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"Warning in Spaces: Blending Heritage, Nature and Design"

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Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (Hons.)
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Faculty of Built Environment, UiTM Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus



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"Harmony in Spaces : Blending Heritage, Nature and Design"

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Visitors' Motivation and Spatial Experience at Kellie's Castle, Batu Gajah, Perak.

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Abstract

This study identifies the major reasons for visitor interest at Kellie's Castle and explains how these needs influence their space experience. Kellie's Castle in Batu Gajah, Perak is a heritage site recognised for its unfinished colonial architecture and unique spatial qualities. This study examines visitors' motivations and spatial experiences, focusing on how architectural, environmental, and landscape features influence behaviour and perception. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining questionnaires with 65 visitors and site observations over two days. Quantitative data were analysed with descriptive statistics, while qualitative observations recorded visitor movement, activities, social interactions, and time spent across indoor spaces, courtyards, gardens, and surrounding landscapes.

Results show that visitors are mainly motivated by physical and aesthetic features rather than folklore or mystical stories. Architectural design and spatial experience were the strongest motivators, followed by historical significance and opportunities for photography and social media. Outdoor areas encouraged longer visits, relaxation, and social interaction, while indoor spaces supported exploration and historical learning. Visitors experienced the castle as a sequence of connected spatial zones, highlighting the importance of variety and transitions. This study links visitor motivation, spatial experience, and environmental characteristics, providing insights for heritage site management, conservation planning, and enhancing visitor experiences.

Keyword: Tourist motivation, Visitor experience, Heritage tourism, Cultural landscape, Kellie's Castle

INTRODUCTION

A cultural landscape is broadly defined as a geographic area that includes both cultural and natural resources, associated with the historical evolution of societies, reflecting the interaction between people and their environment (UNESCO, 2008). It includes tangible elements like buildings, monuments, and geographical features, as well as intangible elements like traditions, rituals, and cultural identity. Cultural landscapes represent collective memory and identity, functioning as a dynamic history of human adaptability, inventiveness, and harmonious interaction with the natural environment. Conservation of cultural landscapes involves maintaining their significance, authenticity, and integrity while also accommodating continuing social and economic development (Nandy, 2022). Sustainable heritage conservation aims to balance the preservation of cultural and natural heritage with environmental, social, and economic sustainability. This involves preserving heritage resources while ensuring they keep helping communities and improving people's well-being.

Kellie's Castle is located amidst scenic plantations and the Raya River in Batu Gajah, Perak, Malaysia, serves as a prime example of a cultural landscape that fuses Moorish, Indo-Saracenic, and European architectural styles with its natural surroundings, drawing visitors through its unfinished colonial grandeur, captivating mystical legends, and dark tourism appeal (Krishnan et al., 2020; Chin Yen Tim et al., 2022). Officially designated as a National Heritage Site under Malaysia's National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645), the castle benefits from comprehensive legal protections that encompass both tangible elements like its structures, gardens, courtyards, and river views, as well as intangible aspects such as historical narratives and cultural identity, ensuring conservation efforts reflect human-environment interactions while promoting sustainable tourism in line with the Malaysia MADANI framework's emphasis on prosperity and environmental stewardship (National Heritage Act, 2005; Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, 2024).

Despite its growing popularity, a significant research gap exists in understanding the precise motivations ranging from architectural fascination and cultural novelty to scenic relaxation that attract visitors and shape their spatial experiences across the site's interiors, gardens, courtyards, and landscapes (Ramli et al., 2024; Chin Yen Tim et al., 2022). This lack of insight challenges effective visitor management and heritage preservation, particularly in harmonizing the site's constructed history with its natural setting to sustain tourism without compromising authenticity. This study on "Visitors' Motivation and Spatial Experience at Kellie's Castle" addresses this gap by exploring these dynamics, thereby contributing to SDG 11 for sustainable communities and informing national policies for responsible heritage tourism in Malaysia (Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, 2024).

This research aims to investigate visitors' motivations and their interactions with the castle's spatial features, delivering actionable insights to enhance heritage tourism management and conservation. Specifically, it seeks to identify primary motivators, including architectural, cultural, and experiential factors, examine patterns of spatial engagement across key zones, and evaluate how the surrounding landscape influences overall perceptions and satisfaction, ultimately supporting strategies that preserve the site's cultural and natural value for future generations (Ramli et al., 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Heritage Tourism Motivations

Heritage tourism motivations refer to the underlying reasons that drive individuals to visit heritage-related destinations, including historical sites, monuments, and culturally significant places. Globally, heritage tourism has been defined as tourism focused on experiencing the past through tangible and intangible heritage, where visitors seek knowledge, authenticity, and emotional connection (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). Recent studies emphasise that visitor motivations are multidimensional, combining educational interests, cultural curiosity, nostalgia, identity-seeking, and aesthetic appreciation rather than purely leisure-based intentions (Su et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022). These motivations are often explained using the push-pull framework, where internal psychological needs (push factors) interact with destination attributes such as historical narratives, architecture, and symbolism (Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

In Malaysia, heritage tourism motivation studies conducted after 2020 focus mainly on UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as Melaka and George Town, revealing that visitors are motivated by learning local history, cultural pride, photography opportunities, and experiential authenticity (Rahman et al., 2021; Omar

et al., 2023). However, these studies largely overlook secondary heritage destinations and non-UNESCO sites. As a result, limited empirical research exists on visitor motivations at sites like Kellie's Castle in Perak, which differs significantly in historical background and experiential character. This gap highlights the need to examine visitor motivations in less-studied heritage contexts to understand how unique narratives and spatial characteristics influence visitation.

