

REVEALING THE DISTINCTIVENESS CHARACTER OF PULAU SURI FLOATING MARKET

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ABSTRACT

The Pulau Suri floating market is the first-ever Malaysian floating market. The market offers a distinct character which attracts domestic and international visitors. However, in the midst of rapid global growth, floating markets have to compete with those in other countries to attract more visitors. This requires such markets to develop distinctiveness and character. This research aims to reveal the existing physical and socio-cultural characters embedded in the floating market at Pulau Suri, Tumpat. The objective is to examine how both parameter elements contribute to the establishment of Pulau Suri's floating market distinctiveness character. Qualitative descriptive methods were employed, including semi-interviews, observations and a field-survey. The data collection method for the field-survey was guided through the use of groupings of elements analysis, including historic and site-physical background; land use and activities; and accessibility and social-cultural factors. This study reveals ten elements affecting the distinctiveness character of Pulau Suri's floating market. These elements are significant elements for understanding, safeguarding, catalyst in the development of floating markets which is under of creative rural tourism.



Keywords: *Distinctiveness, Character, Floating market*

INTRODUCTION

A floating market consists of market activities that take place on the water rather than on land. Vendors sell merchandise from small boats that move along the river, creating a unique and distinct market atmosphere. Most transactions between vendors and buyers take place along the river (Arunrangsiwed, 2020; Siti et al., 2018; Ellyn, 2016; Charoenphon et al., 2011). Most floating markets are located in Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia (Kalimantan), Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and in several Indian waterways. These countries have floating markets because they are surrounded by large and small rivers, which have influenced the cultural patterns of river communities (Siti et al., 2018).

Floating markets, a type of water-based community cultural landscape, have become key tourism products in those regions. Likewise, Malaysia's floating markets have become an increasingly popular cultural tourism product among visitors. Nine Malaysian floating markets can be found in Kompleks JPS, and Pangkalan Tok Kuning, Perlis; Kuala Nerus, Terengganu; Tasik Takong Pengkalan Hulu, Perak; and Jengka, Pahang. Another four are Pulau Suri, Pengkalan Datu, and Pasar Terapung Sri Tanjung, Kelantan; Kampung Tellian Mukah, Sarawak and Kampong Bangau Semporna, Sabah. In contrast to other countries, the presence of those floating markets in Malaysia is intended to improve the local economy and attract tourists. In doing so, these floating markets face fierce competition with neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Those countries have unique floating market characteristics that can be deemed "original" culture, and trading is a hereditary livelihood (Siti et al., 2018; Ichikawa & Denpaiboon, 2017). For this reason, they have many advantages in terms of the distinctiveness of their floating markets.

Thus, to ensure that the floating market landscape tourism sector in Malaysia continues to grow and is able compete with other countries, it is important to ensure that each has its own local character. This research aims to reveal the existing physical and social-cultural elements that embed in the floating market at Pulau Suri, Tumpat. The objective is to examine how

both parameter elements contribute to and enhance Pulau Suri's floating market's distinctiveness local character.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of character pertain to the qualities and features that distinguish one person, groups of people and places from others (Wehmeiner, 1997). National Geography (2022) looks at locations through the lens of different geographic perspectives to understand their characters, which can be considered as the combination of physical and human geographic elements that make a place unique. A place's character can be analysed at the macro or micro level. Norberg-Schulz (1980) and Cullen (1961) affiliated character with the 'genius loci', which is the sense of place people have, understood as the sum of all physical and symbolic values in nature, the human environment. Character brings the concept of distinctiveness; a place can be distinguishable if it possesses distinctiveness (Ginting & Wahid, 2017; Twigger-Ross et al., 1996).

