Exploring the built-environment: heritage trails, values and perceptions

N Mat Nayan1*, D S Jones2,3,4, S Ahmad1 and M K Khamis5

1 Program of Landscape Architecture, Department of Built Environment Studies and Technology, Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch, 32610 Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia
2 Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Geelong Vic 3220, Australia
3 Cities Research Institute, Griffith University, Nathan Qld 4111, Australia
4 Monash Indigenous Studies Centre, Monash University, Clayton Vic 3800, Australia
5 Interior Design Programme, Faculty of Built Environment and Regenerative Design, Raffles University, 80000 Johor Bahru, Malaysia

*Email: nadiy028@uitm.edu.my

Abstract. Understanding visitor preferences to heritage areas is essential in informing management planning and interpretive strategies for these places. This paper uses a quantitative method approach to investigate local Malaysian visitor preferences to heritage trails in the Old Town of central Kuala Lumpur, in Malaysia, to understand what values and qualities visitors are experiencing that informs their preferences. The findings of this research offers a ranking system of heritage trails and buildings based upon visitors’ preferences, that can aid in understanding of visitor preferences of heritage trails and the places and values along such trails.

1. Introduction
Heritage trails have historically been developed based upon different themes with the aim of acting as an interconnecting journey to link sites, attractions, and other tourism businesses by providing information and storytelling along the way [13]-[31]. Hence, urban heritage trails have always been underpinned and characterised by urban histories and narratives. Urban heritage trails have also aided the local economies especially through tourism visitation activities. However, the research on urban heritage trails remains little investigated within academic literature [2]-[13]-[14].

In Malaysia, heritage trails are often developed in partnerships, with local authorities taking the lead in trail development. Hence, this article is concerned with visitors’ experiences on the stakeholder-generated trails, specifically through self-guided tour journeys of urban heritage trails in the Old Town of Kuala Lumpur. The article therefore aims to discuss how these heritage trails influence visitors’ preferences on exploring the trails. Further, the research seeks to define the relationships between Experiential Design Principles and the four realms of these Principles that influence visitor experience and expectations.
2. Literature Review

Generally, a trail refers to a linear tract that has distinctive characteristics and differentiates itself with a specific theme [30]. As established routes, heritage trails act in bridging sites, attractions, and other tourism businesses by providing information and narrative storytelling along the way [13]-[22]-[31]. Depending upon the heritage trail’s location, its form varies significantly in “length, location, and scope, from short, city-centre walks, to extended hikes, scenic drives and international trade routes” [2]. Hence, a trail that was once functionally created as a physical pathway or linear walk has evolved into a different function to serve conservation purposes and enticing engaging experiences amongst visitors through the ubiquitous features highlighted along the trails [12]-[14].

As highlighted by Timothy and Boyd in 2015 North American’s eyes, there are four key purposes of heritage trails: (i) promoting preservation and conservation of historic values by educating the general public about place history; (ii) enhancing a city’s image or a sense of place; (iii) fostering economic development through their promotion as tourism experiences, and (iv) achieving political aims [2]-[31]. These benefits are most likely to manifest when heritage trails involve more than one key feature that involves place and history [2]. Despite the benefits of the urban heritage trails – as a sub-set of heritage trails – especially on nourishing the urban heritage, research into this area is in its infancy “remains under-theorised within the literature” [2]-[14].

A successful urban heritage trail possesses strong meaning-making and has been developed through a detailed selection and interpretation process to ensure the trail is “worthy of preservation, visitation and remembrance” [2]. In addition, a potential urban heritage trail should provide an opportunity for visitors to concentrate upon experience in a more dynamic way [17]. As such, the urban heritage trails can reflect dominant historical storylines or reveal untold histories of the site [2]. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy of the heritage space is a requisite in designing an urban heritage trail to ensure its effectiveness [15].

In terms of urban heritage trails, each trail is unique in terms of its location, visual and aesthetic qualities [3]-[28]. As highlighted by Orbaşli: “Historic towns are valued most for their special character, a physical link with the past and the continuing tradition of a lived-in environment, most notably for: the physical attractiveness of buildings, streetscape, townscapes, views and vista; the light craft-type industries which ensure that they are clean and comfortable places to visit; the human scale and feeling of intimacy; their walkable and explorable characteristics; the life within; the occasion for communication, lost in the larger modern metropolis; the opportunity to become temporarily a part of urban life” [26]. Within this distinctiveness character, urban heritage trails help in conserving the urban heritage identity including the social fabric, historic urban quarter and traditional settlement [25].

