

ASSESSING THE RURAL CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR HERITAGE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PERAK TENGAH DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The cultural heritage resources are widely available in the rural area in the form of a unique culture and art, heritage, traditional knowledge, natural beauty, ecological resources and others, and are representative of the community culture. Heritage interpretation is an educational process that aims to reveal meanings about our culture. Good interpretation enhances our understanding, appreciation, and therefore, provides protection of cultural heritage. This research has two aims; 1) to identify the cultural heritage significance; 2) to designate interpretation plan of the potential cultural heritage for new tourist attraction in the state of Perak. The method of this research involved three steps; inventory of resources, focus group survey and interpretation proposal. Results from focus group indicate the need to customize the interpretation and presentation of rural heritage especially on physical experience in community cultural activities. This study also highlights the most significance cultural resources in Perak Tengah Districts based on ranking. The output of this research is to produce the interpretation guidance for heritage site operators on how visitors can experience our cultural heritage in the rural area.

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Keywords: *Cultural, Heritage, Interpretation, Rural, Visitor*

INTRODUCTION

The rural area has a lot of cultural heritage resources in the form of unique culture and art, traditional knowledge, natural beauty and others. The rural communities' activities do not only give provide alternatives tourist but it could be used as a solution to increase the income and preservation of socio-cultural activities. The benefits of cultural resources in the rural area are very important, as they fulfill some of the National Policies. One of the National Key Result Areas (NKRA) goals is to promote economic revitalization and thus prevent migration of population as well as creating a strong encouragement for rural youth to remain in the village. In addition, economic areas put emphasis on agriculture, tourism, farming and cottage industries. National Physical Plan 2 (NPP2) also highlights cultural heritage and tourism as an important policy to support the realization of the New Economic Model and the 1Malaysia Concept (Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa, 2016). For instance, NPP2 policies number 11 and 12 stated; natural tourism resources, the authentic multi-cultural and historical heritage of the country shall be conserved. Thus, tourism development zones in each state shall focus on specialized regional niche products based on their locational advantages and availability of resources. Besides fulfilling the National Policy, Ministry of Tourism and Culture also highlights the importance of cultural heritage and tourism. The main vision is to develop Malaysia as a world class tourist and cultural destination as well as to build the national identity based on art, culture and heritage.

The State of Perak is known for its richness and uniqueness of history, tradition and cultural heritage especially the traditional Malay village. Base on most visited destination by domestic tourists in Perak by Institut Darul Ridzwan (IDR) 2015, the popular destinations in the year 2012 to 2013 (figure 1), have shown that the tourist destinations are leisure and entertainment category. The findings also show that none of the cultural heritage such as cultural community activities and traditions has been promoted. This is waste because District of Perak Tengah, Kuala Kangsar and Hilir Perak have lots of cultural heritage potential to be promoted especially on village life, arts, culture and agriculture activities. Therefore, further programs to attract tourists to Perak should be encouraged, and the new attraction should be defined and interpreted wisely especially in the rural area so that it can be beneficial to the community. This will definitely

take some effort to create effective interpretation – but if we do it right, we do not only able to help visitors understand the resources but also will be able do a better job managing the site and at the same time able to generate more revenues.

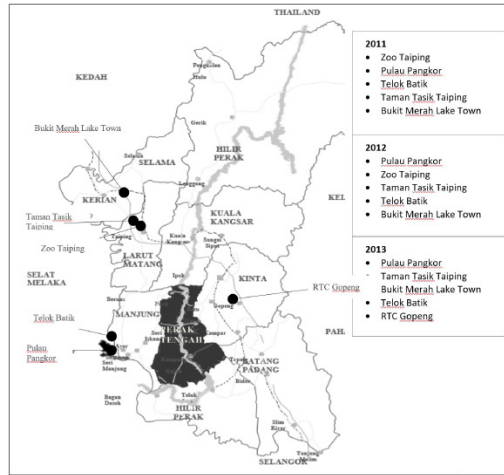


Figure 1: Most Visited Destination by Domestic Tourist in Perak
Sources: IDR Perspective, 2015