The concept of distinctiveness is an essential aspect of shaping place identity. Carmona et al. (2010) note that "distinctiveness is concerned with preserving and enhancing what is special about a place." Distinctiveness relates to a positive perception of the place's uniqueness and the fact that the activities that can be done at the place are different from other places. The distinctiveness of character makes a place unique and easy to recall (Ginting et al., 2017). When a place lacks distinctiveness, it becomes monotonous and unmemorable. According to El Hosary et al. (2018), a place has its own distinctive character due to the five following elements:

Table 1. Description of Local Distinctiveness Elements

Core Elements		Dynamic Elements		
Natural Features	Man Made Features	Cultural Identity and People	Food, Drink and Crafts	Industry and Business
Location Topography Natural Landscape Habitat Coastline Native Plants Natural Materials	Historic Features Townscape Buildings Monument Transportation	Event Language Tradition Famous Person Dressing Music	Craft Artifact Food Drink	Manufacturing Cultural Industries Land uses Activities

Based on the literature review above, it concluded that the two main factors that create distinctiveness character are physical factors (core elements) and social-cultural factors (dynamic elements). However, these characteristics can change over time and influence a place's character due to rapid modernization, resulting in a loss of place identity (Zakaria et al, 2021). In the context of this floating market research, revealing the existing distinctiveness character of the floating market is the first process that needs to be considered to ensure that the local character of the market will continue to be maintained amid modernization. Although the floating market is not an original cultural landscape in Malaysia, presenting a local version of the floating market can enhance the place's character and attract visitors, as well as improve the local economy.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology section discusses the research design, types of data and data collection methods, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

The research methodology was analytical, descriptive, and qualitative. According to Koentjaraningrat (1997), descriptive research aims to describe precisely the characteristics of an individual, circumstances, symptoms or certain groups. This study chose the Pulau Suri floating market as a case study to uncover the distinctiveness character of the market. This case study was conducted using a field survey.

Types of Data and Data Collection Methods

There were two types of data used, including primary data and secondary data. The secondary data were gathered from scholarly journals, government reports, maps, newspapers, conference papers, books, magazines and the internet. Primary data were collected via field survey (including direct observation, and documentation) and semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview method was used in this study because the information obtained from interview sources can support and strengthen the information obtained from field survey sources. Using a list of predetermined questions, a total number of nine informants are among

visitors to the floating market to obtain their opinions on the aspects of distinctiveness related to accessibility, attractive places, diversity of selling local products and cultural activities, and facilities. A field survey was performed by collecting the elements that support the formation of the distinct character of the research area. Based on the theory of the formation of character distinctiveness elements (El Hosary et al., 2018) adapted to this research, five groupings of elements were used as a guide during data collection at the field study stage as follows (Table 2):

Table 2. Checklist for the Field Study

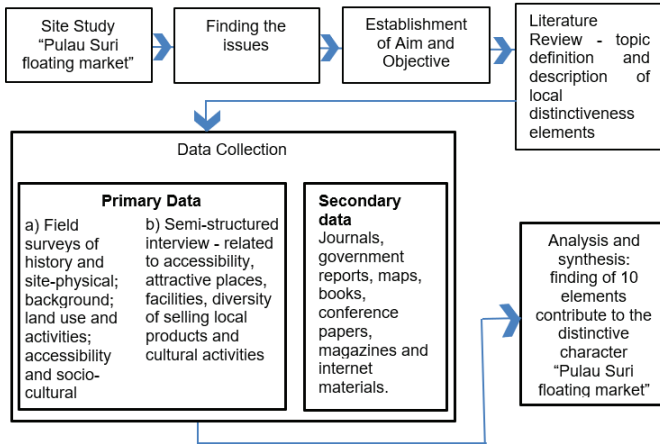
Elements	Data
1. History and Site-physical Background	The location and geographical boundaries, total area, accessibility, number of residents and houses, community ethnicities, economic activities, derived 'name', historical morphology of the site, year established and concept of the floating market.
2. Land use and Activities	The acreage and percentage of land use types; types of land use can be divided into the four relevant items assessed: a) market – types of market, open day and time, vendor ethnicities, space layout, numbers of boat/stall, practices, types of goods; b) open space – total area, location, function, condition, types of facilities, owners c) natural landscape area – types of area, location, species of vegetation and wildlife, functions, types of activities and overall condition.
3. Accessibility	The types of networks, access ways, the distances of every stop - the travel time and fare, types of boats and load capacity per boat.
4. Socio-Cultural	The floating market's vendors (gender majority, costumes, and dialects), and the floating market's visitors/buyers (estimated number of people per day visiting the floating market, types of visitors, activities, and types of local culinary, traditional games, craftsmanship and cultural performance).