Spatial Experience in Heritage Sites

Spatial experience in heritage sites refers to how visitors perceive, move through, interpret, and emotionally engage with physical spaces shaped by historical and cultural meanings. It includes spatial layout, architectural form, circulation, scale, sensory qualities, and atmosphere, all of which influence visitors' understanding and memory of a place (Pallasmaa, 2012; Zhang et al., 2023). Recent global research highlights that spatial experience plays a crucial role in shaping sense of place, visitor satisfaction, and emotional attachment in heritage environments, moving beyond purely visual appreciation toward embodied and experiential engagement.

In the Malaysian context, most heritage-related studies emphasise conservation practices, tourism management, and interpretation strategies rather than visitors' spatial experiences (Salleh et al., 2020). Although some recent studies acknowledge the importance of atmosphere and place attachment, empirical research that systematically examines how visitors experience and interpret heritage spaces remains limited. This research gap is particularly evident at Kellie's Castle, where unfinished architecture, complex spatial sequences, and ambiguous spaces may generate distinctive spatial experiences that differ from conventional heritage sites.

Batu Gajah and Kellie's Castle

Batu Gajah is a historic town in the Kinta District of Perak, whose development was strongly influenced by tin mining and rubber plantation activities during the British colonial period. Perak played a significant role in Malaya's colonial economy, attracting European investors and administrators who shaped the region's physical and social landscape (Rahman & Zainal, 2022). Batu Gajah emerged as an administrative and residential centre for colonial elites, and today it is visited for its historical associations, colonial-era remnants, and proximity to heritage attractions that reflect Perak's economic and colonial past.

Within this context, Kellie's Castle is the most prominent heritage attraction in Batu Gajah. Constructed by Scottish planter William Kellie Smith in the early twentieth century, the castle features a unique combination of Moorish, Indo-Saracenic, and European architectural styles (Visit Perak, n.d.; Malaysia.Travel, 2025). The building was left unfinished following Kellie Smith's death in 1926, and this incomplete condition has become central to its attraction. Visitors are drawn by its dramatic architecture, historical narrative, and mysterious spatial elements such as tunnels, hidden staircases, and open terraces, making Kellie's Castle a distinctive heritage site suitable for studying both visitor motivation and spatial experience.

Dark Tourism Dimensions

Dark tourism refers to tourism activities associated with places linked to death, tragedy, suffering, or the macabre, whether historically documented or socially constructed (Stone, 2006). Contemporary research views dark tourism as a spectrum rather than a fixed category, ranging from sites of real tragedy to places

shaped by legend, mystery, and imagination (Light, 2017). Recent studies indicate that dark tourism motivations include curiosity, emotional intensity, fascination with the unknown, and the desire for unusual or eerie experiences (Biran et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, dark tourism research remains limited but has gained attention in recent years, particularly in relation to folklore, ghost stories, and cultural beliefs (Hanafiah et al., 2021). Kellie's Castle is frequently associated with paranormal narratives and ghost legends, which contribute to its reputation as a haunted site. The spatial qualities of the castle—such as dim corridors, unfinished rooms, and isolated viewpoints—enhance this dark atmosphere. However, existing studies rarely examine how dark tourism motivations are shaped by spatial experience, highlighting a significant research gap that this study aims to address.

Research Gap and Implications

A review of existing literature reveals several critical gaps. First, many heritage tourism studies examine visitor motivations and visitor experiences separately, with limited integration of spatial experience as a core analytical dimension. Second, Malaysian heritage tourism research is heavily concentrated on major UNESCO-listed sites, resulting in a lack of empirical studies on secondary heritage destinations such as Kellie's Castle. Third, while dark tourism has been increasingly discussed, research in Malaysia remains largely perception-based and rarely considers spatial characteristics as influencing factors.

This research is therefore significant because it integrates visitor motivations and spatial experience within a single heritage site that embodies both heritage and dark tourism dimensions. Kellie's Castle's unfinished architecture, layered historical narratives, and atmospheric spaces provide a unique setting to explore how motivations influence spatial perception and movement. By addressing these gaps, this study contributes to heritage tourism theory, enriches understanding of experiential heritage spaces, and offers practical insights for heritage management and tourism planning in Batu Gajah and Perak.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine Visitors' Motivation and Spatial Experience at Kellie's Castle, Batu Gajah, Perak, with a dominant emphasis on quantitative methods. The primary data collection involves a structured questionnaire administered directly to visitors, focusing on gathering numerical data related to their motivations, expectations, spatial experiences, and overall satisfaction through Likert-scale and closed-ended questions. Complementing this, qualitative site observations will document visitor behaviour and interactions within key areas of the castle, providing contextual insights into how the physical environment shapes their experience. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive understanding, with quantitative analysis serving as the dominant framework.

Site Selection

Kellie's Castle, a historical landmark in Batu Gajah, Perak, Malaysia, was built in the early 20th century by William Kellie-Smith, a Scottish planter. The castle is an unfinished mansion known for its unique mix of Scottish, Moorish, and Indian architectural styles. Over time, it has become a famous heritage site, admired for its architectural grandeur and historical mystique.

The location of Kellie's Castle was influenced by the colonial-era economy of the Kinta Valley. It was built

near Batu Gajah, the main administrative hub at the time, due to the thriving tin mining industry. The castle sits on a “changkat,” or hilly terrain, offering a commanding view and a cooler climate. Its proximity to the Kinta River, the main transport route of the period, made it accessible for moving people and goods.