LITERATURE REVIEW

Heritage can be classified into two categories: Tangible Cultural Heritage (TCH) and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Both categories of this heritage are the national treasure that should be preserved and conserved for future generations. Tangible cultural heritage is synonymously associated with physical objects that can be seen as the architectural buildings, monuments, and historic buildings in the city. On the other hand, intangible cultural heritage includes any form of expressions, languages, songs, folk songs, oral traditions, poetry, music, dances, martial arts, that may have existed or exited in relation to the heritage of Malaysia (National Heritage Act, 2005). To increase more awareness towards cultural heritage, the interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage elements should be highlighted and shared with local and visitors. It is easier to describe the “tangible” things- as it is related to the physical characteristics of resources.

However, it is difficult to link those things to “intangible” things; the ideas and emotions behind it. The goal of interpretation is to engage visitors’ senses while challenging them to think about what things mean – to look at them in entirely new ways. In addition, interpretation can create memorable and meaningful experiences for visitors, and inspire them to learn more (Lancaster Planning Commission, 2002).

Besides, the cultural heritage resources are widely available in the rural area. They can be in the form of a unique culture and art, heritage, expertise and traditional knowledge, natural beauty, ecological resources and others. Normally all of these represent the community culture. In addition, the rural community’s activities provide alternatives for tourists and it also can be used to increase the income and preservation of socio-cultural activities (Susyanti, 2013). Tourists are very interested to see how life or culture and heritage interpretation can help enrich their experiences. They seek to understand a sense of place in communities that are unique. All of these can be discovered in the rural area. The term rural tourism and heritage tourism is also a common name in tourism industry that refers to any form of tourism which showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations. As a result, it brings benefit to the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and locals for more enriching tourism experience (Saidatulakma, 2012).

Interpretation Principles and Application

Interpretation is an informational and inspirational process including educational activities that aim to reveal meanings about our cultural and natural resources. The evolution of interpretation philosophy was developed by Freeman Tilden in 1957. He established six principles of interpretation in his book, *Interpretation Our Heritage* (1977). Those six principles are very helpful in preparing interpretation program of heritage sites worldwide:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based on the information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the

- materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural.
4. The main aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
 5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than apart and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
 6. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of 12) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach.

To fit today's world on interpretation, Knudson (2003), Beck and Cable (2011) have updated Tilden principles by adding new principles that provide a more elaborate interpretative philosophy which focus more on the interpreter role and method of interpretation. According to Beck and Cable (2011), every place has its own history and interpretation that can bring the past alive to making the present more enjoyable and the future more meaningful. To achieve this, interpreters must concern themselves with the presented quantity and quality of information. Focused and well-researched interpretation will be more powerful than longer discourse because quality interpretation depends on the interpreter's knowledge and skill, which must be continually developed over time and at the end of the interpretation should be able to instill in the people's ability, and the desire, as well as to sense the beauty of their surroundings and could provide spiritual uplift and in turn able to encourage resource preservation.

Furthermore, interpretation can be used to promote cultural heritage to build national, regional, and community identities. Many visitors want to learn about the places they visit and through interpretation it can convey factual material; for example the history of the buildings, architecture styles and building technique (Aplin, 2002). The goal of interpretation is not instruction but to change attitudes and behaviour, to motivate and inspire, and to take information and make it meaningful and exciting. Besides, interpretation is not just glossy brochures, appropriate signage, and well-edited videos; it is the art of telling the story of a community. In addition, the daily life also can be subjects of interpretation for the visitors. The experiences of spending a few days immersed in a village's way of life will stay with tourists longer than if they had spent the time looking at the monument or building. The tourist seeks various physical experiences and satisfaction. The nature of these will largely determine the destination chosen and the activities enjoyed (Goeldner, 2000).

ICOMOS Charter (1999) gives a guiding direction on what heritage interpretation programs should be considered. The main aspects are retention on the heritage authenticity and culture experiences which include;

1. Enhance the appreciation and understanding of that cultural heritage;
2. Present the significance of the culture in a relevant and accessible manner;
3. Use appropriate, stimulating and contemporary forms of education, technology and personal explanations;
4. Encourage high levels of public awareness and support of heritage;
5. Encourage visitors to experience the wider cultural/natural heritage of the region; and
6. Involvement of all parties, including local and/or indigenous community representatives is necessary to achieve a sustainable tourism industry.