Source: Author's analysis

Analysis

Analysis activities are carried out to reveal the attractiveness of the floating market. At this stage of analysis, the data and information obtained are analysed in a qualitative descriptive manner. This is a combination of data from semi-interview, field surveys and secondary sources.

Table 3: The Methodology Flow Chart



Source: /

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Historical and Site-Physical Background

The Pulau Suri floating market is situated on an island in Pantai Suri village and is known as Pulau Suri Floating Market (Pasar Terapung Pulau Suri in Malay). The Pulau Suri is a floating market location within the cluster of islands at the estuary of the Kelantan River, Tumpat district, Kelantan. Geographically, Pulau Suri floating market is located at the position of 02° 49' 55" South Latitude to 03° 43' 38" South Latitude and 114° 30' 20" East Longitude to 115° 35' 37" East Longitude (Figure 1). Pulau Suri has an area of 10,904 m². The only way to access and exit the Pulau Suri floating market is through the waterways using a boat. Nearly 70 houses in Pantai Suri village are populated by about 435 residents, mostly Malay fishing families. The location of the floating market site was uninhabited.

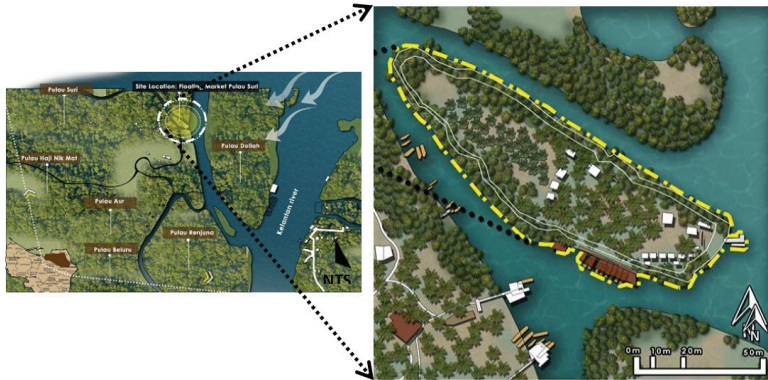


Figure 1. Key Plan (left) and Site Plan (right) of Pulau Suri Floating Market

Source: Author

There are two versions of how the name 'Pantai Suri' originated. The first version is named after a village midwife, Bidan Suri, who explored the village about 50 years ago. Another version represents the name of the wife of the village's first resident, Suri. Because the topography is an island, it is known as 'Pulau Suri'. Earlier, Pulau Suri was an uninhabited island owned by a Pantai Suri villager named Ghani Dollah. From 1985 to 2004, this small sandy island was covered with 50 sea coconut trees planted lengthwise by him (Hussein, 2022). After that year, the island was left desolate with no cultivation efforts. The abandoned island was developed into a floating market by Saifuddin Ibrahim and his friends in order to help increase the income of Pantai Suri village's villagers and act as a tourist attraction. This is because most of the villagers work as fishermen and live below the poverty line (Arziana Mohmad Azaman, 2021, The Star, 2016). After the villagers' ideas and collaboration with Syarikat Suri Mas Seroja and Kelantan State Tourism (TIC), the Pulau Suri floating market opened on September 17, 2016. The idea and concept of this floating market's Kelantan version is a replica of the Hatyai Klong Hae floating market in Songkhla, Thailand. Initially, the management of the floating market provided ten boats to sell food and drinks. Most visitors were Singaporeans and locals.

Land uses and activities

Land uses and activities are the primary human influences that shape

and organize rural communities. Investigating changing and continuing land uses enhances our understanding of how people interact with their environment and provides clues about what physical features and historic properties should be present (USDI, 1994). The analysis shows three types of land use in Pulau Suri. The market land use which split into two types of markets, namely floating markets (5 %) and land markets (5 %), with the remainder of the area being made up of open space land use (42 %), and natural landscape land use that consists of green space (14 %) and riverside areas (34 %).

