

AN ASSESSMENT OF SENSE OF PLACE  
IN KOTA BHARU CULTURAL HERITAGE ZONE  
AMONG TOURISTS

BY

NIK MOHAMAD AIZAT BIN NIK MOHD ADIB

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Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design  
International Islamic University Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

There are many types of tourism and one of them is heritage tourism. In order to attract tourists to revisit and prolong their stay in historical sites, the sites must preserve its unique and authentic identity as well as its sense of place. Tourist who tends to revisit to same site or staying longer within the site is a proof of strong sense of place of that particular tourism site. Conflict arose in cultural identity and Islamic identity has caused tourist lack of excitement thus staying less longer in Kelantan tourism site and physical characteristic decrease in authenticity of Kota Bharu has caused tourist revisit number is low. This research assesses the relationship between sense of place and tourists' frequency of visit and length of stay in Kota Bharu Cultural Heritage Zone based on Bott's Psychometric Scale. This research's methodology is based on the mixed method using both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview). The sample consists of 445 respondents among domestic and international tourists. Statistical analysis of descriptive analysis and inferential analysis - ANOVA were the main methods used. 10 interviewees among government agencies officers and tourism businesses were involved in the structured interview as the medium for the validation of quantitative data of this study. In the research, sense of place of Kota Bharu Cultural Heritage Zone is significance in the context of length of stay which are 'built environment scale', 'character scale', 'inherent socio-cultural scale', 'transactional socio-cultural scale', 'significant scale', 'aesthetic scale', 'informational scale' and well-being scale' while all scales of sense of place of Kota Bharu Cultural Heritage Zone are not significance in the context of frequency of visit since the area presents less influence on tourists' decisions to revisit the heritage zone. The result indicates that the sense of place in Kota Bharu Cultural Heritage Zone has less influence on the tourists' frequency of visit but does influence tourists' length of stay in the zone. Hence, this study has identified and explored the gap in tourism research in terms of the relationship between sense of place and tourist behaviors, particularly tourists' intentions to revisit and their duration of stay in a historical site. The findings are helpful to the government and business owners in planning attractions for tourist and sustaining the social and economic importance of historical areas.

## خلاصة البحث

تتعدد أنواع السياحة وأحدها السياحة التراثية. من أجل جذب السياح لإعادة زيارة المواقع التاريخية وإطالة مدة إقامتهم، يجب أن تحافظ المواقع على هويتها الفريدة والأصيلة بالإضافة إلى إحساسها بالمكان. السائح الذي يميل إلى العودة إلى نفس الموقع أو البقاء لفترة أطول داخل الموقع هو دليل على إحساس قوي بالمكان لهذا الموقع السياحي المعين. نشأ الصراع في الهوية الثقافية والهوية الإسلامية تسببت في افتقار السائح إلى الإثارة وبالتالي البقاء لفترة أطول في موقع السياحة في كلانتان، وقد تسبب انخفاض الخصائص المادية في أصالة كوتا بهارو في انخفاض عدد السياح مرة أخرى. يقيم هذا البحث العلاقة بين الإحساس بالمكان وتكرار الزيارة التي يقوم بها السائحون وطول مدة إقامتهم في منطقة التراث الثقافي في كوتا بهارو استناداً إلى معيار قياس بوت النفسي. تعتمد منهجية هذا البحث على الطريقة المختلطة باستخدام كل من الكمية (الاستبانة) والنوعية (المقابلة). تتكون العينة من 445 مشاركاً من بين السياح المحليين والدوليين. وكانت تحليل ANOVA هي الطرق الرئيسية المستخدمة في التحليل الإحصائي للتحليل الوصفي والتحليل الاستنتاجي. شارك 10 من الذين تمت مقابلتهم من بين مسؤولي الوكالات الحكومية وشركات السياحة في المقابلة المنظمة كوسيلة للتحقق من صحة البيانات الكمية لهذه الدراسة. في البحث، يُعد الإحساس بمكان منطقة التراث الثقافي في كوتا بهارو مهماً في سياق مدة الإقامة وهي "مقياس البيئة المبنية"، و"مقياس الشخصية"، و"المقياس الاجتماعي الثقافي المتأصل"، و"المقياس الاجتماعي والثقافي للمعاملات"، و"مقياس كبير"، و"مقياس جمالي"، و"مقياس معلوماتي" ومقياس الرفاهية " بينما جميع مقاييس الإحساس بمكان منطقة كوتا بهارو للتراث الثقافي ليست ذات أهمية في سياق تكرار الزيارة نظرًا لأن المنطقة تقدم تأثيراً أقل بشأن قرارات السائحين بإعادة زيارة المنطقة التراثية. تشير النتيجة إلى أن الإحساس بالمكان في منطقة التراث الثقافي في كوتا بهارو له تأثير أقل على تواتر زيارة السائحين ولكنه يؤثر على مدة إقامة السائحين في المنطقة. ومن ثم، حددت هذه الدراسة واستكشفت الفجوة في البحث السياحي من حيث العلاقة بين الإحساس بالمكان والسلوك السياحي، ولا سيما نوايا السائحين في العودة ومدة إقامتهم في موقع تاريخي. تكون النتائج مفيدة للحكومة وأصحاب الأعمال في تخطيط مناطق الجذب للسياح والحفاظ على الأهمية الاجتماعية والاقتصادية للمناطق التاريخية.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that i have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science (Built Environment).