Good interpretation will inspire future exploration. Siti Norlizaiha Harun (2007) has explored the different interpretation between two historical sites in Perak; Kellie's Castle and Pasir Salak Historical Complex. The interpretation of Kellie's Castle came from the building itself which displays the architecture and history of the castle. However, interpretation of Pasir Salak Historical Complex is through creating interpretation elements that are associate with the site and the history of Malay heroes against the first British Resident of Perak, Mr. J.W.W. Birch who was assassinated in 1875. The interpretation elements include the diorama at historical time tunnel gallery, traditional Perak house, and memorial monuments. A. Ghafar Ahmad (2012), applied interpretation concepts towards restoration works of heritage buildings. From the project's findings, it is evidence that historical buildings have intrinsic values which need to be explored through suitable interpretation medium. He further suggested that it is necessary to establish authentic assessment and validated interpretations of heritage resources. Authenticity in heritage is very important because the genuine of historic building preservation will provoke the visitor's intention and give distinctive experiences. Due to the importance of authenticity in heritage interpretation, National Trust of Australia (2014) also has established seven interpretation principles and associated it with Australia's heritage. The principles further enhanced the original Tilden's six principles of the skills of an interpreter and ultimately boost the experiences of the visitors to heritage

properties. In addition, the National Trust of Australia added interpretive presentation should be designed as a story that informs, engages, entertains, and enlightens the visitors. The purposes of the interpretation story are to inspire and to provoke people to broaden their knowledge. Interpretation should make people more considered to the place they visited in a wider perspective. Interpretation also should incorporate technology such digital display; however, it must do with foresight and thoughtful care. Heritage interpretation research by Paola M. Lenza et.all. (2016) has contributed the findings that the tourist itineraries are seen as good opportunities for the development of tourism in the rural areas that possess natural or cultural resources. According to Paola (2016), heritage interpretation-based itinerary able to influence tourists who visit a famous rural heritage site, to extend their stay in the related rural area and, as a consequence, consumer tourist products. Tourist itinerary needs to be supported by suitable interpretation media and connects several heritage attractions located in a given rural area with a heritage site selected as a tourist catalyst.

Interpretation Process

The interpretation of heritage involved a few steps. The elements being interpreted need to be researched in detail. The first step is to make an inventory of heritage resources, next to define significance and development of the story. The important criteria, which was based from the Lancaster Planning Commission, 2002, in creating interpretation is knowing the audience. We need to know consider a few factors such as who are the visitors; will the visitors the best way to tell a story is using the physical features that are connected with the story. Good interpretation is about “show and tells”. For example, if we were to talk on how to make traditional food, the visitors will want to see a demonstration of the cooking process. The last step is to choose interpretation media. Interpretation media include everything from printed brochures to guided trails to digital format. Beside interpretation media, Binoy (2011) put emphasis on the role of interpreters at heritage sites. They must provoke curiosity, attention, and interest among the visitors to listen, participate and actively involved in the heritage interpretation process.

METHODOLOGY

The data collections involved inventory and mapping of cultural heritage significance and focus groups survey. The focus group consists of 21 tourist operators and homestay managers at Perak Tengah District. The contents and scopes of the survey were on what cultural resources should be highlighted in Perak Tengah; the existing interpretation medium; and how the interpretation programs to promote the rural cultural heritage resources are planned. From the survey, some interpretation attributes were identified for the storytelling of cultural heritage resources. In addition, the common interview on existing interpretation in the form of questionnaires was formulated and then pre-tested on:

1. Who are the audiences?
2. What stories will help to explain the significance of resources?
3. Will our visitors understand and appreciate what we were telling them?
4. How should we like the visitors to experience?