Market

Based on the field observations, Pulau Suri Floating Market is divided into two areas, namely the floating market and the land market. The floating market is the main attraction for visitors to Pulau Suri, because it is a unique cultural tourism destination displayed in Kelantan's version of a floating market. Visitors can find a variety of local delicacies and enjoy an authentic experience of the local culture. Pulau Suri floating market is open only on Saturdays and begins its activities when daylight breaks from around 8.00 am to 4.00 pm. Most vendors are community people in Pantai Suri village and need to pay RM10 a day per slot for float market management. The average income of floating market vendors is RM300 to RM400 per day. Thus, opening this floating market can increase the income and standard of living of the Pulau Suri villagers, who depend on fishermen or farmers' work.

In terms of layout, the floating market is 50 meters long and is located on the bank of the river. The physical arrangement for the floating market means that boats are parked side-by-side under a roof deck built along the river's edge, as shown in Figure 2. To allow visitors to walk between the vendors on the boat, a waterside wooden path facility is provided along the floating market. Based on observations, visitors seem to spend more time in market spaces close to natural landscapes. Visitors who have completed their purchases can then enjoy their food and consume them in the open space provided by the island. Obviously, the uniqueness of the physical environment of this floating market is a key factor in attracting visitors.

There are two interesting concepts during the buying and selling. Firstly, the vendors do not move or are static in the boat, and buyers must actively move from land to approach the traders. When buyers pay,

they extend a stick with a container to collect the money from the buyer. Secondly, during the transaction between vendors and buyers, they practice sales and purchase agreement (*ijab qabul*) by the oral method following the provisions of Islamic law (Hanafiah, 2019). Vendors will say "I sell," (*ijab*) while buyers say "I buy," (*qabul*). The informant considered that the culture of buying and selling on the water was unique and became the attraction of the Pulau Suri floating market area. Unlike the floating markets of other countries with many floating market boats, Pulau Suri only has 10 boat slots, selling all sorts of local delicacies and drinks. The number of vendors in the floating market varies, depending on the available commodities they want to sell. At certain times, such as school holidays, more than 10 floating market boats are present.

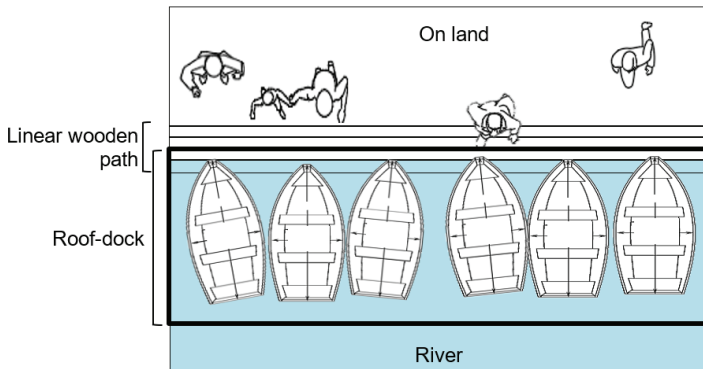


Figure 2. Location of the Floating Market along the River's Edge where Boats are Parked Side-by-side under a Roof Deck Built

Source: Author

Another type of market is the land market, which consists of eight stalls. The land market is about 545 m², and is located in the island's centre and southeast of the island. The purpose of opening the land market is to support the floating market by providing a wider selection of merchandise, giving opportunities to more villagers of Pantai Suri village to run businesses and also increasing the attractiveness of this market further. The land market sells goods such as cakes, local dishes, robe dresses, shawls, scarves, batik, hat accessories, aprons and souvenirs.

Open Space

At 1,432 m², the open space on Suri Island is relatively small and tends to be crowded with visitors. Open space is provided as an area for vendors and visitors to gather and engage in a various of activities such as eating local food, sitting, shopping for a variety of goods, sampling the food on offer, playing, socializing, wandering around, seeing traditional cultural shows and also relaxing as shown in Figure 3. This open space is owned or organized through negotiation between the local municipality and the landlord's private entrepreneurs. It was constructed in the south-eastern area dominated by coconut groves, with grassy-free surface and land markets. Several facilities provide convenience and comfort to visitors, such as the eating area, wooden jetty platform, wooden walkway along the floating market, a public lavatory, prayer rooms, an archway and signboards. However, it has been observed that the basic public facilities provided by the site are very basic and insufficient. Likewise, in terms of cultural program spaces, there is no specific design for the area. These should be added and improved to make it more comfortable and beneficial while also contributing to the enhancement of the Pulau Suri Floating Market's character.