According to the Local Act of Majlis Daerah Batu Gajah (RT MDBG) 2035, Kellie’s Castle is protected for its heritage value while being developed as a tourism attraction. Efforts include “Dark Tourism” experiences that highlight its mysterious history and connections to nearby sites like Pekan Papan. Upgrades to roads and visitor facilities are planned to improve accessibility. The site is managed collaboratively by Tourism Perak, MDBG, and the National Heritage Department (JWN), aiming to strengthen Batu Gajah’s historical significance and attract heritage tourism investment in the Kinta Valley.



Figure 1 : Location Plan, Kellie’s Castle at Batu Gajah, Perak

The study integrates both quantitative and qualitative techniques to understand Visitors' Motivation and Spatial Experience at Kellie’s Castle, Batu Gajah, Perak.

Qualitative: Observation

To ensure consistency with the quantitative framework of the study, the site observation was guided by structured themes aligned with the questionnaire sections. Architectural experience (Section A) focused on how visitors engaged with key architectural elements such as staircases, arches, corridors, and façades, including behaviours such as pausing, photographing, and discussing architectural features. Indoor and outdoor environmental experience (Section B) examined differences in visitor behaviour, comfort, and activity patterns within interior spaces, courtyards, and gardens, particularly in relation to social interaction, relaxation, and duration of stay. Spatial experience (Section C) concentrated on visitors’ movement patterns across distinct zones of the castle, including transitions between spaces, concentration of visitors in specific areas, group size variation, and the length of time spent in each zone. These observation themes allowed qualitative behavioural data to be systematically interpreted in relation to architectural qualities, indoor–outdoor environmental conditions, and spatial sequencing, thereby supporting triangulation with the questionnaire findings.

Quantitative: Questionnaire

This study employs a quantitative research approach using a structured questionnaire administered to tourists at Kellie's Castle to systematically examine visitor motivation and spatial experience. The questionnaire is organised into four main sections: Section A (respondent profile and visit characteristics), Section B (architectural experience), Section C (indoor and outdoor environmental experience), and Section D (spatial experience by zone). Section A collects demographic and visit-related data to allow visitor segmentation and comparison, as visitor motivations and perceptions are known to vary according to age, nationality, occupation, and visit frequency. Sections B and C evaluate visitors' perceptions of architectural qualities and indoor–outdoor environmental comfort, which are recognised as key factors influencing engagement, movement, and satisfaction in heritage sites. Section D focuses on zone-based spatial experiences to capture emotional responses and memorable qualities associated with different areas of the castle, acknowledging that visitors experience heritage sites through distinct spatial sequences rather than as a single uniform space.

All attitudinal items are measured using closed-ended questions and a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree'. Following Rocha & Santos (2025, p. 222), this study uses the 1-4 Likert scale choice, often justified to avoid neutral responses and force decisive opinions for clearer statistical analysis in survey research. This forced-choice approach enhances discriminant validity and reduces common neutral bias. Closed-ended questions ensure consistency, reduce ambiguity, and enable effective quantitative analysis, making them suitable for on-site visitor surveys. Overall, this questionnaire design supports reliable measurement of visitor motivations, perceptions, and spatial experiences at Kellie's Castle in a structured and statistically valid manner.

Sample Size

This research was conducted at Kellie's Castle, Batu Gajah, Perak, focusing on visitors present during the data collection period. The final sample size of $n=65$ was determined using Slovin's Formula (Panjaitan et al., 2021), based on a target population (N) of 500 estimated visitors during the study timeframe.

The calculation is expressed as follows:

Variable (Variant) Values Used	
$n = 65$	$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$
• → Required sample size (number of respondents)	$n = \frac{500}{1 + 500(0.115)^2}$
$N = 500$	$n = \frac{500}{7.6125}$
• → Estimated total population (visitors during the study period)	$n \approx 65$
$e = 0.115$ (11.5%)	
• Margin of error / allowable error	

The data collection was executed over two days, with a strategic goal of obtaining approximately 30 respondents per day. This daily target ensured a manageable and representative dataset while maintaining the quality of the responses. By the end of the site visit, 65 completed survey sets were successfully gathered, exceeding the initial daily estimations.

According to the Central Limit Theorem, a sample size between 30 and 50 is considered sufficient for basic statistical analysis to achieve a normal distribution (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012; Siedlecki, 2020).

Therefore, the collection of 65 responses ensures that the study's findings on visitors' motivation and spatial experience are statistically reliable and provide a valid "snapshot" of the visitor demographic at Kellie's Castle.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Aspect

The demographic profile of the 65 respondents indicates a predominantly young, local visitor base at Kellie's Castle, characterized by a relatively balanced gender distribution with a slight majority of female visitors (55.4%) compared to males (44.6%). In terms of age, the site attracts a significantly younger demographic, with 75.4% of respondents falling within the 18–29 age group, which correlates with students representing nearly half of the participants (49.2%) and the private sector accounting for 30.8%. Domestic visitors are the primary drivers of visits, as 98.5% of the respondents are Malaysian. On the one hand, most of the respondents came for the first time, 63.1%, while on the other, the presence of repeat visitors, 36.9%, gives weight to the continuous spatial appeal of the site and the ongoing motivation of locals to return. (Refer to Table 1).