.....  
Syakir Amir Ab Rahman  
Supervisor

.....  
Noor Suzilawati Rabe  
Co-Supervisor

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science (Built Environment).

.....  
Khalilah Zakariya  
Internal Examiner

.....  
Roslizawati Che Aziz  
External Examiner

This thesis was submitted to the Department of Urban and Regional Planning and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science (Built Environment)

.....  
Syafiee Shuid  
Head Department of  
Urban and Regional Planning

This thesis was submitted to the Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science (Built Environment)

.....  
Abdul Razak Sopian  
Dean, Kulliyyah of  
Architecture and Environmental Design

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
FOV	Frequency of Visit
LOS	Length of Stay
MPKB-BRI	Kota Bharu Municipal Council Islamic City
MDK-PI	Ketereh District Council Islamic Municipal
<i>n</i>	Sample Size
PlanMalaysia	Federal Department of Town and Country Planning
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTO	World Tourism Organization
Y	Dependent Variable
X	Independent Variable

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Sense of place which is composed of place identity, place attachment and place dependence is often linked with the attitude, experience and perception of people towards a particular place (McCunn & Gifford, 2014). The significance of a place becomes a factor for the establishment of a sense of place among people. People who have a strong emotional relationship with a particular place, influence the level of sense of place within the location. This means that a place can be meaningful and significant because it has unique and significant characteristics that people perceive as beloved symbols. Najafi, Kamal, & Mohd (2011) define sense of place as a particular experience of a person in a particular setting that includes feelings like stimulation, excitement, joy and expansiveness. Sense of place is a bond that connects individuals and their meaningful places (Tan, Tan, Kok, & Choon, 2018). McCunn & Gifford (2014) and Pretty, Chipuer, & Bramston (2003) mentioned that bonding and emotion are associated with the individual's perceptions of their identity in relation to the physical environment. These become the central concept of sense of place.

The primary elements that combine to create a sense of place or place identity are namely the history of a place, the physical environment or landscape of a place and the community of a place (Mcewen, 2014). Today, place identity is weakening due to urban regeneration in historic cities leading to a decline in authenticity of the cultural heritage site (Norsidah Ujang, 2010). This happens because of unsystematic urban planning process all around the world that tends to neglect the sense of place in the preservation of historical sites (Goussous & Al-Hammadi, 2018). The revitalization of

the historic sites does not take into account the place identity, spirit and attachment felt by tourists and the community. The degradation of sense of place in heritage sites is also accelerated by mass cultural tourism which decreases the authenticity of the cultural heritage values in the site. Although sense of place has been deemed as an important notion for planners as it is understood to have both economic and social benefits, profound social, economic, and cultural transformations have made it increasingly difficult to retain a sense of local place and its particularity (Belshaw, 2017).

The number of tourists visiting Kelantan was around 5 million people in the year 2017, the lowest percentage among other states in Malaysia (Kelantan Tourism Information Centre, 2017). The tourists visiting Kelantan also has issues regarding revisit and staying longer in the area due to several reason (Tourism Malaysia, 2017). To date, limited studies have been done to assess and validate the relationship between the sense of place and tourism areas, particularly historical cultural sites in Kelantan and whether the tourists' bonding and emotions are significantly affected by the authenticity of historic sites in the area.

Kota Bharu has been declared as a 'Cultural City' in the year 1991 by Kelantan's monarch at the time, Sultan Ismail Petra based on two elements: historical and arts and culture that reflect its authenticity (Hassan et al., 2017). Kota Bharu Cultural Heritage Zone (Zon Warisan Budaya) was chosen as the study area since it has been gazetted by the state government to promote local culture, prominent historical items, and a notable architectural style with the intention of developing Kota Bharu as a prime tourist destination. The zone itself is rich in culture with vibrant markets and mosques as well as various museums and former royal iconic buildings that uniquely contribute to the majestic cultural and architectural landscapes right in the heart of the Kota Bharu city

center. The study will be carried out to identify the sense of place among tourists in Kota Bharu Cultural Heritage Zone.

## **1.2 RESEARCH ISSUES AND PROBLEMS**

### **1.2.1 The decrease of cultural identity in historical sites due to mass tourism**

The current development of cultural tourism that only prioritize large numbers of visitors has been seen as the adaptation of mass cultural tourism which offers standardized and unified experiences and products; degrades local values; disrupts authenticity; and represents a threat to cultural heritage and identity (Domšic, 2013). Smith & Robinson (2006) and Urosevic (2012) supported the claim that mass cultural tourism, as part of the globalization process in cultural tourism, does not provide exclusively an opportunity for preservation of local cultures and heritage. Akis (2011), Csapo (2012) and Richards (2018) agreed that the introduction of mass tourism destroys the culture that the tourists seek and gives negative impact on the local culture and population. Vainikka (2013) and Williams (2002) stated that mass tourism only focuses on profit, targeting large numbers of tourist and leads to inflexible, cheap and predetermined itineraries while ignoring the significance of actual historic value. These would only be provided in standardized forms with relatively minimal levels of services and facilities. Yasmin Mohd Faudzi (2018) mentioned in Kota Bharu, the urban redevelopment has caused significant impacts on heritage buildings' facade which has been neglected by society to give way to contemporary architectural design that does not match the cultural identity of traditional Kelantanese in order to accommodate high volume of visitors. As a consequence, Kota Bharu has come under pressure during the urbanization process which led to negatively impact the cultural heritage and authenticity value to the community (Najihah et al., 2020). In addition, Hashim et al.,

