



Mindfulness: Exploring visitor and communication factors at Penang heritage sites

* Tan Poh Ling

PohLing.Tan@taylors.edu.my
Taylor's University, Malaysia

Shuhaida Md. Noor

Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

Hasrina Mustafa

Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

Shaian Kiumarsi

Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The mindfulness framework has been suggested as useful in explaining tourist learning, understanding and satisfaction. Mindfulness refers to the state of being aware and attentive of one's environment and self while at the same time, being able to suspend preconceived ideas and judgements to process new information. This study revisits the two categories of factors that contribute to mindfulness, namely, visitor factors and communication factors, in the quest to understand their influences at heritage sites. While communication factors have received much scrutiny in previous research, it is not so for visitor factors; additionally, their interrelationship with communication factors and the ways in which they contribute to mindfulness have not been expounded on. In this study, qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with local and international tourists at Penang Heritage Sites, is used to provide preliminary insights on that relationship. The study has revealed that the connection of heritage sites to self (self-connectedness) underscores tourists' mindfulness at heritage sites. Self-connectedness, while at these heritage sites, is identified in three themes: 'cultural heritage and self', in which tourists are mindful of their own cultural heritage; 'culture of others', in which tourists are mindful of the cultural heritage of 'others'; and 'social self', in which tourists are mindful of the opportunity for 'self' to socialise with 'others'. More importantly, then, this study highlights the potential of using communication strategies to emphasise self-connectedness at heritage sites.

Keywords: *mindfulness, communication factors, visitor factors, heritage sites and Penang*

INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, the mindfulness framework has been increasingly applied in tourism research to explain visitors' learning, understanding and satisfaction (Moscardo, 2008). These positive outcomes are of immense managerial benefits to destinations as they help shape desirable attitudes and behaviours such as site preservation and conservation, respect for the community (Moscardo, 2014), repeat visits, endorsement to others of the destinations and willingness to pay premium prices. Much effort is therefore placed on understanding the two categories of factors that have been generally accepted as key to mindfulness, namely communication and visitor. Communication factors refer to the techniques involved in communicating destination stories (e.g. uniqueness, novelty and repetition of information), while visitor factors refer to visitors' mental and physical dispositions.

The mindfulness framework in tourism explains mindfulness as a result of communicating destinations effectively. The effectiveness of these communications, in turn, is dependent upon visitors' dispositions. While the communication factors contributing to mindfulness have been well-researched and their dimensions explained, visitor factors have not been elucidated to nearly the same level of clarity. Current literature identifies visitor factors as those that can be generally summarised as either factors of physical readiness (e.g. low fatigue) or factors of a psychological nature (e.g. interest, motivation). This study focuses on the latter in an attempt to explore and provide more evidence towards the mental processing of communication factors that influence visitors' mindfulness at heritage sites. In the context of Malaysia especially, factors contributing to mindfulness in tourism have been also explored but through different perspectives such as media (Md Noor, Rasoolimanesh, Ganesan, & Jaafar, 2015; Ganesan, Md Noor, & Jaafar, 2014) and tour guide as mediators towards mindfulness (Rosli, Md Noor, Jaafar and Mohamed, 2014). However, there is not much literature related to visitor factors. Hence, this study revisits the two categories of factors contributing to mindfulness, namely visitor factors and communication factors, to ensure that the factors found later are more comprehensive especially in the heritage tourism area.