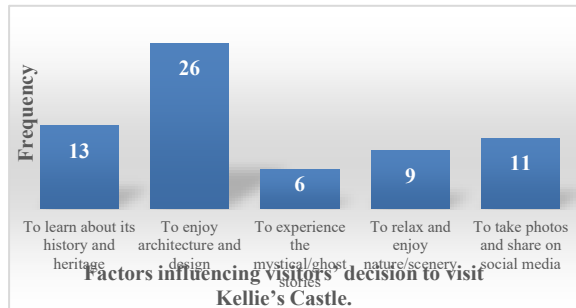
Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents at Kellie's Castle, Batu Gajah (N=65)

Demographic				
Section No.	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sect. A1	Gender	Male	29	44.6
		Female	36	55.4
		Total	65	100
Sect. A2	Age	18-29	49	75.4
		30-39	7	10.8
		40-49	8	12.3
		50-59	0	0.0
		60 and above	1	1.5
		Total	65	100
Sect. A3	Nationality	Malaysian	64	98.5
		Non-Malaysian	1	1.5
		Total	65	100
Sect. A4	Occupation	Student	32	49.2
		Private Sector	20	30.8
		Government Sector	10	15.4
		Self-Employed	3	4.6
		Retired	32	49.2
		Total	65	100
Sect. A5	Visit Frequency	First Time	41	63.1
		2-3 Times	18	27.7
		More than 3 Times	6	9.2
		Total	65	100

Visitor Motivation

Based on the data, visitors are mainly attracted to Kellie's Castle for its physical and aesthetic qualities rather than folklore. The most common reason for visiting is to enjoy the architecture and design, which recorded the highest number of responses, 26 (Refer to Graph 1), highlighting the importance of spatial experience. This is followed by the castle's historical significance (mean = 13). (Refer to Table 2), indicating its role as an educational heritage site. Taking photos and sharing on social media is the third

main reason (11 responses). (Refer to Graph 1), showing the castle’s visual appeal. In contrast, interest in mystical or ghost stories received the lowest response (Refer to Table 2), suggesting minimal influence on visitor motivation



Section No.	Item	Mean	Std. Devition
Sect. A1	To learn about its history and heritage	13	20.0
Sect. A2	To enjoy architecture and design	26	40.0
Sect. A3	To experience the mystical/ghost stories	6	9.2
Sect. A4	To relax and enjoy nature/scenery	9	13.8
Sect. A5	To take photos and share on social media	11	16.9

Graph 1: Frequency of visitor motivations visiting Kellie’s Castle

Architectural Experience

Referring to search objective 1: To identify the key motivators influencing visitors to visit Kellie’s Castle, including architectural, cultural, and experiential factors, the observation and questionnaire will be developed based on these keywords.

From the qualitative site observation at Kellie's Castle of the ‘Architectural Experience’, architecture and spatial qualities form the most relevant motives and spatial experiences for visitors. Historical information received moderate consideration among visitors, indicating that history is a supporting factor for the visit, rather than the main attraction. In contrast, interior spaces and unique architectural features, such as corridors, staircases, and rooftop areas, are highly used and invite longer sojourns while exploring. The high level of photo-taking reveals that it is the visual and experiential aspects of the architecture that strongly form visitor motivation. Overall, Kellie's Castle presents itself to visitors more as an immersive architectural space rather than just a historic site. (Refer to Figure 2)



Figure 2: An overview showing the castle's architecture as the primary reason for visiting.

From the quantitative survey of the architecture experience, this shows that the main motivation for visiting the castle is the exclusive architectural appearance and the associated story. The most important motivation had been “the view from the upper floors or balcony”, which received the highest mean value of 3.51 (SD = 0.732). The second motivation included a shared “interest in the architectural appearance of the visitation to the castle” as a motivation for visitation (Mean = 3.46, SD = 0.772), followed by the efficiency of “the information board to provide information regarding the history of the location” (Mean = 3.46, SD = 0.663). The results indicate that the architecture of Kellie’s Castle plays a crucial role as the backbone for the visitation. (Refer to Table 3)

This affinity for high vantage points (Sect. B7) can be associated with the idea of ‘architectural framing,’ whereby structures are planned in a manner that orients the user’s gaze towards the landscape. As stated in Winnicka-Jasłowska and Tkaczuk (2022), the rooftop and balcony spaces are crucial "experiential zones" that enhance a building's attractiveness by providing a sense of psychological well-being through open vistas. Moreover, the strong level of motivation that stems from the castle's architectural identity (Sect. B9) and its educational facilities (Sect. B2) supports the “Narrative Architecture” theory. The latest evidence provided by Nafi and Tan (2023) suggests that, specifically for heritage tourism, the actual “form” of the architecture forms a medium of narration, and the visitors’ level of motivation to navigate the history they study is very high because they get to physically travel through the history they are studying.

Table 3: Visitors’ motivation in relation to architectural aspects.

Section No.	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sect. B1	I am interested to learn about the history of Kellie’s Castle.	3.42	0.705
Sect. B2	The information boards help me understand the history of the castle.	3.46	0.663
Sect. B3	The guide’s explanation is easy for me to understand.	3.17	0.894
Sect. B4	I enjoy looking at the shapes of the arches, windows, and openings.	3.43	0.749
Sect. B5	I notice the details of the bricks, carvings, and other decorations.	3.40	0.825
Sect. B6	The inside spaces (rooms, corridors, stairs) are interesting to explore.	3.45	0.751
Sect. B7	The view from the upper floors or balconies is attractive.	3.51	0.732
Sect. B8	The unique parts of the castle (such as unfinished areas or ruins) make the visit special.	3.40	0.725
Sect. B9	The architecture of Kellie’s Castle is one of the main reasons I came here.	3.46	0.772

Aspect	Quantitative Findings (Survey)	Qualitative Findings (Observation)	Relationship
Primary Motivator	Highest mean score for attractive views from balconies and upper floors (3.51).	Observers noted high engagement with rooftops and vantage points for photography.	Similarity: Both methods confirm that high-elevation spaces are key "experiential zones."
History & Heritage	High mean for information board efficiency (3.46).	Visitors show moderate interest in reading boards compared to physical exploration.	Contrast: Survey shows satisfaction with info tools, but observation reveals they are only a "supporting factor" to the physical space.
Spatial Interaction	Strong interest in inside spaces such as corridors and stairs (Mean 3.45).	Moderate to high frequency of visitors spending time exploring interior rooms and windows.	Similarity: Both identify the internal layout as a critical component of the "Narrative Architecture" experience.