Benefits of urban heritage trails point to their ability to “encourage visitors towards a more engaged interaction within the spaces through which they tour” [14]. The traditional options on experiencing urban heritage trails include: (i) guided tours, (ii) self-guided tours, or (iii) a combination of both. Amongst the options, self-guided trails are acknowledged as a “global phenomenon and the self-guided field continues to grow in size and diversity” [15]. Through a self-guided tour, visitors can explore a trail freely and completely independently; additionally, it is cheaper, less formal and not tied to time. Flexibility is the major advantage of a self-guided tour. Hence, self-guided tours provide more opportunities for visitors to experience a trail [12]. Therefore, most urban heritage trails are well-equipped with signage and way-finding aids, information panels or commemorative plaques, digital or printed brochures, as well as audio recordings and mobile apps to ensure quality and accessible information to guide users [2].

Kuala Lumpur City Hall, as a municipality, is no exception in seeking to promote the uniqueness of heritage trails in Kuala Lumpur. It offers 13 heritage trails that have been refined from the original route, as promulgated from the Kuala Lumpur Heritage Trail Master Plan 2018 that aimed to promote heritage trails in KL. The KLHTMP 2018 heritage trails have been recognized as successfully promoting historical heritage areas and contributing to the development of this tourism sector [30]. To create a distinctive identity, each heritage trail proposed under the KLHTMP 2018, applied a distinct storytelling theme that articulated “a particular narrative of identity – a unifying frame through which
The diversity of place can be viewed” and explored [14]. Hence, the development of these trails reputedly improved the imageability of the Old Town including its social spaces, heritage sites, and its neighbourhoods [14]-[30].

3. Methodology

3.1. Site study: Heritage trail 01 (Medan Pasar/Market Square) and Heritage trail 02 (Dataran Merdeka/Merdeka Square)
The case study involved two selected heritage trails drawn from the Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020 and the Kuala Lumpur Heritage Trail Master Plan 2018;
- Heritage Trail 01: Medan Pasar/Market Square and
- Heritage Trail 02: Dataran Merdeka/ Merdeka Square (Figure 1).

The rationale for their selection was the closeness of their locations, their distinctively different narratives, yet their closeness in telling the story of the establishment and landscape setting of the Old Town of Kuala Lumpur. Heritage Trail 01, located on the east side of Kelang River, was once a core Chinese cultural area, whereas Heritage Trail 02, located on the west side of Kelang River, carries core features of the past British colonial administration [19]-[21].

Both trails strategically use selected heritage buildings as stopping-points that facilitate the visitors’ movement along the trails. In addition, both trails are also located within a 300m walking radius from the confluence between the two rivers. Hence their spatial location makes walking distances -- 0.73km for Heritage Trail 01 and 1.72km for Heritage Trail 02 -- stress-free for visitors [6]-[8]. Both trails were also originally developed by the same City Planning Department of KLCH.

3.2. Data set: questionnaire
The questionnaire design sought to test how visitors appreciate the listed heritage buildings and spaces that have been selected as stopping-points along the heritage trails. This bottom-up approach is crucial in explaining the success of the trails from the users’ or visitors’ points of view throughout the trails.
The data obtained was elucidated from a specially drafted questionnaire that was divided into 4 main sections: (i) Section 1: Respondent Demographics Characteristics (ii) Section 2: Heritage Trail 01: Medan Pasar / Market Square; (iii) Section 3: Heritage Trail 02: Dataran Merdeka / Merdeka Square; and (iv) Section 4 on the respondents’ preferences from both heritage trails explored. For Sections 2 and 3, the survey applied a Scale of Preferences (Scale 1 Less Preferred – Scale 5 Strongly Preferred) to indicate the level of preference of the building by the respondent. Scale of Preferences helps to quantitatively measuring visitor-oriented development(s), preferences and personal experiences [4]-[23], especially for on-site interpretation.

