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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AS AN APPROACH FOR SUSTAINING CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUES: A CASE STUDY OF GEORGETOWN, PENANG.

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ABSTRACT

The study explores Responsible Tourism as an approach to balance the growth of the tourism industry with the preservation of Georgetown cultural history, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, due to the growing concern over the sustainability of cultural assets in heritage-rich locations. The impact of mass tourism on local communities and heritage sites, as well as the necessity of increased community engagement in tourism management, are among the important concerns covered in the research. The main objectives of the research are to explore the role of Responsible Tourism in enhancing cultural heritage preservation, promote community engagement in tourism-related activities, and propose strategies to mitigate the negative effects of tourism. A number of important topics are covered in this study, such as how tourism affects cultural heritage, and the necessity of Responsible Tourism practices that respect cultures. The study uses a structured questionnaire to locals approach for quantitative surveys. The results show that incorporating Responsible Tourism into cultural heritage promotes environmental stewardship and cultural resilience in addition to improving the visitor experience. This study emphasises how crucial it is to acknowledge Responsible Tourism as a key element in the growth of cultural heritage, promoting policies that balance financial gains with cultural sustainability.

Keywords: *Responsible Tourism, Cultural heritage, Community engagement, preservation*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has grown significantly in the last several decades, making it one of the biggest sectors in the world. Tourism offers the potential to provide economic development, through the provisions of increased income and employment and funding for the maintenance of national parks as well as conserving nature (Buultjens, Ratnayake, Gnanapala, & Aslam, 2005). However this quick growth has also brought with it serious problems, such as the deterioration of the environment, the loss of cultural legacy, and socioeconomic divides between the host populations and visitors. Therefore, Responsible Tourism has emerged as a preventive approach to maintain the sustainability of parks. Despite Responsible Tourism being a vague concept that is difficult to operationalize (Merwe & Wöcke, 2007), it is still a very important guideline for tour operators and authorities to implement.

The concept "Responsible Tourism" has gained popularity in the travel and hospitality sector. Responsible Tourism is not a kind of tourism; rather, it is an alternative strategy to the development of tourism (Goodwin, 2011). It is mainly motivated by the "Principles of Sustainable Tourism," which are once more founded on "tourism ethics" and "human rights." The evolution of tourism development has revealed it to have a double-edged character (Dredge and Jenkins, 2007). As an approach, Responsible Tourism provides a long-term way to handle the intricate effects of tourism. It promotes enjoyable and respectful travel experiences by highlighting the significance of establishing deep links between visitors and host communities.

The cultural shifts brought about by Penang Island's tourism, according to some critics, are a result of globalization's reality of fast economic growth, ongoing urbanisation, and shifting demographics. Changes in residents' lifestyle: Mignolo (1998) argued that tourism is a form of modernization and will deeply affect the urbanization process in a community. Ahmad (2006) goes on to say that urbanization and modernization have exposed many old historic areas in the region in danger of being demolished in the name of progress. Gaining an understanding of the cultural heritage was crucial to

understanding how the locals define Responsible Tourism. Likewise, the historical and contemporary knowledge of the participants has an equal influence. When considered collectively, participants' comprehension of the area's cultural heritage influences their reactions to tourists and their comprehension of Responsible Tourism. (Lindholm & Ekblom, 2019).

Therefore, the objectives of this paper is (i) To promote Responsible Tourism to Inform travellers about the value of cultural heritage and its preservation to persuade them to take responsible actions. (ii) To include community Engagement to evaluate the perceptions of local residents in Georgetown towards the impacts of tourism development in Penang and (iii) To develop Mitigation of Negative Impacts by Promoting methods to reduce harm by assisting in the identification and resolution of the adverse impacts of tourism on cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Preservation Approach (Global case studies)

Case studies of Responsible Tourism throughout the world provide important insights into striking a balance between historical preservation and the growth of Responsible Tourism approach. As Smith (2016) points out, the preservation of cultural heritage is not just about protecting the past but also about fostering resilience and adaptability for future generations. Responsible Tourism has emerged as a key instrument for guaranteeing the conservation of cultural assets while also boosting local economies and communities all over the world.

