

Preserving Local Crafts of Malaysian Tangible Cultural Heritage Through Travel Kits by State Identity

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Abstract

Many reasons are contributing to the growing need for cultural heritage preservation including development, modernization, climate change, and assimilation. Within this, it is important to emphasized that cultural heritage tourism encompasses not only intangible heritage, such as traditions, values, and religions, but also tangible heritage, such as craft, materials, and settlement patterns. Craft has a unique quality and also serves as a powerful means of cultural communication in the community. By classifying the new tourism goods based on traditional crafts according to their different states, this research examined the types and significance of traditional crafts as well as the attitudes of local citizens towards them, with the goal of preserving Malaysia's cultural legacy. The results from the study established the justification for preserving Malaysia's cultural heritage through two major points: the responsibility of the current generation, the potential design according to state identity as part of cultural preservation and the relevancy of preserving and maintaining Malaysia's cultural history to a tourism product.

1. Introduction

One of Malaysia's potential tourism industries is heritage-based tourism but there is not much promotion available right now for this aspect of legacy tourism (Ramli, 2017). Additionally, intangible cultural heritage also received less attention in recent decades (Olalere, 2019). Therefore, tourists especially those who visit museums, do not frequently visit historical and heritage sites (Roslan, 2019). And to guarantee sustainable tourism development based on cultural heritage, it is imperative to conserve and preserve the cultural legacy that provides tourists with an exceptional experience.

Despite the possibility that tourism may encourage economic expansion, it is clear that poor conservation would cause changes and the loss of the original heritage (Caust & Vecco, 2017). According to Hoang (2021) there is a recognition that locals' attempts to publicized their past in the absence of relevant legislation and professional support could lead to damage to the area and potentially diminish the value of the cultural history. Since cultural legacy is still seen as having little external benefits, its development is not fully utilized to raise the demand for and supply of culture. Moreover, the shortage of literature on the subject may be the cause of the general shortcomings in cultural asset conservation and protection (Jani et al., 2018). In light of this, it is crucial to stress that cultural heritage tourism encompasses both tangible and intangible heritage.

Taking this into consideration, the aim of this study is to evaluate Malaysian cultural heritage values by categorizing them based on their unique positions. Additionally, this study makes an effort to assess the perceptions of the locals regarding the potential for new tourism products based on traditional crafts. The findings will recommend highly inventive and creative effort to preserve and promote Malaysia's cultural heritage to visitors and the broader public.

2. Background Study

2.1 Cultural Heritage

The term of "cultural heritage" describes how the past is used by modern culture which is a reflection of the past that helps to shape regional identity and national stereotypes (Nilson & Thorell, 2018). According to Khakzad et al. (2015), cultural heritage is defined as the portion of history that we choose to preserve for modern objectives and national cultural heritage values can be promoted and practical advantages to the community can be obtained by safeguarding, preserving, and promoting these values (Hoang, 2021). In addition, natural heritage is defined as places or regions of sea and land that can be officially recognised for conservation purposes as heritage values by applying specific assessment criteria (Suaib et al, 2020). These places and regions may include national parks, marine protected areas, other reserves, botanic gardens, private conservancies, significant fauna and flora habitats, and geological sites.

Furthermore, there are many different types of cultural heritage, which are further separated into physical and intangible forms. All objects that can be seen, such as movable items like coins and paintings and immovable items like sites and monuments, both on dry land and underground, are considered to be part of the tangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage, on the other hand, is more subjective and includes things like customs, dances, and rituals (Suaib et al., 2020). Martial arts, theatre, sound design, and music composition are more traditions that represent Malaysian culture (Mustafa & Saleh, 2018). As a fundamental component or auxiliary attraction to the specific tourism sites, traditional and regional cuisine has been acknowledged as an intangible cultural asset (Aziz et al., 2021).

In the southeast of Asia, Malaysia is a country that have peninsula borders the South China Sea, Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia, and the northern islands of Borneo and Thailand. Similar to its neighboring countries in the region, Malaysia boasts a treasure trove of rich and diversified cultural heritage (Suaib et al., 2020). Malaysia's distinctiveness stems from its diversity as a multiracial and multicultural nation. Due to modernisation, assimilation, and globalisation, these cultural heritages may disappear completely if no attempts are made to preserve and maintain them (Suaib et al., 2020).

There are numerous racial and cultural groups in Malaysia. Among these are Georgetown and Melaka, which show how the Malay Archipelago, India, China, and Europe interacted to create some of the most exquisite historical structures in terms of architecture and culture (Mustafa & Saleh, 2018). Below is some of the examples of cultural and natural heritage in Malaysia those recognized in the UNESCO World Heritage list established by Wan Samsudin et. al (2023).