Included in the questionnaire was the use of Experiential Design Principles or EDP as proposed by Pine and Gilmore in 1999. EDP argues that experiences fall into four distinctive realms - the entertainment, education, esthetic or escapist realms (Figure 2). In addition, these experiences are core in the cultural heritage ‘industry’ that includes assessment, planning, management and or interpretation activities. For urban heritage trails, the EDP assists the researcher “to ascertain whether the experiential design principles proposed by Pine and Gilmore had been incorporated and if so, to what extent” [12]-[14]. Hence, EDP helps to focus on the quality of respondent experience(s) during the trail exploration.

![Figure 2. Experiential Design Principles and its Realms. Source: Adapted from [29].](image)

Therefore, the questionnaire involved two types of questions; (a) closed-ended (Section 1 – 3) and (b) open-ended questions (Section 4). Open-ended question offered the chance for respondents to express qualitative values, thereby offering more feedback from the respondent with little influence or bias by the questioner.

To reduce heritage buildings mis-identification, maps and locations of the selected heritage buildings and spaces were attached with the questionnaire (Figure 3). Image inclusion images aided in respondent veracity and response rates [9]. Data gathered was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software and was subsequently interpreted.
Figure 3. Maps and location of the selected heritage buildings and spaces located in Heritage Trail 01 and Heritage Trail 02.

4. Findings
Data were collected online during February and March 2021. A total of 167 questionnaires were completed from a total of 200 distributed (83.5% rate). 33 questionnaires were excluded from the survey as respondents had only journeyed on one heritage trail from the two included in the questionnaire (therefore 67% rate). Participants selected must have experience both trails to ensure the validity of the data.

Findings from the survey conducted evidenced that the majority of respondents (N = 167) were female (68.9%), and aged between 20–24 years old (58.6%). The home location (place of residence) data depicts that heritage trails have a value in attracting visitors to explore the trails especially for those living outside KL or in neighbouring Selangor state (65.2%, n=109) (Figure 4.).

4.1. Findings from the case of Heritage Trail 01: Medan Pasar or Market Square
Amongst the heritage buildings and spaces listed in the trail, the highest recognition by respondents was given to the Medan Pasar plaza. Some 33% of respondents strongly preferred, and 35% agreed, that Medan Pasar is the main cultural attraction of Heritage Trail 01. This result was followed by the MS Alley Company area (Strongly preferred = 24%, Moderately to strongly preferred = 35%). However, for the OCBC Building and the Old Gian Singh Building, only 13% of respondents identified that these buildings contributed to the historical values of the area (Figure 5).
Figure 5. Preferable heritage buildings located along Heritage Trail 01.

4.2. Findings from the case of Heritage Trail 02: Dataran Merdeka or Merdeka Square
From the list of buildings along Heritage Trail 02, almost all respondents acknowledged Dataran Merdeka as being the main contributor to the trail, with 60% being strongly preferred (n = 100) and 40% in moderately to strongly preferred. In contrast, the Industrial Court was less valued by the respondents with only 17% identifying with its cultural or aesthetic values (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Preferable heritage buildings located along Heritage Trail 02.
4.3. Findings from the case of Heritage Trail 01 and Heritage Trail 02

Statistical analysis of questionnaires revealed that respondents preferred open spaces -- Medan Pasar (Heritage Trail 01) and Dataran Merdeka (Heritage Trail 02) -- as the key elements along the trails (Figure 5 and Figure 6). This evidences that respondents are aware of these spaces even though they are physically surrounded by iconic heritage buildings. It demonstrates that these spaces should be properly acknowledged as core contributors to the Old Town’s identity and the nuclei for cultural diversity in this area [20].

When asked about their most preferred trail, 86% of respondents voted for Heritage Trail 02. When asked about the main reason why Heritage Trail 02 was selected, 54% responded that this trail provided aesthetic experiences during the exploration (Figure 7). This statistically finding corroborates Jurowski in 2009 whom stated that “visiting a historical site is classified as esthetic experiences because the visitors are passively appreciating and are not becoming actively involved” [10]. In terms of Experiential Design Principles, aesthetic experiences possess passive and immersion experiences. Passive absorption allows visitors to use their senses to appreciate surroundings and at the same time allows the mind to be immersed by the surroundings [10]-[29].

