

## Accessibility Adaptation in Heritage Boutique Hotels: A review on literature

Syazwani Abdul Kadir<sup>1</sup>, Mariam Jamaludin<sup>2</sup>, Abd Rahim Awang<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,3</sup> Centre of Studies for Interior Architecture

<sup>2</sup> Centre of Studies for Architecture

Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying,  
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia

[syazwani179@salam.uitm.edu.my](mailto:syazwani179@salam.uitm.edu.my), [marja67@gmail.com](mailto:marja67@gmail.com), [abdrahimawang@yahoo.com](mailto:abdrahimawang@yahoo.com)  
Tel: +6019-654 6564

### Abstract

This paper offers a literature review for a study that intends to explore heritage boutique hotels' methods in adapting accessibility. Methodology employed for this paper is mainly an analysis of secondary data from scholarly articles and other types of academic publications. Topics being discussed emerged from the issue of accessible tourism to the accessibility adaptation in repurposed heritage buildings, which then scoped to the heritage boutique hotel trends in today's tourism industry. The literature reviews highlight the heritage boutique hotels' ability in providing distinctive cultural tourism and conclude that the discussed topics are interrelated with each other.

Keywords: Accessible tourism; accessibility adaptation; heritage building; boutique hotel

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### 1.0 Introduction

Accessibility or inclusiveness has been considered as an important aspiration of Malaysia's socio-economic development plan. While many studies have been conducted in regards to accessibility in Malaysian built environment, the study that focuses on accessible tourism especially the one that emphasizes on heritage buildings is still lacking. Some of the precedent studies on heritage buildings include the studies specified to cultural heritage tourism (Azmi and Ismail, 2016), significance of mining heritage (Ahmad and Jones, 2013), public perception and awareness of heritage building conservation (Nik Azhari and Mohamed, 2012), and heritage lodgings (Pongsermpol and Upala, 2018; Lee and Chhabra, 2015; Henderson, 2013; Henderson, 2011). However, these studies are not scoped to the accessibility adaptation in the repurposed historical buildings. The issue of accessibility in heritage buildings is important to be addressed as 'heritage' is valued as a significant aspect for the Malaysian tourism industry. Heritage is seen as a catalyst for the growth of Malaysia tourism industry locally and globally (Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, 2015).

When talking about accessible tourism, it is not only about accessible places of tourists' attraction but also about the means of transportation, services, as well as tourists' accommodation. In addition, tourist's accommodation such as hotel and resort has become 'the destination' itself in today's era of digital media that values travel experience as 'the new luxury'. As the ultimate tourists' destination and especially as their place to stay during the trip, hotels should be accessible and able to cater the needs of a various range of users (Global Design Educators Online News, 2004). With regards to these matters, this paper offers a literature review on interrelated topics of research that intends to explore heritage boutique hotels' methods in adapting accessibility in their hotel design and services. Topics

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being discussed emerged from the issue of accessible tourism to the accessibility adaptation in repurposed heritage buildings, which then scoped to the heritage boutique hotel trends in today's tourism industry.

## 2.0 Accessible Tourism as the Social Aspect of Sustainable Tourism

Accessibility development in Malaysia has shown many improvements especially through the government's endorsement of regulations and standards that promote an inclusive environment and fortify the rights of persons with disabilities. However, one of the overlooked topics in Malaysia accessibility studies is accessible tourism. In order to grasp the concept of accessible tourism that is attractive to the broadest range of local and foreign tourists, an inclusive approach is seek to provide guidelines for the accessibility in means of transportation, tourism services, tourists' attractions, and accommodations. Kose (2015) highlights the importance of accessible tourism through a study that reviews the provisions of accessible facilities for travelers. The study urges that there is a vital need of providing accessibility in heritage buildings of the tourist attraction (Kose, 2015). An accessibility provision study by Abdul Rahim and Abd Samad (2010) addresses the insufficiency of facilities for disabled hotel visitors, most significantly to persons using wheelchair and persons who are visually impaired. These substantial findings by the renowned accessibility scholars emphasize the importance for accessible tourism in this post-millennials era.

Interestingly, accessible tourism can be regarded as interchangeable with sustainable tourism. Liusman et al. (2013) indicate that accessibility is an aspect of social dimension in the Heritage Sustainability Index. This acknowledgement is due to accessibility provision that may create a user-friendly place that encourages social interaction and activities (Abdul Kadir & Jamaludin, 2018). In tourism scenario, a user-friendly place may attract more local and foreign tourists, and therefore, generate more economic activities around the area (Lim et al., 2009). While accessibility contributes to sustainable tourism as one of the social aspects; heritage which is another major part of this research paper, contributes to the cultural aspect of sustainable tourism. Cultural heritage in tourism is discussed further in the next section of this paper.