Generally, mindfulness has been suggested as a useful resource in managing heritage destinations. Studies found that as a result of mindfulness, tourists are more appreciative and show better understanding of a site (Moscardo, 1996), demonstrate increased level of support for the preservation of an attraction (McIntosh, 1999), experience greater social presence, learning, enjoyment, and escape (Kang & Gretzel, 2012), and exhibit enhanced learning and responsible tourism behaviours (Ganesan, Noor & Jaafar, 2014). Needless to say, visitors who are mindful would appreciate the destination better and are less likely to act irresponsibly in ways that could damage the sensitive artefacts, spoil the built and natural environment or upset the local residents. Notwithstanding the economic benefits of tourism, research has shown that most heritage spots in Asia are experiencing deterioration due to threats brought about by overtourism, specifically; development pressures, unsustainable tourism, insufficient management, looting and conflict crises (Global Heritage Fund, 2012; Colomb & Novy, 2016; Leadbeater, 2017; Paris, 2017). Approximately one-third of these heritage sites have been diagnosed as 'in danger', mainly due to the terrible misconduct of tourists and operators (World Monuments Fund, 2010). Thus, one way to help ensure the sustainability of heritage sites is to create mindful tourists who not only take enjoyment in what these sites have to offer, but who also appreciate the heritage.

The objectives of this study are, firstly, to explore the communication factors that contribute to visitor mindfulness at heritage sites in Penang, and secondly (and most importantly), to examine the psychological factors that underscore visitors' mindfulness. In recent years, the

number of tourists that have visited Penang heritage sites has grown exponentially, greatly contributing to the growth of the state of Penang as well as the Malaysian economy. The 'World Heritage Site' status accredited by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the 7th of July 2008 has been the greatest impetus for Penang's tourism industry, drawing in tourists from places both local and abroad to experience heritage linked to the culture and trade exchanges between the East and West of the 18th Century (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1223>).

To be sure, this study is part of a larger study to determine the relationship between the factors contributing to mindfulness and its outcomes at heritage sites. The data from this study was then used to improve the measurement instruments for visitor factors in tourism's overall mindfulness framework.

MINDFULNESS FRAMEWORK

McIntosh, (1999), Moscardo (1996) and Tung & Ritchie, (2011) suggested that mindfulness among visitors may facilitate learning and enhance their appreciation towards heritage sites. It has been offered as a tool for destination providers to better manage visitors. The present study, therefore, focuses on providing greater insight into the factors that contribute to visitor mindfulness at these sites.

In general, mindfulness refers to the cognitive condition of mental responsiveness. This is important, in the case of heritage sites, as it helps people assess circumstances using the information available (Chen, 2015; Langer, 1992) to arrive at focal ideas or topics (Dutt & Ninov, 2016) through problem detection, judgmental structure re-evaluation and information learning (Langer, 1989; Moscardo, 1999). Mindfulness has roots in the practices of Buddhism and other contemplative traditions where conscious attention and awareness are actively cultivated (Brown & Ryan, 2003). It was later viewed through the lens of psychology based on Langer's work in 1989 which conceptualised mindfulness as the ability to consider things in new, thoughtful ways and avoid the automatic categorisation of situations. This psychological conceptualisation evoked the application of mindfulness to the tourism management sector through the efforts of Moscardo (1996).

Today, the Moscardo (2003) mindfulness framework is widely used in tourism research to explain the factors contributing to visitors' mindfulness which, in turn, influences their learning, understanding and satisfaction (Figure 1). The framework explains mindfulness as the product of both communication factors and visitor factors. Communication factors refer to the elements of communication at work in controlling site management. These include variety, multisensory communication, novelty, use of questions, visitor control, connections to visitors, and good physical orientations. Visitor factors refer to visitors' dispositions, including level of interest, level of fatigue and level of distraction. In the framework, visitor factors operate as conditional factors that may mediate or, in some cases, moderate the relationship between communication factors and mindfulness. The framework also explains that mindfulness leads to visitors having a clear mental structure, allowing them to become more adept at relating present experiences to past experiences and prior knowledge.