![Figure 7. Preferable heritage trail and realm of experiences.](image)

From the open-ended questions, that invited visitors’ thoughts on new attractions, some 75% of respondents pointed to cultural activities comprising night markets and cultural festivals (including art and painting activities), some 16.7% on introducing more 3D arts along the trails, 5.6% were interested in mural painting, and 2.7% suggested increasing the numbers of stores that sell arts or crafts related to KL (Figure 8). Because a majority of respondents were from young generations (Refer Figure 4), this finding indirectly points to the importance of designing heritage places in a “youth-friendly way” to cater for these users’ interests [7]-[18].

![Figure 8. Potential attractions proposed by the respondents for the heritage trails.](image)
5. Discussion
As argued by past research, the success of urban heritage trails is dependent upon the empowerment of their development by key stakeholders but should be informed by local community involvement and responses arising from the integration of user experiences. As argued by Cantillon, the actual lived experience of exploring a heritage trail can “diverge considerably from the expectations” established through brochures or websites and thus “create possibilities for a mismatch between expectations created with literature and the reality of the experience on the ground” [2]. Therefore, coordination between the community, users and stakeholders is crucial in ensuring positive impacts for a trail especially in promoting heritage. As concluded by Orbašli, “placing community at the heart of decision-making and pioneering locally-driven bottom-up approaches” [24].

These research findings also revealed that urban heritage spaces require more than one criteria in designing an urban heritage trail. Mapping the urban heritage spaces is challenging, but this task ensures quality promotion of and sustenance of the local identity. Allied research demonstrates that heritage spaces also contribute to the “quality of the environment in which people live and work” and therefore the “quality of heritage conservation in the urban area” [5]. Thus, heritage spaces and not just buildings should also be equally conserved to ensure that the local identity conserved. In addition, integrating urban heritage spaces into trails also contributes social, environmental, cultural and economic benefits. While a narrative upon identity and urban history can be interpreted through a trail the success of a trail occurs where “the emphasis has been on streetscape beautification rather than a holistic approach to the urban fabric” and is not comprised by tourism developments [27].

6. Conclusion & recommendations
This research concludes that the heritage buildings, spaces and unique cultural identities need to be equally considered, and not just the propensity upon the former, in urban heritage trail development and interpretation. It is also important to addresses the aspirations of younger generations in serving as outdoor museums for learning and experiencing the heritage and culture of a place. This may better aid cross-generational appreciation of heritage values. Again, co-creation of trails between stakeholders, local residents and visitor is essential in enhancing cultural experience for all users. Participation from the local residents is “more effective in introducing the whole entity of a historic town as well as boosting heritage awareness among residents” [16].

Through a bottom-up policy approach, stakeholders can promote the uniqueness of trails. However, to gain more comprehensive experience research, a questionnaire should also be conducted amongst stakeholder, trail designer and also non-government organizations.

This research technique offers replicability to other urban heritage trails in Malaysia to enable a comparative study. This includes further investigation on identifying the connections between the four realms highlighted in the Experiential Design Principles.

While this research revealed that respondent visitors prioritised aesthetic activities, this research did not address the existence of a “sweet spot”. From Pine and Gilmore’s theory, a “sweet spot” could be attained when all four realms are experienced. Therefore, more research is needed to validate the existence of a “sweet spot” and the role that all four realms play in visitor satisfaction. Future research should also investigate crucial and unexplored aspects of visitor experiences in urban heritage settings towards realising an “engaged, multi-vocal and sensory experience of place” of a trail [14].