Table 1: The examples of cultural, natural, and indigenous heritage in Malaysia

Categories / Types		Examples
Cultural Heritage	Tangible	Historic Cities
	Intangible	Mak Yong
Natural Heritage	Site	National Park/ Forest
	Object	Royal Headgear
	Geopark	Langkawi Geopark

Malaysia is not only unique country with a multicultural diversity but also has a rich and numerous culture and heritage treasures (Wan Samsudin et al., 2023). Two popular tourist destinations in Malaysia are Melaka and Penang, both of which are well-known for their historical significance (Suaib, et.all., 2018). One of the cities with a significant built heritage is Melaka, which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008. Melaka can foster a unique multicultural architecture with prominent Western, Chinese, and Islamic influences as well as social conventions, folklore, and religious activities (Suaib, et.all., 2018). Chai (2011) states that Penang is renowned for its heritage character, particularly in Georgetown, a city with over 200 years of urban history. In an

increasingly globalized world, cultural heritage tourism in urban settings serves as an engineering tool to improve cities (Chai, 2011).

3. Methodology

In order to investigate the significance of heritage tourism in Malaysia for the promotion and preservation of Malaysia's cultural heritage, qualitative approaches were chosen for this research project. This study attempts to assess residents' opinions on the possibilities for new tourism products based on traditional crafts by categorising them according to their unique states. Open-ended questions were used to extract these detailed, in-depth perspectives from the Malaysian residents of Klang Valley during in-person, semi-structured interviews that the researcher performed.

Malaysian nationals between the ages of 18 and 29 who reside in Selangor's urban areas make up the study's participants. The surrounding area was mostly focused in Klang, Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya, Setia Alam, Shah Alam, and Alam Budiman. Through purposive sampling, the researchers chose the number of participants from the larger population. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, and the interviewee was given the choice of meeting in a public setting where they felt comfortable, like a park, café, or hostel in Selangor, Malaysia. Practical considerations include noise that affects the recording, effective communication between the parties, and privacy. Each participant had between 25 and 60 minutes for the interview. Throughout the interview, the researcher made notes and videotaped the conversation.

4. Data Collection

4.1 Demographic of the participants

Table 2: Category of Informants

Informants	Numbers	Age
Male	4	19-29
Female	7	19-29

Out of the 11 responders, 7 were women and 4 were men. It was simpler to approach female respondents than male ones because they were more open to doing last-minute interviews.

4.2 Purpose Of Visiting Malaysia

Malaysia has a diverse population, with great ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. The population is unevenly distributed between Peninsular and East Malaysia, with the vast majority living in Peninsular Malaysia. In the interview with a respondent who was working in Malaysia as a graphic designer and had travelled domestically, one respondent was stated:

"Malaysia's cultural heritage has been less exposed to the new generation, and it is worrying that some teenagers know less about Malaysia's history." (Respondents 5)

When it comes to question about the purpose of international tourists coming to Malaysia, most of respondents have different view on what are the purpose of the visitors visiting Malaysia. As one of them stated that:

"Malaysia had the diversity of our cuisine, as Malaysia is home to many races." (Respondents 2)

In addition, others respondents claimed that food is the primary reason why the majority of international tourists visit Malaysia by claimed:

"I highly believed on the food. They can find a great food here!". (Respondents 3)

When it comes to the importance of heritage tourism in Malaysia, one respondent, who is businessman and often travelling around Malaysia, stated that:

"It is essential for domestic and international tourists to learn about Malaysia's cultural heritage through heritage tourism. Melaka ought to have been the starting point for"

introducing the history and culture of Malaysia.” (Respondents 1)

Within the answer given, it can be anticipated that domestic and international tourists are still unaware of the importance of Malaysia's cultural heritage.

4.3 Importance of Heritage Tourism as A Medium for Exposing Malaysia's Cultural Heritage

Next question is to identify the importance of heritage tourism as a medium for exposing Malaysia's cultural heritage. One of the respondents from Pahang, stated that:

“Yes, heritage tourism is essential, but its significance varies by location, such as Melaka.” (Respondents 1)

The people of Malaysia are a mosaic of Chinese, Indian and native Malay influence. The Malays make up the largest ethnic group, and tend to practice both Islamic and Malay traditions, and speak in the native Malay language. The Malaysian Chinese make up about 25% of the population, with three main dialects of Chinese languages being spoken: Hokkien, Cantonese and Mandarin speakers. The Malaysian Indians – who make up 10%, tend to be descendants of Tamil-speaking South Indians who were brought in under British colonial rule.