The results of focus group survey help to identify the interpretation that will influence and capture the visitor's interest to visit and experiences culture heritage in the study area. The proposal of heritage interpretation focused on the development of visitor's expectation and experiences based on the findings from the literature reviews of interpretation principles. Thus, the proposal is a process of heritage interpretation and involves three main stages; 1) Identifying rural cultural heritage significance; 2) Subject of interpretation; what story to tell and how to tell, and 3) Interpretation medium.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study area for this research involved the 69 villages along Perak River in Perak Tengah District. The village or kampung (in Malay word) along Perak River were very attractive and active in their cultural activities; also have a unique and pleasant panorama of the village and farming area. There are more than 20 cultural heritage resources situated along Perak river banks. The resources categorize into; cultural heritage, historic building, historic site, rural agro, town, natural conservation and, sport and recreation.

Based on observation and interview, all cultural heritages have their own identities and located on linkages route where visitors can explore easily and experiences the local cultural activities. Unfortunately, the current cultural heritage and tourism product was not promoting wisely on site with good support facilities especially the interpretation and presentation medium. This included the incomplete tourist itineraries document, limited of interpreters, unclear tourist trail and lack of information on heritage resources.

Cultural Heritage Significance

Base on observation and mapping on existing cultural heritages along Perak River, the resources are unique and give a beautiful image of the rural community of Perak Tengah District. Some of the images come together with three categories of resources – natural, culture and visual. The image with these three packages will become the best for heritage interpretation because it represents the image of Perak Tengah as a whole. For example, the architecture of traditional Kutai house, padi field, durian orchard and farming activity will become interactive information that can be used for interpretation. A nature guide or cultural guide of these resources does not only provide information but can reveal deeper meaning and the true cultural heritage in rural areas and that can attract visitors.

Pasir Salak Historical Complex at Kampung Gajah is the existing tourism product that is already known in Perak Tengah. However, the interpretation for visitors was limited to the gallery and has not fulfilled the expectation of visitors of cultural heritage in Perak Tengah. Based on the interpretation principles - interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, should give a full range of experiences to visitors and building relationship with the heritage site, especially to the rural community. Based on the focus group finding (result from 21 respondents), the homestay managers and tourist operators agreed and provided suggestion by ranking the six main cultural heritage resources that associated with the cultural heritage of Perak Tengah (see table 1). The cultural heritage resources categories include heritage buildings, traditional crafts, historical sites, rural cultures and natural heritage. From the list of main cultural heritage resources in Perak Tengah; Pasir Salak Historical Complex, traditional Kutai house, labu sayong craft and royal mausoleum trails are the most distinctive attraction and destination for tourism which is associated with Perak Tengah.

Table 1: Main Cultural Heritage Resources in Perak Tengah

Cultural Heritage Resources	Location	Categories	Remarks	Rank (n=21)
Pasir Salak Historical Complex	Kampung Gajah, Pasir Salak	Heritage building	The historical complex sits in the traditional Malay houses. It features various memorials erected to honor Malay heroes.	1 (28.57%)
Traditional Kutai house and panoramic view of traditional village	Bota Kiri, Padang Tenggara, Parit	Heritage building	There are about 40 Kutai's house that still survives but only 30 in intact conditions. (Sabrizaa Abd Rashid, 2014).	2 (23.80%)
Labu Sayong	Kampung Pulau Tiga, Kampung Bidara, Kampung Gajah	Traditional craft	Labu Sayong or water container made of clay	3 (19.05%)
Royal tomb (mausoleum)	Bota, Belanja, Pulau Tiga and Kampung Gajah,	Historical site	They are about 14 royal tombs site along Perak River in Perak Tengah	4 (14.28%)
Terrapin Wild-life Conservation Center	Bota Kanan	Natural heritage	An informative visitor Centre on river terrapin's species.	5 (9.52%)
Pekan Sehari (3 locations)	Bota kiri, Parit, Lambor, Kampung Gajah	Rural culture – daily life of community	Malay traditional market – selling daily needs	6 (4.76%)

Heritage Itineraries

According to Paola (2016), the planning of the tourist itinerary should have occurred within an appropriate heritage interpretation strategy as a working method which could facilitate the understanding and social use of the heritage sites. The mapping of heritage itinerary for Perak Tengah District was done base on the cultural heritage categories, the location, the

route (trail) and linkages between resources. The itineraries start with a starting point; which are a heritage site and an already well-known base on the rank of the tourist attraction (in table 2 above) and several other tourist resources selected for each mukim in Perak Tengah. Examples of heritage itineraries as shown in figure 3. Base on a mapping of the tourist attraction, most of the cultural heritage was spotted and concentrated at three small towns; Pekan Parit, Pekan Bota, and Kampung Gajah-Pasir Salak. Base on this mapping the tourist route or heritage trail was easy can be developed including the development of heritage interpretation strategy.