(2020) stated that the physical characteristic decrease in authenticity of Kota Bharu has caused tourist revisit number is low. Therefore, mass cultural tourism presents negative impacts towards the authenticity of heritage sites.

### **1.2.2 The weakening of place identity through urban regeneration in historical sites**

According to Lai, Said, & Kubota (2013), problems such as the decline of local identities and incompatible developments in Malaysia's historical districts have decayed the characteristics of the areas. The impact of new development, such as new commercial buildings, replacing the existing traditional shop houses has destroyed local traditional street vendors and significant cultural open spaces. In Melaka, due to the economic benefit that the communities are able to gain in the living heritage sites, some events have been "commercialized" to attract tourists to the point that their authenticity has been compromised (Aziz, 2017). Other than economic factors, the changes in the community's lifestyle has also become a factor in the erosion of traditional culture. When standards of living were generally upgraded, lifestyles gradually changed due to modern development. Consequently, features such as open spaces, streets and traditional activities, attributes that give a city its unique character and provide the sense of belonging to its community are continuously disappearing (Harun & Said, 2008). Ghapar, Zakariya, Harun, & Zen (2016) argued that urban regeneration has failed to take into account the cultural environment and that development has failed to provide a broad-minded solution, ending up as urban standardization and sacrifices uniqueness. The failure of urban regeneration in tackling the authenticity of historical sites is due to the uniform concepts of planning and development together with the commodification of places which have led to the loss of local identity (Norsidah Ujang, 2010) and it may

be caused by lack of cultural conservation emphasis in urban planning theory which presents a challenge to local adaptation of planning practices (Zainal Abidin, 2016). These are the trends in new development projects in Malaysian cultural heritage sites which are causing the decrease of authenticity in historical areas. In the scope of Kota Bharu, capital city of Kelantan, also known as ‘cultural city’ is facing dilemma of changing its identity into an Islamic city (Norlizaiha Harun, Zuraini Md Ali & Rodiah Zawawi, 2005). Hasnina Hassan, Ghazali Ahmad & Roslizawati Che Aziz (2017) stated after the declaration of ‘Islamic City’ in year 2005, the landscape and urban design of Kota Bharu is in the direction of creating a city which could be related to Islamic identity thus created the conflict of place identity between Islamic design and vernacular regional identity (Mohd Rusdi & Ismail Hafiz, 2009). Kvam (2011) mentioned that for people taking a special interest in Malay culture a stay in Kelantan and Kota Bharu must be a tremendous disappointment. Abdul Hazif, Mohd Rusdi & Norazah Suki (2020) also mentioned that effect of confusing in cultural identity has caused tourist lack of excitement thus staying less longer in Kelantan tourism site. It is important to make a distinction between historical sites from modern spatial developments in order to formulate suitable regeneration strategies that will conserve and sustain the local culture and historical site richness.

### **1.2.3 Lack of study on sense of place and heritage sites in Kelantan has caused a lack of emphasis on sense of place in Kelantan cultural tourism planning**

To date, several researches have explored place identity and heritage sites in Kelantan (e.g. Hassan et al., 2017; Mohd Nasir & Salleh, 2014) but none have tackled the aspect of sense of place among the local community and tourists. Firdaus Sufahani, Ismail, & Muhammad (2013) have discussed international tourists’ behavior in Kelantan without

relating it to heritage sites. Saad & Radzi (2011) on the other hand, have covered the administration of Kota Bharu from the Islamic perspective, which touched upon sense of place in relation to strengthening the identity of Islam through Kota Bharu's physical appearance. A recent research by Ahmad & Hassan, (2018) covered tourist perceptions on Kota Bharu's image as an Islamic City. It can be clearly seen that recent researches about Kelantan have been separating sense of place and heritage sites without attempting to relate them to one another.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Three research questions were raised from the problem statements above, as follows;

**Question 1:** How does the decreasing cultural identity affect the involvement of tourists in a cultural heritage site?

**Question 2:** How does tourists' perception of sense of place affect tourists' length of stay and frequency of visit?

**Question 3:** What are the recommendations to improve the sense of place in heritage sites in Kelantan?

### **1.4 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The aim of the research is to study the sense of place among tourists in Kota Bharu Heritage Zone.

Four objectives are designed to achieve the research aim as listed below:

**Objective 1:** To study the concept of sense of place and cultural heritage tourism.

**Objective 2:** To study the relationship between length of stay and sense of place among tourists in Kota Bharu Cultural Heritage Zone.