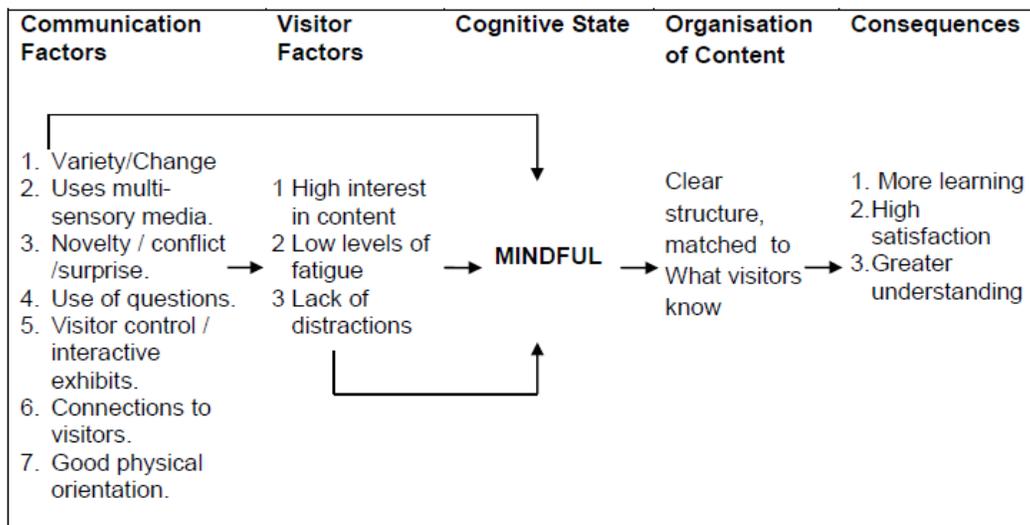


Figure 1. Mindfulness model of communicating with visitors
 Source: Woods and Moscardo, 2003, p.99

In tourism, mindfulness is commonly applied to assist in understanding effective communication factors in tourism settings (e.g. Dionyssopoulou, Pridezi, & Mylonakis 2014; Ganesan, Md. Noor & Jaafar, 2014; Lee & Kim, 2018; Rubin, Lee, Paris & Teye, 2016). This group of studies focused on communication tactics and strategies subscribed in tourism settings. Another smaller group of studies examined visitor factors to explain the underlying psychological aspects that influence visitor attitudinal and behavioural responses (e.g. Lynn, Chen, Scott & Beckendorff, 2017; Moscardo, 2017; Taylor & Norman, 2018; Frauman & Norman, 2004).

However, visitor factors have come under intense scrutiny in light of tourism research’s recent and growing interest in cognitive psychology (e.g. Moscardo, 2018; Pearce & Packer, 2013; Skavronskaya et al., 2017). Moscardo (2017) proposed that stories play a significant role in encouraging mindful visitors and supporting more positive tourist experiences. She used the three key characteristics of a story (structure, themes/topics and roles to play and actions to complete) to explain the links between stories and mindfulness. The ‘roles to play’ aspect is of particular interest in our study as it provides a mechanism to explain visitors’ connections to the heritage story. Moscardo (2017) explained that to achieve mindfulness, the visitor must be allowed to make choices and personalise their experience. Following Moscardo’s (2017) call for more research in this area, this study will explore the personalisation of visitor experience as explained by visitors at a heritage site. This will be examined by investigating the connection made between self and heritage. It has long been argued that the self provides a frame of reference in developing meaning for other concepts (Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985); one of which is heritage. Therefore, it is proposed that visitor experience at heritage sites is likely to have a greater impact on their responses if it has meaning in terms of the self, and that these responses will be affected by how the heritage is viewed in terms of the self.

Study Area

The world-renowned recognition from UNESCO has placed George Town, Penang in the tourism limelight. Previously known more for its street food, Penang is now a major attraction for those interested in the merging cultural influences of East and West in the earlier century. After the declaration of Penang's capital city, George Town, and the city of Melaka as twin heritage sites by UNESCO in 2008, Malaysia experienced a growth in tourist arrivals from 20.97 million in 2007 to 22.05 million in 2008 (Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2018). Specifically, visitor arrivals at Penang International Airport have steadily increased by 6.5–9% per year over the past 10 years ("Tourism and ecotourism in numbers," 2017).