Figure 3. Open Space as Space for Visitors to Gather and do Various Activities

Source: Author

Natural landscape area

There are two major natural landscape areas in Pulau Suri: green space and the riverside area. The green space occupies the northern part of Suri Island and is the predominant land use, with an area of 4334 m². Further inland, the Pantai Suri's villagers have planted rows of coconut trees (Cocos

nucifera). These cultivated plants are a source of drinks and culinary foods such as coconut drinks or smoothies. The dominant type of naturalized plants are bushes and tall grasses. The common treeshrew (*Tupaia glis*) is one of the wild animals in this natural landscape area due to the presence of many coconut trees, which are a food source for this species. There are also several species of colourful birds, such as the Japanese sparrowhawk (*Accipiter gularis*) and Javan myna (*Acridotheres javanicus*), as well as monitor lizards (*Varanus salvator*).

The riverside area consists of 3529 m² on Pulau Suri's edge. Nipa palm (*Nypa fruticans*) grows in the mangroves and stood alongside the riverbanks. Villagers use the plant as a source of ingredients, such as the famous local kerabu Nipa (palm salad), which is widely sold in floating markets. Other riparian plant species that grow in the riverside area are the mangrove apple (*Sonneratia caseolaris*), Portia tree (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*) and vetiver grass (*Vetiveria zizanioides*). In addition, aquatic creatures such as the giant mudskipper (*Periophthalmodon schlosseri*) and Nipa crab (*Scylla serrata*) can be found in the riverside area. Besides providing habitat and food for a variety of aquatic life, the riverside vegetation area also acts as a buffer zone, stabilizing the riverbanks and creating the natural character and tranquil landscape of Pulau Suri. In short, the various vegetation of green spaces and riverside areas must be protected as a whole mainly to ensure the sustainability of natural resources.

Accessibility

Accessibility networks are transportation systems that move people, goods, and materials from one area to another (USDI, 1994). Pulau Suri floating market is located on an island, and no roads lead to the island. The only way to access this floating market is by boat, and this type of transportation makes it unique. There are three mainland jetties that serve as take-off points for connecting to Pulau Suri. From LKIN Kuala Besar jetty, visitors must pay RM7 per person. It takes about 15 minutes to reach the floating market, which is the closest take-off point to the island particularly for those coming directly from Kota Bharu. There is a 30-minute boat ride to the floating market if visitors take from the Medan Grilled Fish jetty and the ticket cost is RM21 per person. Meanwhile, many visitors prefer to take a boat through the Pengkalan Kok Majid jetty, paying RM11 per person

and for a journey of around 40 minutes.

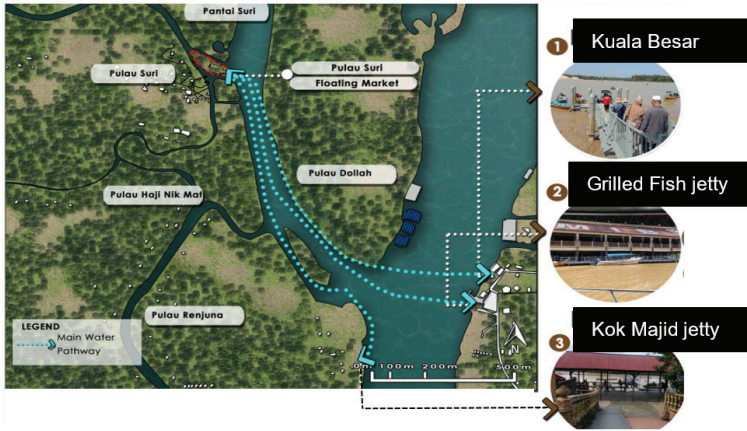


Figure 4: There are Three Mainland Jetties that Serve as Take-off Points for Connecting to Pulau Suri

Source: Author

With this much access, it is considered relatively easy for visitors to come to the Pulau Suri floating market. The informant also agreed on the ease of access to the floating market area. The boat used to carry a passenger is a type of outboard engine fibreglass boat that carries 12 people and is powered by two large 115 engines. Along the riverway leading to the Pulau Suri floating market, visitors will see several islands and have the opportunity to experience the tranquil natural surroundings, the local settlement alongside the river, various river community activities, wild river habitats, village residents' boat traffic and other floating markets.