## 3.0 Heritage Building Conservation: Its Common Issues and Long-term Benefits

Cultural heritage can be defined as "tangible or intangible form of cultural property, structure or artefact and may include a heritage matter, object, item, artefact, formation structure, performance, dance, song, music that is pertinent to the historical or contemporary way of life of Malaysians" (National Heritage Act, 2005, p.16). While cultural heritage is vital in sustaining the history and identity of our nation, there are some issues that need to be highlighted and discussed. First and foremost, as Malaysia urban areas are developing rapidly, some scholars concern on the issue of disharmony between the urban regeneration and heritage areas (Said et al., 2013). Said et al. (2013) claim that most urban regeneration projects prior to the National Heritage Act 2005 often neglected building conservation as a part of their project, which caused regretful demolition of old buildings. With increasing enforcement and law initiatives by the Malaysian government, this problem is consistently solved over time.

Table 1. Issues Pertaining to Heritage Buildings Conservation

Authors, Year	Issues of Heritage Building Conservation
Tan et al., 2016	Lack of technical information for heritage building conservation.
Mohd Azizi et al., 2015	Lack of expertise team that is skilled in conservation works.
Harun, 2011	Lack of knowledge of conservation. Confusing laws and guidelines. No standard method of conservation.

(Source: Tan et al., 2016; Mohd Azizi et al., 2015; Harun, 2011)

Other than the conflict between urban regeneration and heritage conservation, there are other issues pertaining to heritage buildings conservation as indicated in Table 1, based on precedent scholarly studies. Due to these common issues of heritage building conservation, the scholars recommend for the establishment of conservation expertise team and technical guidelines for proper building conservation (Tan et al., 2016; Mohd Azizi et al., 2015; Harun, 2011). It is significant to preserve and sustain heritage buildings for long-term benefits of economic, environmental and social aspects as listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Benefits of Heritage Buildings Conservation

Authors, Year	Benefits of Heritage Building Conservation
Umar & Said, 2018	Less waste from building demolitions. Building adaptations use fewer materials. Building adaptation utilizes less energy in the built environment.
Prompayuk & Chairattananon, 2016	Maintains physical evidence history and transfers value knowledge and skills of their ancestors. Support the interaction among the environment, people and community activities. As an identity of the local community or difference. Benefit to the community in two important ways, to saving the cost of new buildings and attractions to visitors.
Harun, 2011	Preserving the heritage value of historical buildings. Knowledge of innovative architectural design, materials used and building construction techniques.

(Source: Umar & Said, 2018; Prompayuk & Chairattananon, 2016; Harun, 2011)

#### 4.0 Accessibility Adaptation in Heritage Buildings and Its Challenges

Persisting from the issue of accessible tourism discussed previously, heritage buildings also require adaptation of accessibility provisions that may fulfill diverse visitors' abilities. Findings from precedent studies indicate the lack of accessibility in Malaysian heritage buildings that were retrofitted into different types of building function such as government office, museum and hotel (Jamaludin and Abdul Kadir, 2012; Zahari et al., 2016). In addition, Jamaludin and Abdul Kadir (2012) found that the formerly built heritage buildings are less accessible than the newer ones, suggesting the need of accessibility adaptation in repurposed heritage buildings. Said et al. (2013) also propose accessibility adaptation in the conservation of heritage buildings to ensure inclusivity and usability to the local communities in the revitalized historic areas. The concerns discussed above reveal the needs for accessibility adaptation in the conservation of heritage buildings.

However, conserving the tangible elements of heritage buildings is a challenging work due to the historical values that the buildings possessed. While there are many adaptations need to be done to an old heritage building, conservation expertise and designers need to be careful in protecting the heritage value of the building (Harun, 2011). Drastic renovation of heritage buildings should be avoided as it may abolish the inheritance integrity of the buildings (Jason and Gomathy, 2008). Furthermore, conservation of heritage buildings should enhance the buildings' historical design and respect the building original charms (Mohd Azizi et al., 2015). Taking these highlighted matters into account, conservation works require meticulous planning and cooperation between the experts as well as respectful care during the restoration and maintenance undertakings. This also includes the adaptation of accessibility during the conservation process.

#### 5.0 The Hip Heritage Trend in Today's Tourism Industry

One of the methods in conserving heritage building is through adaptive reuse, which can be described as a method of replacing a building function when the former purpose is not practical anymore (Douglas, 2002). Common adaptive reuse projects include boutique hotel which is set in retrofitted heritage premise. While there are many growing types of boutique hotels, the ones that are housed in heritage buildings retain a unique identity and are most likely to offer an enriched experience of the place's history and local culture to the hotel customers. This hip heritage trend in today's tourism industry is verified by some recent studies on heritage boutique lodgings. A study by Henderson (2011) found that boutique hotels housed in heritage properties are becoming a growing trend with the hoteliers and tourists in South East Asia. A study by Khosravi et al. (2012) establish that the unique architecture and aesthetic interior design are often mentioned as preference attributes for visitors' choice of boutique hotels as their vacation stay. In an earlier study, Khosravi et al. (2012) found that respondents' preference attributes for choosing boutique hotel include "individualization and personal services, the availability of ready help and the attention from friendly staff in a homely environment with unique architecture".