From the findings across these three aspects reveal that the visitor experience at Kellie’s Castle is defined by a powerful synergy between visual aesthetics and physical immersion. While quantitative data highlights high satisfaction with "attractive views" and "information board efficiency," qualitative observations clarify that visitors are most deeply engaged when actively exploring the "Narrative Architecture" of the site. Ultimately, the castle functions as a series of "experiential zones" where the

architectural layout and elevated vantage points serve as the primary drivers of engagement, with historical information acting as a supporting framework rather than the main attraction.

By identifying these specific drivers, the analysis successfully achieves Research Objective 1 through a comprehensive ranking of visitor motivations. The data confirms that while cultural elements provide a necessary educational context, the most influential factors are the architectural exploration of the building's unique interior and the experiential reward of its "Instagrammable" views. This multi-layered approach provides a clear profile of why people visit, proving that the site's physical layout and visual appeal are the dominant catalysts for the visitor experience.

Indoor and Outdoor Experience Factors

Referring to search objective 2: To explore visitor perceptions and patterns of interaction across Kellie's Castle's spatial zones - interiors, gardens, courtyards, and surrounding landscapes, the observation and questionnaire will be developed based on these keywords.

From the qualitative site observation of the 'Indoor and Outdoor Experience Factors' at Kellie's Castle, the results of the findings indicate that outdoor settings and views significantly drive the motivation and experience of visitors in Kellie's Castle. Visitors were highly positive towards greenery, open spaces, and landscape views, and showed significant interest in rooftop and window views. Indoor settings offered a medium level of comfort and aesthetic pleasure, which aided movement and were less emphasized in comparison to outdoor settings. Overall, the results indicate that the landscape setting and views are of prime importance in influencing visitor experiences at Kellie's Castle since the ideal experience of the visitor prefers open and scenic outdoor spaces. (Refer to Figure 3)

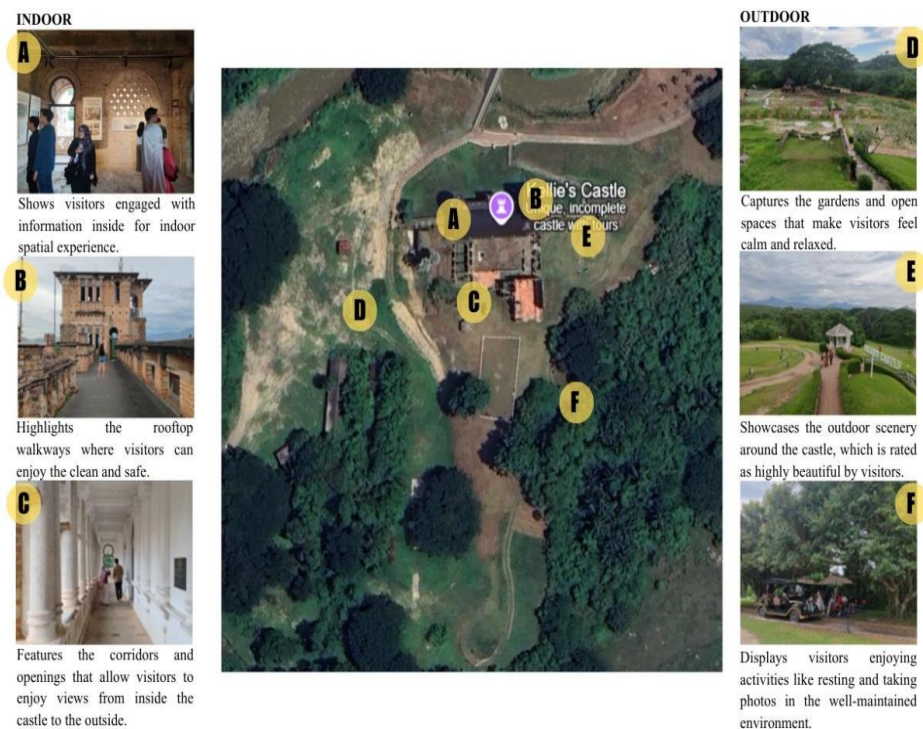


Figure 3: Indoor and outdoor Experience Factors

Indoor experience (inside the castle).

From the quantitative survey of the “indoor experience”, from the Table 3, the indoor experience is most positively influenced by visual qualities, particularly “I enjoy the views from the windows and openings inside the castle”(Sect. C4), which records the highest mean score of 3.51 with a relatively low standard deviation of 0.664, indicating consistent visitor appreciation of visual connections and natural light. Environmental comfort factors follow, with “The lighting inside is bright enough for me to see clearly” (Sect. C3) showing a mean of 3.09 (SD=0.824) and followed by “The temperature and airflow inside feel comfortable” (Sect. C2) recording a mean of 3.06 (SD=0.788). These moderate mean scores suggest that while indoor lighting and thermal comfort are generally acceptable, they are perceived less strongly than visual enjoyment. The comparatively higher standard deviations for these items indicate more varied visitor experiences, likely influenced by differences in spatial conditions, crowd density, or duration of stay within different interior areas of the castle. (Refer to Table 4)

Outdoor experience (around the castle).