Social and Cultural Aspects

Cultural traditions affect how land is used, occupied, and shaped. Religious beliefs, social customs, ethnic identity, and trades and skills may be evident today in the land's physical features and use (USDI, 1994). The evaluation of social and cultural aspects will focus on six aspects: boat vendors and visitors/buyers, traditional food offered, traditional games, craftsmanship and cultural programmes.

Boat Vendors

Boat vendors are found in the floating market, where older women

predominate. The female boat vendors use a small-sized outboard engine fiberglass boat (known as 'bot enjin galah' in Kelantan) that carry only two people. They are expert at controlling the merchandise-laden boat. Despite their proximity, they maintain their boats' balance and avoid colliding. Interestingly, the vendor's profiles remain natural, with traditional attire. Women wear the traditional baju kurung, which consists of a loose-fitting blouse and a sarung. They also have their heads covered in the Islamic tradition with tudungs or hoods. In the boat, women traders use plastic baskets to display their merchandise. They welcome potential buyers/visitors who come with friendly smiles and offer the merchandise they had upon the board. The Kelantanese dialect is the primary medium of interaction between vendors and buyers in the Pulau Suri floating market.

Visitors/buyers

The visitors/buyers to floating markets have three types: nearby inhabitants, local visitors and foreign tourists. Based on on-site research and informants, the floating market receives an average of 500 visitors daily. This can go up to 1500 visitors during school holidays, of which 33% are nearby inhabitants, 2% are foreigners and 65% are local tourists. The nearby inhabitants deliberately come to the floating market to buy daily necessities and prices remain relatively low. Meanwhile, according to the informants, locals and foreigners are attracted to the floating market area because of the unique experience of buying at the floating market and enjoying various Kelantanese food. Usually, visitors spend between one to two hours, enjoying various passive recreational activities.

Local Delicacies Offered

In analysing the local delicacies available in the Pulau Suri floating market, the research found that a wide variety of traditional Kelantan food is sold. Interestingly, these markets sell items that are rarely obtained elsewhere because they are obtained from nearby forests, crops around the house or collected from plants that grow wild in their village. Among the traditional food that is unique and most sought after by visitors is kerabu Nipa (palm salad), where mangrove palm flowers are obtained from mangrove trees that grow on the banks of rivers or swampy areas only. Due to its uniqueness, there are demonstrations of cooking kerabu Nipa in the floating market area. There was also a demonstration of making kuih kapit (love letters).

Other exotic and traditional Kelantan foods are nasi tumpang, nasi kerabu (salad rice), miang kham (an appetizer from the Thai community), kuih kerepek (fish crackers), lokan keju bakar (baked cheese oyster), latok (grape seaweed salad), and etok salai (smoked corbiculacea), Melaka sugar and many more. While the drinks, vendors offer bottled water and young coconut water fresh, as well as Nipa drinks (mangrove palm juice) to visitors. The locals believe that Nipa vinegar can help in the treatments of diabetes, hypertension and many more ailments. The visitors can observe a demonstration of how the juice is extracted by cutting the trunk and placing a plastic bag/bottle to collect the juice. To summarise, local delicacies offered in the Pulau Suri floating market consists of exotic delicacies, traditional dishes and drinks from their own orchards. So, the product from the market is still raw. As stated by the informants, they prefer the natural food products sold in this market rather than processed products.

Traditional Games

Visitors come not just to buy food but also for an opportunity to watch the bantam chicken vocal fighting competition (ayam serama). The traditional games are held on Pulau Suri, where the vocal fighting of selected hybrid jungle roosters competes against each other. The competition is recognized as a heritage art of ayam serama Kelantan by the State Culture and Arts Department (JKKN) as shown in Figure 5. As stated by the informant, this chicken vocal competition is unique and rarely seen anywhere. Another unique traditional game in which visitors have the opportunity to watch trained monkeys (*Macaca spp*) pluck coconuts. In Kelantan, coconut-picking monkeys are necessary for the traditional coconut industry, because each monkey can pick around 100 coconuts daily (Anem, 2020).