George Town features a unique blend of religious pluralism, British colonial townscape and living heritage evidenced in the daily lives, rituals, trades, cuisine and architecture of the inner-city community. Additionally, Malaysia is home to a diverse group of races and ethnicities; the nation's historical past has greatly contributed to the multi-ethnic status it carries today (Chandran & Mohammed Ariffin, 2015). The presence of these different ethnic groups are manifested in George Town's various heritage buildings, in its diverse cultures and in its array of languages (Farahani, Abooli, & Mohamed, 2012; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Ahmad, & Barghi, 2017). Its key attractions include the Khoo Kongsi clan house, the Kapitan Keling mosque, the clan jetty, and Fort Cornwallis. Apart from its rich heritage, the systematic and coordinated management of George Town's assortment of exhibitions and information has made it highly appropriate for exploring visitors' mindfulness at cultural heritage sites.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In-depth semi-structured interviews, a qualitative method, were used to achieve the objectives of this study. Participants were asked to recount their best experience at the heritage sites. Probes were used to gain richer insights into the communication and visitor factors influencing their mindfulness. The first question asked was "What is your best experience at the heritage sites?" Following this question, more probe questions were asked based on the factors influencing mindfulness according to the framework. The method involved in developing the first questions is termed "critical incident" methodology and is most suitably used when the aim of research is to identify complex or less well-defined factors (Gremier, 2004; Flanagan, 1954). This method was used in this study because participants are more likely to recall better and be able to recount in detail incidents that they view as 'critical'. Additionally, using this technique across a number of participants enabled the researcher to look for evidences of commonalities in themes. The best experience remembered is highly likely to be associated with a state of mindfulness. To explore the connection between self and heritage, participants were asked to explain how they related to the cultural heritage site visited.

Sampling and Data Collection

The target population for this study was visitors to George Town heritage sites. The purposive sampling method was utilised in which participants aged 18 and above with experience visiting the core heritage zone of George Town heritage sites were selected. Data was collected from visitors at Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, the Peranakan Mansion and Khoo Kongsi in Penang. These heritage attractions were targeted based on the Top Tourist Attractions in Penang list, produced by Tourism Malaysia (2014). Moreover, these attractions share a number of similarities, each being

a heritage house that has since been turned into a museum. Each of these data collection sites is located in the core heritage zone of the George Town World Heritage Site. The sample includes 12 local and international tourists from various nationalities and ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Data collection was conducted over a period of 4 days towards the end of week. Visitors at the selected heritage sites were approached at the end of their tour and asked if they had time to be interviewed. The interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The experiences recounted by these visitors, who made either personal visits or group visits, took place in different heritage settings, specifically: mansions, museums, temples, forts and clan associations.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data were analysed using the deductive coding method as suggested by Saldaña (2012). This type of analysis consists of a systematic coding whereby data are broke down according to a code list or code system, to identify emerging relevant patterns or factors. The transcripts were analysed based on the categories and themes which were developed gradually and collaboratively based on the literature review. The coded segments were then grouped and synthesised 'up' into (more general) categories, which in turn were linked to more general themes and factors. Finally, they were linked with the categories and themes based on the literature review earlier and also used to name the theme based on the common or general sub-theme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented here in two parts. The first part addresses the communication factors that contribute to mindfulness as experienced by the participants. The communication factors, considered the building blocks to mindfulness, are examined based on techniques of interpretation and communication, or external factors that contribute to visitors' mindfulness. The second part addresses the visitor factors, which relate to visitors' psychological dispositions, in order to understand the key psychological elements, or the internal factors, that make visitors mindful of cultural heritage. The confluence of these two sets of factors will then be addressed to provide insights into understanding the paths to mindfulness in heritage tourism.

COMMUNICATION FACTORS

Table 1 displays the four main categories of communication factors that have emerged from the qualitative data. In the first category, novelty/new information, participants experienced an acute awareness of heritage upon coming across information or interpretations that were not part of, or were inconsistent with, their current knowledge. The second category, variety, refers to participants' preference for an assortment of different information or experiences. The third category, uniqueness, relates to participants' observations of tangible and intangible heritage that differ from their previous experiences. Finally, in the visitor control category, participants expressed that they were partial to having control over their experience in navigating the heritage sites mentally and physically. These elements of communication are consistent with the existing

mindfulness framework. In addition to identifying the elements, we delved into explanations of how they operate, as delineated under the sub-themes in Table 1.