In contrast, the outdoor experience, as indicated by the quantitative survey factors, demonstrates stronger and more consistent positive perceptions among visitors. The highest-rated item is “I enjoy doing activities outside, such as walking, resting, or taking photos” (Sect. C7), with a mean of 3.59 and the lowest standard deviation of 0.583, reflecting high agreement that outdoor spaces support active engagement. This is closely followed by “The outdoor scenery around the castle is beautiful” (Sect. C5), which records a mean of 3.57 (SD=0.637), highlighting the strong aesthetic appeal of the surrounding landscape. Additionally, “The combination of indoor and outdoor areas gives me a good overall experience” (Sect. C9) achieves a mean of 3.51 (SD=0.616), suggesting that visitors value the seamless integration between spatial zones. Overall, the higher mean scores and lower variability indicate that gardens, courtyards, and surrounding landscapes play a significant role in shaping positive visitor interactions and overall satisfaction at Kellie’s Castle. (Refer to Table 4)

Table 4: Indoor and Outdoor Experience Factors.

Indoor (Inside the castle)			
Section. No.	Item	Mean	Std. Devition
Sect. C1	The indoor areas are easy and safe to walk around.	2.95	0.779
Sect. C2	The temperature and airflow inside feel comfortable.	3.06	0.788
Sect. C3	The lighting inside is bright enough for me to see clearly.	3.09	0.824
Sect. C4	I enjoy the views from the windows and openings inside the castle.	3.51	0.664
Outdoor (Around the castle)			
Section. No.	Item	Mean	Std. Devition
Sect. C5	The outdoor scenery around the castle is beautiful.	3.57	0.637
Sect. C6	The gardens and open spaces make me feel relaxed.	3.45	0.638
Sect. C7	I enjoy doing activities outside, such as walking, resting, or taking photos.	3.59	0.583
Sect. C8	The outdoor environment feels clean and well-maintained.	3.35	0.717
Sect. C9	The combination of indoor and outdoor areas gives me good overall experience.	3.51	0.616

Aspect	Quantitative Findings (Survey)	Qualitative Findings (Observation)	Relationship
Visual Connection	The highest indoor means (3.51) for enjoying views from windows and openings.	Observers recorded "High" visitor interest specifically in the window and rooftop views.	Similarity: Both methods confirm that the interior's value is heavily dependent on its visual link to the exterior landscape.
Outdoor Engagement	The highest overall mean (3.59) was for	Observers noted "High" positive responses to	Similarity: Both datasets prioritize the outdoor environment as the

Aspect	Quantitative Findings (Survey)	Qualitative Findings (Observation)	Relationship
	active engagement, like walking & photography.	greenery and scenery.	primary driver of visitor satisfaction and active interaction.
Indoor Comfort	Moderate mean scores for lighting (3.09) and airflow (3.06) with higher variability.	Observers noted Low engagement with indoor aesthetic elements and Moderate comfort levels.	Similarity: Both methods indicate that while the indoor environment is functional, it is perceived as less impactful than the outdoor experience.
Spatial Flow	Strong agreement (3.51) that the combination of zones creates a good experience.	Observers recorded "Moderate" exploration of paths and gardens.	Contrast: While visitors highly value the concept of combined zones in surveys, their physical behaviour (observation) is more heavily weighted toward specific scenic vantage points.

The visitor experience at Kellie’s Castle is primarily driven by a high appreciation for Outdoor Engagement and Visual Connection. The aesthetic beauty of the landscape (Mean = 3.57) and the visual access to the exterior (Mean = 3.51) serve as the strongest predictors of satisfaction, mirroring findings by Zhou et al. (2025) that visual stimuli are the most potent factors in cultural landscape perception. While Indoor Comfort is functional, it remains secondary to the outdoor experience, a hierarchy supported by the University of Nottingham (2026) research, which posits that the 'scenicness' of a historic site is its most valuable public good. Ultimately, the Spatial Flow (Mean = 3.51) facilitates a cohesive experience, confirming that the castle's architectural value is deeply intertwined with its environmental context."

The evaluation successfully achieves Research Objective 2 by mapping how visitors perceive and interact with different spatial zones. The findings show that while the interiors are functional for historical learning, the highest levels of interaction occur in open-air and panoramic spaces like the rooftops and surrounding landscape. This confirms a pattern where visitors prioritize "prospect" views and visual connection over enclosed areas.

Spatial Experience

Referring to search objective 3: to evaluate how the physical landscape characteristics surrounding Kellie’s Castle influence visitors’ motivations and perceptions, the observation and questionnaire will be developed based on these keywords.