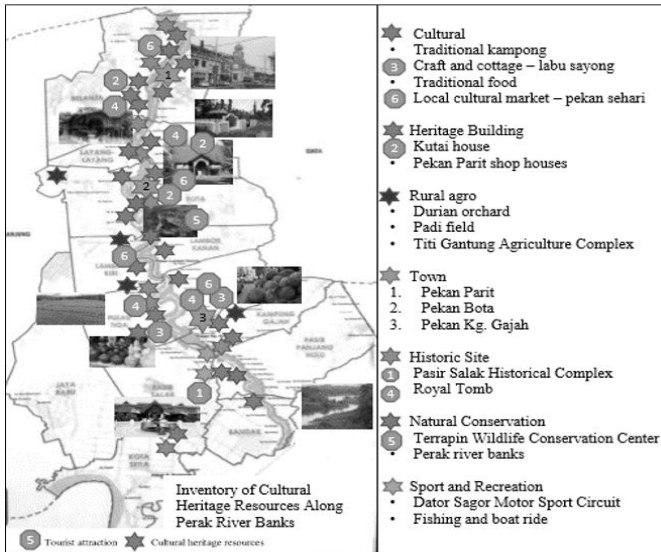


Figure 2: Area of Itinerary for Rural Heritage Tourism in Perak Tengah District

Interpretation Proposal

Heritage interpretation is an educational process that aims to reveal meanings about our culture. Good interpretation enhances our understanding, and appreciation. As a result, protection of natural and cultural sites can be implemented. Interpretation is an integral part of conservation (Beck and Cable, 2011). Interpretation proposal of Perak Tengah cultural heritage was developed base on interpretation principles of Tilden (1957), ICOMOS

(1999), Beck and Cable (2011) and Australia National Trust Interpretation (2014). The summary from these four sources can be concluded; interpretation is a process to know and understand the meaning of cultural heritage. Besides the guiding principles on how the culture can be presented and what story to tell, interpretation is also an engagement program between visitors and the heritage subjects. The interpretation plan needs to involve three main stages as suggested in Table 2.

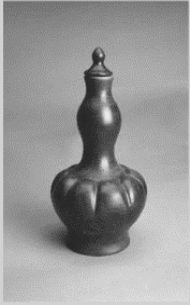
Table 2: Heritage Interpretation Plan for Perak Tengah District



Stage	Task	Process, Principles and Materials
Stage 1	Identifying cultural heritage significance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All the cultural heritage resources need to elaborate their significance on history and why they are important to communities and sites. 2. Put all these resources on the map in a theme which can be useful when planning tourist routes and walking trails.
Stage 2	Subject of interpretation and develop the story At this stage, all the subject to interpret and a story to tell should relate or check with all the interpretation principles. The interpretive writing and presentation should address what readers would like to know and considered their age difference.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The interpreters need to do detail research on a subject of interpretation. Interpreters need to be familiar with what story to tell about the heritage resources especially community and folks story. 2. The interpreters need to plan how to tell the story in interpretive ways which can attract visitors interest, make them involve with cultural heritage and excited to explore and stay longer at the sites. The best method of interpretation is show and tell where visitors physically involve with the heritage rather than listen to the interpreter’s briefing or story. 3. Who is it for? The audiences may include the existing visitors and people who don’t currently visit the place. Interpretation should address the children and young teenagers. The best interpretation and presentation is by doing the separate program or activities for children, teenagers and adults.