The next question emphasizes that preserving Malaysia's cultural heritage through tourism is important for local or international tourists. One participant who is an avid traveler stated that:

“It is literally important because cultural heritage creates unique tourist attractions for a place or country which in turn creates jobs and spur economic growth for its people.”

Preservation and restoration create skilled jobs which increase surrounding property values and encourage development of communities within these areas. Cultural heritage is central to protecting our sense of who we are. It gives us an irrefutable connection to the past – to certain social values, beliefs, customs, and traditions, that allows us to identify ourselves with others and deepen our sense of unity, belonging and national pride.

As the culminating question for this section, this question discusses how things have changed of tourism in Malaysia over the past few years. Most of them have different answers to the issue, but one individual from the government sector stated:

“Yes, it has changed significantly. There are many tourists from various countries, and they travel for a variety of reasons, including education, medical treatment, and others.”

The significance of heritage tourism in Malaysia for promoting and preserving Malaysia's cultural heritage is either not established or successful.

4.4 Assessing the Impact of New Tourism Products Based on The Traditional Crafts

Similar to their multicultural past, Malaysia's handicrafts and artwork are lively and varied. Some of these crafts can withstand the test of time, but others encounter difficulties in the artisan's quest to maintain their cultural legacy. The multi-cultural nature of this nation is reflected in the handicrafts made by regional artists. Batik, Songket, Kite Making, Woodcarving, Menkuang, Kris, Boat Making, and Rattan Weaving are some examples of Malaysian art and crafts.

The first question asked to respondents in interview session is about traditional crafts related to tourism that the respondent remembers. Responding to the question, majority of the respondents mentioned batik, rattan bags, and clothes. As stated by freelancer from Johor that:

“I can't even remember some new or innovative traditional crafts related to tourism. They should make one.”(Participant 8)

Regarding Malaysian tourism, the next inquiry concerns the level of satisfaction with regional items. Most of the respondents said they were not happy with the merchandise. According to one respondent:

“I wish for some high-quality traditional works of art that are culturally or aesthetically connected to their place of origin.” (Participant 4)

The researcher then inquired about their reaction to newly developed tourism products and what they were anticipating. It can be concluded that most of respondents want to see the new development towards tourism products. One of them stated that:

"Yes, I also anticipated something that could be easily carried or stored, something that is not very large or burdensome to move around." (Participant 3)

Then, the researcher asked about how tourism products can influence tourists to appreciate the importance of Malaysia's cultural heritage. Most of them have different responses, but one graphic designer stated:

"It might be a thing or an item that so strongly resembles Malaysia's identity that people will instantly be able to identify its origins and know that it was produced in Malaysia." (Participant 10)

The final query posed by the researcher concerned the respondents' perceptions about Malaysian local handicrafts in light of tourism in five years. All of them were eager to see new travel-related items that would support the preservation and promotion of Malaysia's cultural heritage both locally and beyond. Among them was one who said:

"I know in the future that we can be proud of one of our souvenirs that tourists will be excited to get when they are traveling in Malaysia."

In summary of the interview responses reveal that mostly respondents mentioned batik, rattan bags, and clothes as traditional crafts related to tourism. The respondents also dissatisfied with the current quality of regional items and want high-quality, culturally significant products thus they are eager for new, portable, and culturally reflective tourism products. The data also established where most of the respondents believed that tourism products can promote cultural heritage appreciation if they strongly represent Malaysia's identity and further support preserving and promoting Malaysia's cultural heritage.

5. The Prototype Proposal of New Tourism Products (Travel Kits) With State Cultural Heritage Identity

The interview lasted no longer than 15 to 20 minutes, and all questions were answered comprehensively by the respondents. The researcher examines the data carefully to identify recurring themes, topics, concepts, and meaning patterns. The researcher uses sample photos of new tourism products based on respondents' responses because one of the goals of this study is to investigate locals' opinions about possible new tourism products based on traditional crafts by categorizing them according to their respective states.

5.1 Kedah Proposal

In regard to whether the rice plant pattern can symbolize Kedah, the majority of respondents expressed a positive sentiment. One respondent stated:

"The rice plant is an integral part of Kedah's identity as it is one of the major rice-producing regions in Malaysia."

Another participant mentioned:

"The rice plant represents the agricultural significance of Kedah and its role as the 'Rice Bowl of Malaysia'."