From the qualitative site observation at Kellie's Castle, the “Spatial Experience” for visitors at Kellie’s Castle is facilitated by smooth movements between the different spaces. Most of the interior areas, gardens, and courtyards were moderately explored by visitors. It can be pointed out that there was balanced engagement with both built and open spaces. Interaction with the surrounding landscape was low, with the latter serving mainly as a visual background. Overall, a clear layout and ease of transition from one space to another will support continuous exploration and heighten the comfort and experience of visitors to the site. (Refer to Figure 4)

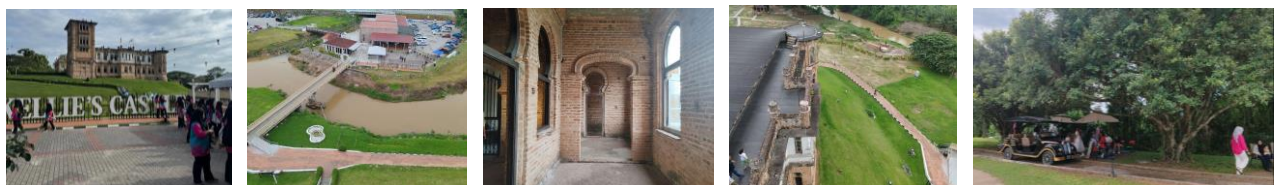


Figure 4: These images show that Kellie’s Castle is a balanced journey between old ruins and open nature. Overall, the site’s

charm lies in its variety, letting visitors move easily from historic rooms to beautiful outdoor scenery for a satisfying visit.

Interest and Time in Each Zone

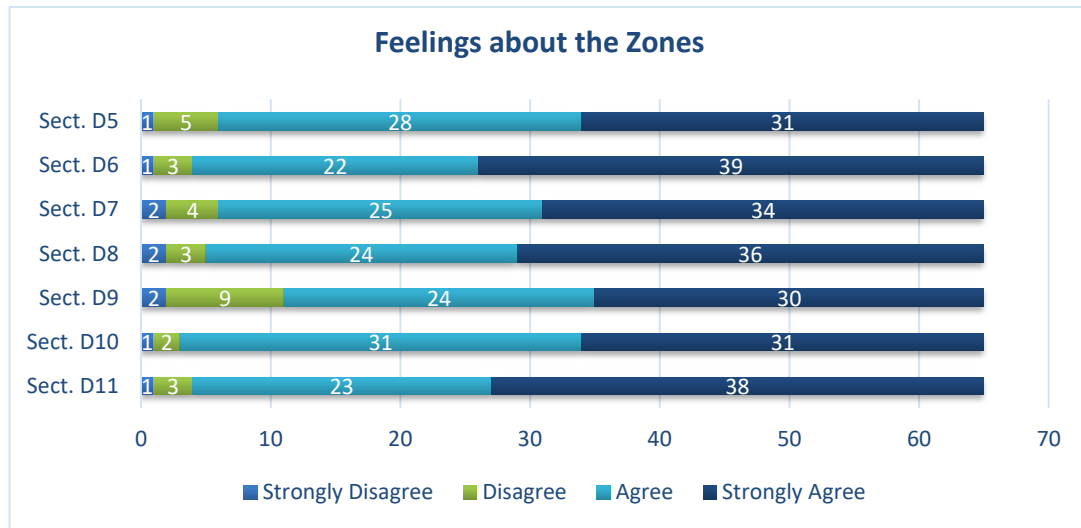
From the quantitative survey of “Spatial Experience” of interest and time zone in each zone at Kellie’s Castle, the data indicated a strong preference for open air and panoramic spaces over enclosed spaces inside. The level of visitor engagement with the surrounding environment of the castle, including hills and the river, was the greatest, with a mean of 2.68 (SD = 0.471). This indicated that the most engaging part of this castle is its environment. The rooftop spaces followed with a mean of 2.66 (SD = 0.477), followed by the gardens with a mean of 2.57 (SD = 0.529). (Refer to Table 5). The fact that these three zones: landscapes, rooftops, and gardens are preferred shows that the type of view is one where visitors want to have a "prospect" view. As postulated in Appleton's Prospect-Refuge Theory, people have an inherent psychological preference to have views of an environment from a distance while feeling safe. Some current literature regarding visitors' behaviour in Heritage sites shows that the concept of "visual permeability" and viewing the site from higher vantage points is a strong contributor to visitor dwell time (Lee & Kim, 2021).

Feelings about the Zones

From the quantitative survey of “Spatial Experience” of feeling about the zones at Kellie’s Castle, in terms of the emotional impact of these environments, visitors thoroughly enjoyed the restorative aspects of this location. The most revered experience was the calming influence of gardens and greenery, with a mean of 3.52 (SD = 0.664). This was very close to the importance of having a combination of all environmental factors towards their enjoyment of this location, with a mean of 3.51 (SD = 0.664). The hill and views of the river further added to this visit, with a mean of 3.45 (SD = 0.730). (Refer to Table 5). The fact that the gardens score very high, along with the “mix of zones” in the castle, implies that it also provides a “restorative environment.” As observed in the study conducted by Patuano (2020), when historical buildings are collaged with landscape environments, it creates a “biophilic” environment that can help in overcoming mental exhaustion. The “spatial diversity” that occurs while moving between ruins and greenery prevents “museum fatigue” along with a continued high level of visitor satisfaction.

Table 5: Spatial Experience.

Interest and Time in Each Zone			
Section. No.	Item	Mean	Std. Devition
Sect. D1(a)	Interiors (rooms, corridors, stairs) [Floor G]	2.34	0.594
Sect. D1(b)	Interiors (rooms, corridors, stairs) [Floor I]	2.49	0.562
Sect. D1(c)	Interiors (rooms, corridors, stairs) [Rooftop]	2.66	0.477
Sect. D2	Gardens (lawns, plants, sitting areas) [Garden]	2.57	0.529
Sect. D3	Courtyards (open paved spaces inside the compound) [Courtyards]	2.55	0.501
Sect. D4	Surrounding landscapes (hill area, river, wider views) [Surrounding Landscape]	2.68	0.471
Feelings about the Zones			
Section. No.	Item	Mean	Std. Devition
Sect. D5	The interior spaces help me imagine how people lived in the castle before.	3.37	0.698
Sect. D6	The gardens and greenery make me feel calm and relaxed.	3.52	0.664
Sect. D7	The courtyards are good places to stop, rest, or take photos.	3.40	0.746
Sect. D8	The hills and river views make the visit more enjoyable.	3.45	0.730
Sect. D9	It is easy for me to move between interiors, gardens, courtyards, and surrounding landscapes.	3.26	0.815
Sect. D10	Each zone gives me a different kind of experience.	3.42	0.635
Sect. D11	The mix of all these zones is an important reason I enjoyed my visit.	3.51	0.664



