment (Fikry & Hassan 2016) the existence of center that provides varieties of treatments is crucial to reduce numerous aberrant behaviors of children with Autism. This paper aims to explore the characteristics of autism centers in Malaysia. Based on phone interviews conducted with the staff of 22 Autism centers, it was found that majority of Autism centers in Malaysia requires children to undergo a

diagnostic test, offered a combination of classes and charged classes fees in the range of RM356 to RM600 per month. © 2016. The Authors. Published for AMER ABRA by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), spiritual intervention through Islamic psychotherapy approach (Abidin et al. 2018), and the learning settings (Zulkanain et al. 2019).

Tourism is for all. Without the exclusion of the special need tourists, tourism can be accessible and beneficial to everyone. Family leisure was seen as a fruitful setting for family-based (Walton 2019), out-of-classroom intervention and unstructured programme such as a visit to cultural heritage sites create more relax and comfort environment to the children with ASD (Deng 2017). In the case that the quality of life of an individual with autism is likely to reduce in physical and well-being (Roy & Dillo 2018), thus, the intervention from the tourism industry players to serve the tourists with special needs is vital especially in planning the tourism trips (Hamed 2013).

The tourism providers can innovatively collaborate with local autism association and institutions to understand the growing community better. It would help to provide improved vacation opportunities through better planning and theminimising of inconveniences and conflicts during the vacation process. For the tour operators, there is a call to set up autism-friendly packages and travel agreements that meet and gratify the special needs of the developmentally impaired and their families. Future studies may need to look into the readiness of the travel agencies in planning and arranging special trips for the families with autistic children and the rest of the autistic tourists.

The inability for the children with ASD to fully engage in a play-based activity would channel an unpleasant effect on the parents and the children's well-being. Therefore, the parents need to understand and incorporate playfulness as the environmental and interactional components (Román-Oyola et al. 2018). Furthermore, occupational therapists can provide coaching strategies to help these parents improve their understanding of how to manage the vacation itinerary and activities accordingly. This improvement will help to maximise the benefits from the experience in their children.

The effort to provide inclusive and equal tourism experience to all people regardless of the disabilities can support the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDG) 2030 Agenda, specifically in reducing inequalities based on disabilities. Most importantly, paying attention to the human rights of the PWDs and their family members would facilitate a harmony living and inevitably empower the societies.

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