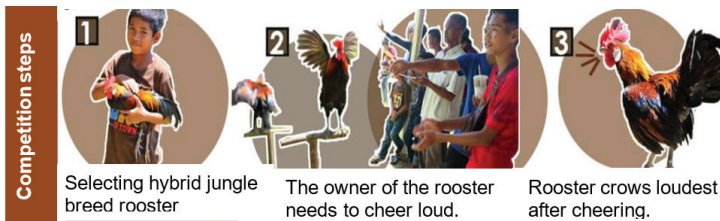


Figure 5. The Bantam Chicken Vocal Fighting Competition

Source: Author

Craftsmanship

Based on direct observation, Pulau Suri floating market has traditionally beautiful and varied craftsmanship. Mengkuang mats are among the handicrafts that are often demonstrated in the Pulau Suri floating market. Visitors to the Pulau Suri floating market have the opportunity to watch weavers demonstrate the weaving of mengkuang mats, or even knit them by hand. The mats are sold at Pulau Suri floating market at prices ranging from RM65 to RM180 each. Visitors can also watch demonstrations of villagers making roofs from Nipa leaves. Other craftsmanship displayed and sold at the Pulau Suri floating market area includes making charcoal from coconut shells, painting batik and building fishing boats. Displaying the manufacture of craftsmanship is seen as an effort of this floating market area to sustain the distinctive values of craftsmanship while upholding their cultural identities (Maaruf et al., 2020). Even so, craftsmanship demonstrations are not available weekly but only at certain times, such as during school holidays or special occasions.

Cultural Performances

While feasting on meals, visitors may also entertain with traditional music or local cultural performances, such as dikir barat and kertok. Both performances are commonly held on the island from 10 am to noon. Unfortunately, as with the craft demonstrations, these events also are held at the request of visitors who come in groups rather than weekly. Local authorities can organize or encourage communities to hold cultural events and festivals on a regular basis to attract tourists to market shopping and cultural visits.

CONCLUSION

The research has pointed out ten factors that contribute to the formation of distinctive character in Pulau Suri's floating market. The physical factors of the floating market's distinct character include the uniqueness of its physical location on the island, land use and activities (consisting of markets, open space and natural landscape), and easy access to the floating market. Meanwhile, the social-cultural factors of the distinct character include the history and memory of the Pulau Suri floating market; the visitors to the market; boat vendors, who are mostly mature women, in terms of their

ethnicity, costumes, dialect interaction, buying and selling practices; the product display and the various merchandise on the boats (local culinary dishes and fresh produce); craftsmanship; and traditional games and cultural performances.

Generally, the results revealed ten factors of distinctive character in Pulau Suri's floating market can be suggested as significant elements in understanding, safeguarding, and catalysing the development of creative rural tourism as addressed in the Ninth and Tenth Malaysia Plan, and the National Tourism Policy. From the community's perspectives, the research will help the local community to improve their business and thus contributes to the local economy. With these ten factors of floating market distinctive characteristics revealed, industry practitioners are expected to be aware of tourist needs and get inspiration on how to transform or revive their tourism businesses. Finally, the findings on distinctive character of floating market will contribute to filling a gap in the knowledge, since no reviews about local character floating market have yet been undertaken.

However, this study has its limitations, primarily being the focus only on Pulau Suri's floating market's distinctiveness character. Therefore, future studies should investigate the other floating market throughout Malaysia. The research also has its limitations because of the number of informants and the qualitative methodology used. Thus, future research should increase the number of informants and employ a mixed-methods approach in order to enrich the collected data and in consequence, the study's findings.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Faridatul Akma Abdul Latif was the main contributor to the study who created the abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, conclusion and references. Salina Mohamed Ali and Masbiha Mat Isa helped in the methodology, results, and discussion and references. Ili Najwa Syamimi Mohd Zain helped write parts of methodology and references.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the research.

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Tarikh : 20 Januari 2023

Prof. Madya Dr. Nur Hisham Ibrahim
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Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

Setuju.

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