Graph 2: Feeling About the zone for the Spatial Experience aspect

Spatial Zone	Qualitative Findings (Observation/Visuals)	Quantitative Data (Mean Scores)	Synthesis: Impact on Motivation & Perception
Surrounding Landscape (Hills, River)	Visual Backdrop: Low physical interaction; serves as a scenic frame for the castle ruins.	Highest Engagement (2.68): Ranked as the most engaging element of the site.	Contrast: While visitors don't "use" the landscape, it is their primary visual motivator. It provides the "Prospect" view that makes the site feel expansive.
Gardens & Greenery	Restorative Hub: Offers the best "sense of peace" and a break from the ruins.	Top Emotional Score (3.52): Highest mean for providing a calming, restorative influence.	Similarity: Both methods confirm that greenery is essential for mental relief, creating a Biophilic Environment that prevents "museum fatigue."
Rooftop & Vantage Points	Excitement: Highlighted as the most exciting area for exploration and panoramic views.	High Interest (2.66): Ranked just below the landscape as a preferred zone.	Similarity: Elevated physical characteristics satisfy the human psychological preference for a "Prospect" view from a position of safety.
Interiors & Architecture	Historical Anchor: Provides the narrative. Visitors move through rooms to "imagine the past."	High Perceptual Score (3.37): Strongly helps visitors connect with the site's history.	Complementary: The architecture serves as the "Refuge" (enclosed, safe) while the landscape provides the "Prospect" (open, wide).
Spatial Layout & Flow	Smooth Transitions: Balanced journey between old ruins and open nature.	Ease of Movement (3.26): High agreement that moving between spaces is comfortable.	Similarity: The "Spatial Diversity" (moving from dark rooms to bright gardens) keeps interest high throughout the visit.

Based on the synthesis of qualitative observations and quantitative data, the spatial experience at Kellie's Castle is defined by a synergistic relationship between its built forms and natural surroundings. The interiors and architecture serve as a "refuge" that anchors the historical narrative, while the rooftops, hills, and river provide a high engagement "prospect" view that satisfies the psychological desire for panoramic vantage points. This variety, complemented by the restorative gardens and a spatial layout designed for smooth transitions, creates a "biophilic" environment that effectively prevents museum fatigue and fosters mental well-being. Ultimately, the site's physical characteristics motivate exploration by balancing the intellectual intrigue of the ruins with the sensory relief of the landscape, confirming that visual permeability and elevated perspectives are critical drivers of visitor satisfaction and dwell time in heritage settings (Lee

& Kim, 2021; Patuano, 2020).

In conclusion, the analysis successfully achieves Research Objective 3 by demonstrating that the physical landscape characteristics of Kellie's Castle are the primary drivers of visitor engagement and emotional restoration. The findings show that while the interiors act as a "refuge" for historical learning, the rooftops and surrounding nature provide "prospect" views that motivate exploration and high engagement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that visitors' motivation and spatial experience at Kellie's Castle are strongly influenced by physical, architectural, and environmental qualities rather than by folklore or mystical narratives. The findings indicate that architectural design and spatial experience are the dominant motivators for visitation, followed by historical significance and opportunities for photography and social media engagement. Visitors interact differently with indoor and outdoor spaces, with courtyards and gardens supporting longer stays, social interaction, and relaxation, while indoor spaces encourage exploration and historical learning but with shorter engagement durations.

The findings align with existing heritage tourism literature that emphasises architectural authenticity, spatial character, and environmental comfort as key determinants of visitor satisfaction and engagement. Consistent with previous studies, Kellie's Castle is experienced as a sequence of interconnected spaces rather than a single homogeneous environment, highlighting the importance of spatial zoning, visual permeability, and movement patterns in shaping memorable heritage experiences.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted over a limited two-day period, which may not fully represent visitor behaviour across different seasons, weather conditions, or peak tourism periods. In addition, although the sample size is statistically acceptable, it reflects only a snapshot of visitor perceptions and may not capture wider demographic or cultural variations.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable implications for heritage site management and landscape planning. The results suggest that conservation and management strategies should prioritise the preservation of key architectural features, scenic viewpoints, and outdoor spaces that support social interaction and relaxation. Strengthening interpretive elements within indoor spaces—such as clearer signage, interactive displays, or guided narratives—may encourage longer engagement and deeper historical understanding. Furthermore, improvements to landscape elements, including shading, seating, and pathway clarity, could enhance visitor comfort and spatial flow while maintaining the site's heritage character.

Overall, this research contributes to heritage landscape studies by integrating visitor motivation, spatial experience, and physical environment characteristics within a single heritage site. It also offers a practical framework for combining qualitative observation with quantitative analysis in heritage tourism research. Future studies are encouraged to extend data collection across longer periods and varied conditions, conduct comparative analyses with other heritage sites, and employ advanced spatial tools such as GIS mapping or visitor movement tracking to further refine understanding of visitor behaviour and space utilisation at heritage attractions such as Kellie's Castle.

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