Table 1. Communication Factors Influencing Mindfulness

Main category	Themes	Sub-themes
Communication Factors	Novelty / new information	Gaining attention Expectation and anticipation New knowledge Enhancement of knowledge Memorability
	Variety	Capturing interests Intangible and tangible cultural elements Most linked to food, lifestyle and architecture
	Uniqueness	In ordinary things Things that are different from their past experiences or knowledge
	Visitor control	Navigation of visitation Control of time and space/setting

Novelty / new information

The findings indicate that new and novel information was especially effective in capturing visitors' attention. Visitors to the heritage sites arrived with the expectation of, at the very least, gaining new knowledge of the heritage sites. They were curious about the new possibilities that they might encounter. As expressed by a participant from France, she had read up about the Khoo Kongsi clan house prior to her visit and expected to learn more about the clan by going there in person.

“So we expect that it is probably a rich family and a huge house... I didn't know exactly what to expect...but I was just curious, and all these colours, I didn't expect really because I am not so aware of what is happening in Asia and is my first time in Asia. So I just discover... open my eyes and looked and looked, what is this and try to learn a bit.” (Participant 1)

There were also indications that mindfulness was triggered when visitors came upon information that was inconsistent with their current knowledge. Some expressed that they were unsure of what to expect, and hence waited in anticipation to discover something new and surprising.

“I didn't imagine a lot about all the cultural stuff because I have seen more pictures of Malaysia of the nature. So it was most in my mind, you know, about snorkelling and diving. About the cultural, in fact I had really not many representations about what it could be. I would say Armenian Street was the kind of images of China or Asia.” (Participant 2)

When encountering information that is novel or new, visitors were quick to tune into it and become aware of how it added to their experience of the site. They were mindful of not just their veridical experience, but also of how that experience enhanced their knowledge, as explained by these participants:

“I can observe the people and surrounding, different culture in the city and also from the Khoo family, so that is something new that I come across. It is something new thing for me.” (Participant 7)

“Some of them are quite new, and some of them maybe give me more perspective and give me more information about the races, culture and religion.” (Participant 3)

Participants could also specifically identify the new or novel information that they encountered, indicating that not only had they encoded the specific information, but they were also able to access it in detail when asked to recall much later. Thus, the findings show that new or novel information resulted in strong memory links that enabled information to be easily recalled when cued for.

“I can observe the culture. The Chinese culture from the Khoo family, so, that is very informative. Yes, this is a new thing for me.” (Participant 8)

Variety

Variety emerges as an element that captures both the attention and interest of visitors. Each visitor has different interests, and thus locates variety differently in both the tangible and intangible. Food, lifestyle and architecture were quoted as some of the cultural exhibits that visitors were most mindful of:

“There is variety because you have people who are really interesting. The food is also interesting because there are different ways to cook. The lifestyle is also different and the architecture.” (Participant 1)

“Oh well, there are so much different cultures, food and things for me to experience. The buildings here are of various architecture and they are all different.” (Participant 10)

Uniqueness

Many participants also looked for experiences that are out of the ordinary, seeking and anticipating experiences that will be able to excite, amaze and surprise them. Interestingly, the findings showed that uniqueness was found not only in the main cultural showcases but also in elements that could be taken for granted, such as the colours of buildings. Uniqueness was perceived by the participants in the following ways:

“Most of the building here are so colourful and special in a way... unlike our place which is based mainly on one particular colour.” (Participant 12)

“The things here are with many colours, brightness and also high buildings.” (Participant 2)

“Everything here is unique as I have not been to many Asian countries, so yeah... it is all unique with the culture, people and also building and food of course.” (Participant 9)

Visitor control

It also emerged from the data that participants appreciated being able to navigate seamlessly on their own through the heritage sites. Being in control of their on-site experience allowed them to relax and set their own pace for learning and appreciating the heritage:

