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System proves there is substance to Malaysia Boleh

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BALI and the terrorist bombings exploded more than the tourist idyll of the island. It laid bare to examination standards of service, not only between countries but also within a country.

One commentary in a metropolitan newspaper on the Oct 12 bombings was telling. It warned Australians of the practical consequences of doing business, and travel, in some countries in the region.

By Australian expectations of standards, police, rescue and hospital services in Bali were woeful.

Indonesia can look relatively developed if you fly into Bali or Jakarta, wrote commentator Michael Backman. But the real test of a country's development is not how many shiny office towers or international resorts it has but how it copes with shocks.

Indonesia has its hints of affluence. But largely they're superficial.

How do general, public services measure up to visitor expectations? It is an important point, more so for Malaysia higher up the development scale than it is for Indonesia.

As Malaysia heads towards its Vision 2020 target, it will have to be inventive in making the transition from low-end, labour-intensive manufacture to value-added high technology.

Tourism will matter in the transition and beyond. And tourism is about services.

Its been a while since I've been in Malaysia.

I was keen to see for myself.

I am encouraged. Malaysia is not just about the tallest, the biggest, the most ostentatious, the most. There is substance to Malaysia Boleh.

The infrastructure is there. There is a system. It works if you know how to use it.

I'd marked out my strategy. Public transport would be my measure of systems and service. In the Klang Valley at least.

I'd heard much about the KL City Air Terminal. I'd use the KLIA Ekspres. How userfriendly was it?

KLIA and KL CAT were everything the promotional campaigns and brochures made them out to be. Things worked; Immigration (non-autogate), Customs (green lane), baggage retrieval. The wash facilities were impeccable.

Resist the temptation and the transition from KLIA to KL CAT is seamless; 28 minutes to the minute, non-stop, every 15 minutes. While away the time watching the Multimedia Super Corridor development flash by the window, the digital entertainment, or muse over the fighting words of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Facing Challenges: Caring for the Race.

Direction signs were well marked, in Bahasa and English, and symbols. From KL Sentral, the rail network fanned out KLIA Transit, KTM Komuter, STAR and Putra light rail, and the soon to come monorail. Tickets were available from vending machines, or over the counter.

The Kuala Lumpur Transit Rail Map is comprehensive. Where I was stumped as to what next after I stepped off the rail, a phone call or two set me in the right direction.

Its the feeder services that came up short. Access to vehicle parking for commuters is not uniformly available at every station.

The standard of taxis in terms of vehicle roadworthiness, passenger comfort and driver attitude, knowledge and courtesy is patchy.

The bus network appears to be even more comprehensive than rail. The network is in need of route maps at bus stops.

Going by the transport network and the North-South Highway there is a system to Malaysia Boleh. I will defer to resident commentators on the need to foster a culture of maintenance. What is needed, I might add, is more readily available information. One number to call for all transport information, for instance. Information is a big part of service.