Future research should also addresses other types of urban heritage trails, including government-generated, market-oriented, and community-based initiatives, because each type of trail represents a different approach and identity [1]. Research constraints due to the Covid-19 outbreak in Malaysia also limited the focus of this research study restricting it to only local visitors. It is hoped that future research can involve a variety of respondents to help the researchers obtain more comprehensive findings.
References

[1] Barber L B 2019 Heritage tours and trails on foot in Hong Kong. Journal of Heritage Tourism. 14 pp 295-307
[2] Cantillon Z 2020 Urban Heritage Walks in a Rapidly Changing City Journal of Heritage Tourism. 15 pp 149-163
[3] Carmona M and Punter J 2013 The Design Dimension of Planning (Routledge)
[4] Chen C F and Chen P C 2009 Exploring Tourist Preferences of Heritage Attractions: Evidence from discrete choice modeling in Taiwan Travel and Tourism Research Association Conf. (Hawaii)
[5] Dameria C, Akbar R, and Indradjati P N 2018 Whose Sense of Place? Re-thinking Place Concept and Urban Heritage Conservation in Social Media Era IOP Conference Series Earth and Environmental Science. 158 pp 1-13
[6] Google Maps (Cartographer) 2021
[7] Ismail W H W and Nadarajah J R 2016 Young Visitors in the City Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences. 234
[8] Jabatan Perancangan Bandaraya 2018 Jejak Warisan Kuala Lumpur: Ringkasan Eksekutif (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur)
[9] Jones T, Baxter M and Khanduja V 2014 A quick guide to survey research Annals of The Royal College of Surgeons of England. 95 pp 5-7
[10] Jurowski C 2009 An Examination of the Four Realms of Tourism Experience Theory Int. Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education Con (San Francisco)
[11] Kuala Lumpur City Hall 2020 Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020 (Kuala Lumpur: Kuala Lumpur City Hall)
[12] MacLeod N 2012 Cultural Routes, Trails and the Experience of Place Handbook of Cultural Tourism (London: Routledge)
[13] MacLeod N 2016 Self-Guided Trails – A Route to More Responsible Tourism? Tourism Recreation Research. 41 pp 134-144
[14] MacLeod N 2017 The Role of Trails in the Creation of Tourist Space Journal of Heritage Tourism. 12 pp 423-430
[15] MacLeod N and Hayes D 2013 Understanding Self-Guided Trails Managing Leisure. 18 pp 257-272
[16] Malaysian Urban Conservation Initiatives Creation of Heritage Trail in the Historic Town of Taiping, Malaysia
[17] Miles S 2017 Remembrance Trails of the Great War on the Western Front Journal of Heritage Tourism. 12 pp 441-451
[18] Morrison J 2019 Are heritage attractions doing enough to attract young visitors? Museums + Heritage
[19] Nayan N M 2017 Conservation of Heritage Curtilages in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. (Ph.D), The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia
[20] Nayan N M, Jones D S and Ahmad S 2019 Historic Open Space: The Identity of [Padang] Merdeka Square, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Asian Journal of Behavioural Studies. 4 pp 29-39
[21] Nayan N M, Jones D S, Bahaluddin A, Ghani I A and Rahman N A 2020 Designating Urban Rivers as National Heritage IOP Conference Series Earth and Environmental Science. 409 pp 1-11
[22] New South Wales Heritage Office 1995 Guidelines for Heritage Trails (Sydney: New South Wales Heritage Office)
[23] Nihayah D M, Fafurida Kistanti N R and Handaru, A W 2020 Assessing Visitor Preferences as to Sustainable Heritage Tourism International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. 13 pp 345-358
[24] Orbasli A 2017a Conservation Theory in the Twenty-First Century Journal of Architectural Conservation. 23 pp 157-170
[25] Orbaşlı A 2017b The Historic Towns of Saudi Arabia’s Red Sea Coast: Tourism Development and Conservation Human Interaction with the Environment in the Red Sea (Brill) pp 207-227
[26] Orbaşlı, A 2000 Tourists in Historic Towns: Urban Conservation and Heritage Management (1st ed.) (London: Taylor & Francis)
[27] Orbaşlı A 2018 Urban Heritage in the Middle East: Heritage, tourism and the shaping of new identities Routledge handbook on tourism in the Middle East and North Africa (Routledge) pp 95-105
[28] Orbaşlı A and Vellinga M 2020 Architectural Regeneration (Wiley-Blackwell)
[29] Pine B J and Gilmore J H 2011 The Experience Economy (Vol. Updated version) (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press)
[30] Shamsuddin S 2018 Pelan Induk Jejak Warisan Kuala Lumpur (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur)
[31] Timothy D J and Boyd S W 2015 Tourism and Trails: Cultural, Ecological and Management Issues (Channel View Publications)