Regarding the use of green and yellow as identifying colors for Kedah, the respondents had mixed opinions. Some participants agreed that these colors could be associated with Kedah, with one respondent stating,

"Green represents the lush paddy fields, while yellow symbolizes prosperity and royalty."

However, a few respondents felt that other colors, such as shades of brown or gold, might better represent Kedah's identity.

5.2 Perlis Proposal

In terms of the combination of blue, yellow, and red symbolizing Perlis, the respondents had varying perspectives. One participant mentioned:

"Blue signifies the calmness of the Perlis River and the Andaman Sea, while yellow and red can represent the state's rich cultural heritage."

However, another respondent disagreed by said:

"These colors are more commonly associated with the national flag rather than Perlis specifically."

Regarding the prominence of blue as a color for the design, the majority of respondents agreed that blue could be a significant color for Perlis.

One participant mentioned:

"Blue is often associated with Perlis due to its coastal location and the stunning blue hues of the surrounding waters."

5.3 Pulau Pinang Proposal

Regarding whether the design, including its color and pattern, can represent Pulau Pinang, the respondents had varying opinions. One participant stated,

"The design incorporating vibrant colors and unique motifs reflects the cultural diversity and lively atmosphere of Penang."

However, another respondent mentioned,

"While the design is visually appealing, it may not necessarily capture the essence of Pulau Pinang as a whole."

In terms of whether a floral pattern can symbolize Pulau Pinang, the majority of respondents agreed. One participant stated:

"Flowers are often associated with Pulau Pinang, particularly the iconic Penang Orchid, and they symbolize the state's natural beauty and horticultural heritage."

5.4 Kelantan Proposal

Regarding the use of brown as the primary color representing Kelantan's identity, opinions were divided among the respondents. One participant mentioned,

"Brown can represent the earthy tones of Kelantan's rural landscapes and traditional crafts like woodcarving and weaving."

However, others felt that vibrant colors, such as shades of red or orange, might better capture Kelantan's lively cultural traditions.

In terms of whether incorporating batik design can attract buyers, the majority of respondents agreed. One participant stated:

"Batik holds a special place in Kelantan's cultural heritage and incorporating it into designs can attract both locals and tourists who appreciate traditional craftsmanship."

5.5 Terengganu Proposal

Regarding whether black and white can symbolize Terengganu in a travel kit, opinions were split among the respondents. One participant mentioned,

"Black and white can represent the contrasting elements of Terengganu's landscape, such as the black sandy beaches and white sandy shores."

However, some respondents felt that incorporating vibrant colors, like shades of blue or turquoise, might better symbolize the coastal beauty of Terengganu. In terms of whether the pattern is accurate and suitable for Terengganu's travel kit, the majority of respondents expressed positive feedback. One participant stated,

"The pattern captures the intricate motifs found in Terengganu's traditional crafts, such as songket and wood carving, and it represents the state's rich artistic heritage."

All respondents concurred that this new tourism product has the potential to impact Malaysia's heritage tourism as an innovative concept. In addition, all respondents responded differently to the follow up question, alongside one notable exception of Rehan, a private sector employee, who stated:

"It is delightful to see this new development. Implementing a classic pattern from Kelantan or Terengganu in batik and layang - layang to water container, cardholder, and purse."

In addition to requesting responses to the new tourism product, the researcher concludes the interview by asking whether the respondent would purchase the product if it were available. 11 of the respondents confirm they will definitely purchase the new products. Only one of them responded with the following response, which she stated:

"Yes, I will definitely purchase it and promote it globally because I want this new product to represent Malaysia's cultural heritage."

STATES	THE PROPOSAL
PERLIS	
KEDAH	
TERENGGANU	
PULAU PINANG	
KELANTAN	

5. Conclusion

The results from the study demonstrated that the justification for preserving and promoting Malaysia's cultural heritage is valid. Cultural heritage is the inheritance of living traditions that encompass everything from history, practices, expressions, values, places to objects of a community or society from past to present, passed down from generation to generation (Wong, 2022). It fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity among people who belong to a certain community. This study established the importance of preserving and promoting our cultural heritage in term of 3 major points: the responsibility of the current generation, saving natural resources as part of cultural preservation and the relevancy of preserving and maintaining Malaysia's cultural history to a tourism product.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Muhammad Rohaizad Zainun; **data collection:** Muhammad Rohaizad Zainun; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Muhammad Rohaizad Zainun; **draft manuscript preparation:** Muhammad Rohaizad Zainun, Norfadilah Kamaruddin. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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