Machu Picchu, Peru

Machu Picchu's authorities implemented daily restrictions on visitors to address tourism complaints. This reduced congestion and improved the site's integrity. A timed ticketing system was also implemented to maintain a consistent flow of visitors and prevent damage to historic buildings. These strategies have demonstrated that it is possible to balance tourism with heritage preservation. Through careful management of visitor numbers, the involvement of local communities, and the reinvestment of tourism revenue into conservation, Machu Picchu serves as a model of how Responsible

Tourism can contribute to both the protection of cultural heritage and the economic sustainability of local communities (Bastante & Busto, 2018).

Zanzibar, Tanzania

Zanzibar's approach focuses more on community-based tourism and local involvement in conservation efforts. Involving local people in tourist planning and decision-making has been one of the main tactics. This guarantees that the growth of tourism is in line with locals' interests and promotes the preservation of their cultural identity. In order to support cultural practices and generate income, locals are urged to serve as tour guides, craftspeople, and guardians of the island's customs. Through this model of community engagement, eco-tourism, and cultural preservation, Zanzibar offers an example of how Responsible Tourism can foster both economic development and the protection of cultural heritage without the heavy regulation seen in other tourism hotspots (Hassan, 2020).

Local preservation approach (Georgetown, Penang case study)

Since Georgetown's inclusion on the UNESCO list of heritage buildings, the Malaysian government has been working hard to preserve these structures. These historic structures must be conserved to the International Council on Monuments and Sites' level in order to maintain its most original and stable state. Because of climatic shifts, conservation efforts are becoming increasingly difficult (Harun, 2011). There are policies that need to be followed during the conservation processes. These policies will act as the guideline for the stakeholders. The impacts of conservation politics are wide-ranging and influencing the economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of a community (Rypkema, 1994; Pickard and Pickerill, 2002; Leichenko et al., 2001).

This is where Responsible Tourism plays a pivotal role. By encouraging visitors to interact with heritage assets in a way that enhances rather than diminishes their preservation, Responsible Tourism as a strategy strongly relates to these conservation principles. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Responsible Tourism emphasizes the need to minimize negative impacts on the environment and local communities while ensuring tourism is a tool for enhancing cultural preservation (UNWTO, 2020).

Additionally, Responsible Tourism may give communities the resources they need to manage tourism in a sustainable way. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) highlights the importance of involving local communities in heritage management to foster a sense of ownership and pride, while ensuring that conservation practices are integrated into everyday tourism (ICOMOS, 2020).

Responsible Tourism Approach

A rising understanding of the detrimental effects mass tourism may have on local people, the environment, and cultural heritage led to the development of the approach of Responsible Tourism. According to Hall (2007) and Schilcher (2007), only tourism growth is not enough, if equity cannot be achieved. Urray and Larsen (2011) have expressed their concern about the unequal power structures in tourism growth at various tourist destinations.

The Responsible Tourism approach stresses the need for a sustainable, balanced connection between tourist activities and their surrounding environment, in contrast to traditional tourism models that frequently prioritise economic advantages without taking into account their wider implications. Responsible Tourism is gradually becoming more popular as a means of assisting locals at tourist destinations (SNV, 2009).

To make positive changes at tourist destinations, a good number of modern-day experts also have suggested that, when constructing tourism attractions, both the “Principles of Responsible Tourism” and the “Responsible Tourism Guidelines” should be taken into consideration (Bendell and Font, 2004; Bohdanowicz, 2006).

Responsible Tourism approach in Malaysia

As a proactive approach to guaranteeing the destination's long-term survival, Responsible Tourism has a long history (Tay et al, 2016). Current trends suggest that a Responsible Tourism strategy is being formed, even in the absence of official statistics (Mody et al., 2017). Enhancing the cultural, economic, and environmental aspects of tourism is the goal of Responsible Tourism (Dębicka & Oniszczyk Jastrzabek, 2014; Lee et al., 2017).