(a)



(b)

Fig. 1. (a) Façade of 1825 Gallery Hotel; (b) Back view of Swiss Hotel Heritage Boutique Melaka.

(Source: Author, 2019)

Moreover, some recent studies indicate that the uniqueness of heritage boutique hotels' design and their cultural services offer distinctive cultural experience which cannot be replicated in other places in the world (Lee and Chhabra, 2015; Mundo-Hernández et

al., 2015; Henderson, 2013). In other words, heritage boutique hotel offers cultural tourism that is favored among today’s tourists (Ujang et al., 2018; Chan, 2012; Holverson et al., 2010). The originality of these hotels develops such sentimental ties as Harun (2011) beautifully mentioned in his writing that “authenticity is not only the physical return of the building but what is most important is the emotion, memory and the resulting sense when the building is conserved” (p.44). Fig. 1(a) and Fig. 1(b) provide the example of the charming features of boutique hotels that resided in repurposed heritage buildings in Malacca.

### 6.0 Heritage Boutique Hotels Signify Distinctive Cultural Tourism

As briefly mentioned previously, heritage boutique hotel offers cultural tourism that cannot be experienced at other places. Heritage boutique hotels do not only create more economic activities at the surrounding area but also upkeep the heritage value and image of the local culture. Revitalized heritage buildings create a livable surrounding and therefore attract more tourists and generate more economy to a place (Pongsermpol and Upala, 2018; Said and Samadi, 2018; Abdul Rashid, 2015). In respect to heritage, boutique hotels are also seen as the “performative space” which may enhance the tourist experience of the local attraction, particularly if they stay in a heritage area (Butland and Rofe, 2014). Differed from the conventional hotels, boutique accommodations allow the visitors to be a part of the surrounding culture of the place they visit during their stay at the hotels (McIntosh and Siggs, 2005). Heritage boutique hotels especially, offer a dual role to the tourists; as an accommodation, and as a cultural display (Chang and Teo, 2009).

Furthermore, heritage buildings are regarded as the representation of local identity and culture of the surrounding area (Chang and Teo, 2009) which create the place identity (Umar & Said, 2018) and sense of place for that particular historical area (Abdul Rashid, 2015). In their study on place attachment, Ujang et al. (2018) recommend that in order for tourist to have a strong attachment and memorable experience to places in Malaysia, future improvement should be made focusing on providing better tourist accessibility and enriching Malaysian cultural context. This is a significant finding that support the need of better accessibility for heritage places of tourist attraction as to strengthen tourists’ emotional ties to the places they have visited. Considering heritage boutique hotels’ ability in enriching tourists’ cultural experience and emotional attachment, it can be safely said that the hip heritage hotels signify a distinctive cultural tourism.

### 7.0 Conclusion

Through the discussion throughout reviews of literature in this paper, it can be concluded that the highlighted topics of this study are interrelated as depicted in Fig. 2. It is also found that one of the significant recommendations is to provide better accessibility in heritage buildings in order to create a more memorable experience to local and foreign tourists. By incorporating accessibility in the hotel accommodations, Malaysia tourism will not only benefit from the uniqueness of heritage value within the accommodations, but also from having accessible tourism that attracts more potential tourists of wide ranges of needs and expectations.

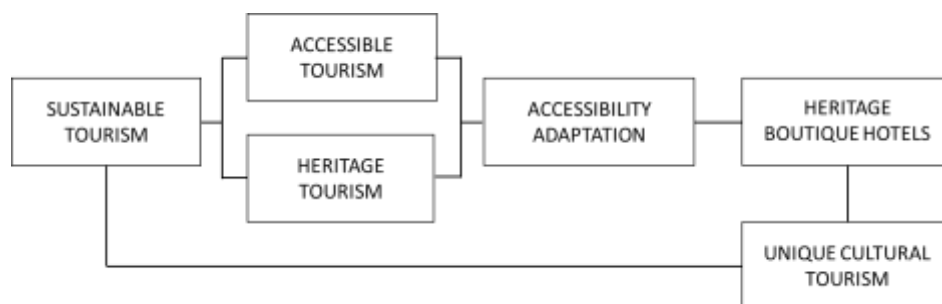


Fig. 2: Framework of Accessibility Adaptation in Heritage Boutique Hotels  
(Source: Author, 2019)

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