<p>Stage 3</p>	<p>Chosen suitable media for interpretation.</p> <p>Deciding what tools to use is very important in heritage interpretation. Selecting the right media should be be guided by the cost-effective aspect such as in terms of budget, human resources and long-term maintenance which benefit the community and heritage preservation (Woolmer, 2016).</p>	<p>Four types of interpretation media:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal or face to face – walks, talks, performances, workshops, demonstration. 2. Printed materials – brochures, map, handouts, exhibitions, leaflets, panels etc. 3. Interactive multi-media – slide shows, digital display board, film, apps, audio, websites, touchscreens. 4. On-site installations or tailor-made interpretation – sculpture, model, way-markers, signage, trails (the physical interpretation can become a cultural landmark for the sites)
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The interpretation guidance of rural cultural heritage significance presented in this paper focused on main resources which suggested most distinctive attraction and destination for tourism in Perak Tengah District (as shown in Table 3). The interpretation proposal or guidance in Table 3 presents the cultural heritage interpretation that is located in outdoor contexts; this will bond visitor relationship towards the heritage sites and will develop memorable experience for them.

Table 3: Interpretation Guidance for Rural Tourism in Perak Tengah District

Cultural Heritage Significance	Subject of Interpretation & Development of Story		Interpretation Medium
	What story to tell	How to show and tell	
<p>Traditional Craft: Labu Sayong</p> <p>Location: Kampung PulauTiga</p>  <p>Traditional water pitchers known as <i>labu sayong</i>.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The history of labu sayong should associated be with the place and people. For examples; Labu means pitcher while Sayong is a name of a small village near a river in the royal town of Kuala Kangsar. 2. The philosophy/culture/ folks behind the craft making. For examples; it is believed that the drinking water stored in the labu sayong has certain health properties to cure common ailments like a cough and fever. 3. How to make labu sayong pottery. Explain the steps and the design elements - clay motifs/decorations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A potter demonstrates their skills in the art of traditional pottery, using a tabletop hand-wheel to create a "labu sayong" 2. Visitors try to do it (DIY method) 3. Activities for children – art clay project. Interpretation for children should stimulate the children’s active participation in the theme. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printed materials - handouts, brochures, visitor’s guides on pottery making. 2. Panels and banners – interpretive contain to attract visitors at least before left the site they take a photo of memories. 3. Short video on Labu Sayong pottery 4. Souvenirs and handicraft for visitors

<p>Heritage building: Traditional Kutai House</p>  <p>Impressive Malay architecture of Kutai house mainly located at the riverbank of Perak River.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The history of Kutai house. For examples: The traditional Malay house in Perak is called the 'Rumah Kutai'. 'Kutai' means old. 2. Background and origins of the house. Who built it? Who lives there? How did the building change over time? What factors led to these change? 3. The architecture styles and typology. What philosophy has influenced the design and space? What materials and construction methods of the house? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visitor guide explains the “what story to tell” to visitors. Architectural details of the house can be interpreted to tell a story. 2. Living history interpretation – stay or spending a few days to experience the life in Kutai house and kampung. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printed materials - handouts, brochures on Kutai house. 2. Signage – interpretive map/ plan showing the interior or layout of the Kutai house. Gift and handicraft for visitors
<p>Historical Site: Makam DiRaja or tomb (mausoleum) for royal families</p>  <p>The tomb of the Perak Sultanate is one of the heritage monuments that still exist and preserved.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The history of Perak Sultanate and the ruling system. 2. Tell about the settlement along Perak’s river and relationship with the tombs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Historical trail of royal tomb starting from Bota to Kampung Gajah. 2. Story telling by interpreter/ tourist guide 	<p>On-site installations or tailor-made interpretation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information signage on history of the sultan 2. Continuous wayfinding along Perak River to the tombs. The signage or wayfinding should come out with a distinctive design that associates with the history of the royal sultanate and can become a prominent landmark for the site.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents information on effective interpretation that can play the main role in promoting heritage tourism in the rural area. There is a need to have an effective “Interpretation Plan” especially the rural area which has a varied and unique cultural heritages - tangible cultural heritage (TCH) and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Interpretation plan is a document that provides the principles, process, and strategies for interpretation and presentation of heritage. The plan identifies key themes, storylines, and audiences and provides recommendations about interpretation media. It includes practical and specific advice about how to implement the plan. There is no doubt that the interpretation exercise will be challenging one for those involved, but the results will be rewarding.

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