Under the 9th Malaysia plan, a more integrated approach to tourism planning and management is to be undertaken (EPU, 2005) through preserving as well as enhancing the existing and natural and cultural assets. In addition, the role of the State Tourism Action Councils (STAC) will be further expanded to include regular monitoring and evaluating of project outcomes. Besides to ensure the preservation of the environment, tourism activities should preserve the culture of the local communities and provide adequate economic opportunities for the locals whilst guarding them against exploitation (Moore 1996, Leposky 1997).

Community Engagements

Previous research has shown that local community support is crucial to the sustainable growth of the rural tourism sector (Sharma & Dyer, 2009; Scales, 2014), as local communities are the only and most convenient source of human capital for the growth of rural tourism. In order to minimise negative effects and maximise positive ones, the Cape Town Declaration (2002) promoted the definition of social responsibility as assessing social consequences based on the operation's life cycle, which includes the planning and design phases (Mathew and Kumar, 2014).

The degree of local community involvement in historical protection will depend on their level of awareness (Halim & Tambi, 2021). In order to conserve and preserve cultural heritage, it is crucial that the general public is aware of the breadth of its values.

Overall, the literature suggests that effective Responsible Tourism strategies require integrating guidelines and principles into tourism planning processes. By focusing on sustainability, cultural preservation, and community involvement, Responsible Tourism can create a harmonious balance between heritage conservation and the economic benefits of tourism.

In conclusion, Responsible Tourism is a powerful tool for achieving long-term cultural preservation, supporting local economies, and mitigating the negative consequences of mass tourism. By prioritizing sustainability, Responsible Tourism helps create a more resilient and inclusive tourism industry (Bohdanowicz, 2006).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Method (Demography)

The study will use a sampling technique to select local residents. The goal of the questions was to gather between 50 and 100 responses, however because of the deadline, only 30 were able to complete them. This method ensures that different groups within the local population are represented, particularly in terms of:

- Age groups: Younger, middle-aged, and older residents to ensure diverse perspectives on cultural heritage.
- Involvement in cultural heritage activities: Residents actively engaged in heritage preservation versus those less involved.

Data Collection and Research instrument

This research was conducted in Georgetown that focuses on Macalister Road, Penang Road, Gurney Drive and the city center of Georgetown. Employs a quantitative research design to examine the community engagement in being part of the Responsible Tourism approach in Georgetown, Penang, with a focus on local residents. The methodology is structured to collect numerical data from local residents regarding their awareness, attitudes, and behaviors related to cultural heritage preservation and their role in Responsible Tourism. A structured questionnaire is employed as the primary tool for data collection. Descriptive research is used to describe the characteristics of the variable used in research and seek to answer the questions to who, what, when, where, and how (Zikmund, 2003). The descriptive research is a questionnaire to receive community feedback on their opinions of the Responsible Tourism approach. The questionnaires are distributed from door-to-door, and this method was chosen because of its higher response rate than other methods (Andereck & Nickerson, 1997) but in this era as technology has improved, instead of door-to-door, the questionnaires are open-ended questions to gather insights from respondents to get more meaningful answers, is given through Google forms online as it is faster and easier.

A structured open-ended questionnaire will be developed to gather

data which are community feedback on Responsible Tourism approach. The survey is an open-ended question designed for community engagement on Responsible Tourism. The questionnaire will be divided into several categories:

a) Awareness of Cultural Heritage in Georgetown

This section aims to assess local residents' knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage of Georgetown, including both tangible and intangible aspects. Example questions include:

- How important is Cultural Heritage to your community's identity?
- What benefits do you think Cultural Heritage brings to tourism in your region?

b) Community involvement

- In what ways do you think local communities can participate in promoting Cultural Heritage through tourism?

- Please share your experience engaging in any tourism initiatives.

c) Sustainability and preservation

- What challenges do you see in preserving Cultural heritage in the face of tourism?

- How can tourism be managed to ensure the preservation of Cultural heritage?

The statistical software (such as SPSS or Atlasti) will be used for data entry, cleaning, and analysis. The results will help identify patterns in local residents' understanding and attitudes toward cultural heritage and Responsible Tourism, and whether these are influenced by factors such as involvement in heritage activities

Limitations

This study is limited to local residents in Georgetown, Penang. Therefore, the findings may not be directly applicable to other regions or tourist destinations but some show examples of other states' cultural heritage for Responsible Tourism. Additionally, since the data will rely on self-reported responses, there may be biases such as social desirability bias or response bias, and also their true opinions.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive statistical analysis was carried out using Atlas.Ti in order to characterise and summarise the key characteristics of the data set on each component of Responsible Tourism, namely community involvement, Economic impact, Sustainability and preservation and improvements

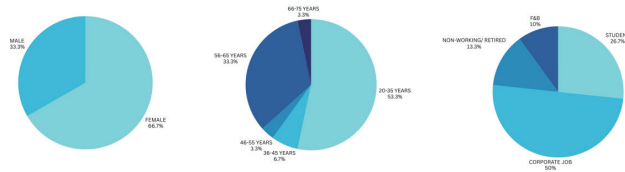


Figure 1. Demographic Data

Source: Author

Figure 1 shows the statistics. The sample consists of 90% female respondents and 10% male respondents, indicating a higher representation of females. The respondents ranged in age from 20 to 75 years, with the largest age group being 20-35 years.



Figure 2. Questionnaire Data on Local Awareness

Source: Author

Figure 2 indicates the local awareness of cultural heritage for Responsible Tourism in Georgetown, Penang. The importance of cultural heritage to the communities identity. Most of the respondents agreed with the local awareness in terms of benefits, local feelings and the identity importance. As evidenced Respondent 19 and the majority of the other respondents. Respondent 19 in Quotation 3 pointed out:

“Cultural Heritage representation in tourism is very important to showcase and attract interest in tourists. One significant advantage of cultural tourism is its potential to boost local economies. Tourist expenditures in local businesses such as restaurants, and shops can contribute to the growth”.

“Cultural heritage is a big draw for tourism in Penang, showcasing its history, food, and traditions. It’s great for the community, but it’s important to ensure tourism respects and preserves the culture and landmarks” quoted by respondent 27, in terms of locals' feelings towards cultural heritage for Responsible Tourism.

However, there are also a few respondents who disagree with the positive values such as: *“The awareness for this heritage value is not well spoken/introduced either by government or local council. But, back in the 2010s the representation was much better. Right now, we lost them for the sake of trend, this fast growing world does not suit for those delicate heritage time consuming”* quoted by respondent 7 which the respondents feelings are moderate.

Based on these findings, it is clear that while cultural heritage has the potential to significantly contribute to Responsible Tourism, more concerted efforts are needed to ensure that tourism development is aligned with cultural preservation. Local governments, tourism stakeholders, and the community must collaborate to promote Responsible Tourism practices that not only enhance the visitor experience but also protect and celebrate the region's cultural heritage for future generations. Local community participation is considered an important asset in the development of tourism as it will take place within their domain and the local community is considered the legitimate and moral stakeholder in tourism development (Haukeland, 2011; Iqbal & Ahmed, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the significance of cultural heritage in promoting Responsible Tourism in Georgetown, Penang, by examining the perspectives of local residents. The findings highlight the importance of cultural heritage as a key driver for Responsible Tourism, with many respondents recognizing its potential to boost the local economy and preserve the community's unique identity. Cultural heritage tourism, through its focus on history, traditions, and local culture, can serve as an effective tool for sustainable tourism development, fostering both economic growth and cultural preservation.

However, the study also revealed concerns among respondents about the declining awareness of cultural heritage values in recent years. While the positive economic impact of tourism is acknowledged, there is a growing sentiment that the rapid pace of development and changing trends have undermined efforts to preserve cultural heritage. Several respondents noted the lack of sufficient efforts by local authorities to promote cultural heritage and engage the community in its preservation, which could threaten the long-term sustainability of both the tourism industry and the cultural landmarks that make Georgetown unique.

In conclusion, tourism strategies into cultural heritage can play a crucial role in ensuring that tourism in Georgetown remains both economically viable and culturally sustainable. By fostering awareness, engagement, and conservation efforts, Georgetown can continue to thrive as a world-class heritage destination while safeguarding its unique cultural identity.

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