“I can plan my walk here easily, choose what I liked to see first and skip the other for later, or maybe tomorrow” (Participant 10)

They were able to choose which exhibits they wanted to spend more time on and which they wanted to skip:

“The easy things to understand so that I could go first, so if I want to know more then I will read very long things that are in the museum.” (Participant 2)

Participants shared that navigational tools such as site maps were of help, and signposts and leaflets were useful in helping them take control of their experience:

“The places here are all easy to go. The map is good with mural as well. I can choose what I want to do first.” (Participant 8)

VISITOR FACTORS

Next, visitor factors were analysed to determine the psychological factors underscoring visitors’ mindfulness, and from this, self-connectedness emerged as a defining construct. Self-connectedness refers to the way in which visitors relate the self to the heritage site and their experiences there. Table 2 presents the visitor factors through this theme of self-connectedness and three subthemes, namely: ‘cultural heritage and self’, ‘cultural heritage of others’ and ‘social self’. In the ‘cultural heritage’ category, visitors were observed to often ground their experience at the heritage site to self. The ‘cultural heritage and others’ category refers to experiences at the site that promoted visitors to think from the perspective of others. Finally, the ‘social self’ category is based on how visitors took the opportunity to have a more meaningful experience at the site by socialising with others, such as other visitors. Table 2 displays the main categories of visitor factors that have emerged from the qualitative data.

Table 2. Visitor Factors Influencing Mindfulness

Main category	Themes	Subthemes
Visitor factors	Self-connectedness	Cultural heritage and self Cultural heritage and others Social self

Cultural Heritage and Self

In visiting cultural heritage sites, the self was found to be a prominent feature in visitors' experience of mindfulness. The state of mindfulness surfaced as the self was implicated with what was being observed and experienced at the heritage site. Participants often related their experiences at the site through the filter of self. This was succinctly expressed by the following participant.

"I always connect with myself with all the places that I visit, especially all the Chinese temple, and heritage that relate to the Chinese. I always try to link on my own culture, and my own belief. And on my value as well. So, I can see the different and many things in common." (Participant 3)

Participants also appeared to compare the various sites through the lens of self;

"There are some places such as the Blue Mansion which offers something new. But Khoo Kongsi is similar to me, my culture and my background... I can relate." (Participant 11)

To visitors, the cultural heritage sites become more alive, meaningful and important when connected to the self:

"From one point, it's similar culture with my background, Chinese culture. Although I can it is different from our original culture, there are still things that remain the same. I always try to link on my own culture, and on my own belief." (Participant 3)

Cultural Heritage and Others

The findings indicate that visitors were attuned to the cultural heritage of others. On one hand, the meaning of self was found by juxtaposing one's own cultural heritage against those of others. On the other, visitors tried to relate the cultural heritage found at the sites to people that they themselves knew. No man is an island, as the saying goes, and visitors to cultural heritage sites were found to be mindful of the amalgamation and confluences of culture.

For one participant, even though the culture being exhibited did not reflect his own, he was able to relate to it because he had grown up with friends who belonged to that cultural background. Therefore, the participant sought to find meaning by linking the new knowledge gleaned from the heritage site to his past experiences with people who shared a similar culture.

"I can understand a little and relate because in Malaysia we have friends of different race since we are young." (Participant 5)

For another participant, what caught his interest was the amalgamation of Malay and Chinese cultures at a heritage site which was reflective of his own cultural heritage. Thus, he was able to locate and relate his self to the Peranakan site.

"Previously I didn't really know the Peranakan. When I go to that place, I get to know about the detail about the Peranakan culture. What do we call it? It is about the origin, you know, it is the mixed culture between the Malay and the Chinese." (Participant 6)

Socialisation at setting

When visiting cultural heritage sites, participants were found to be interested not just in the exhibitions, but also in other visitors. It appears that the cultural heritage settings encouraged them to open their eyes and minds to people of different cultural and national backgrounds. The findings indicate that these cultural settings permitted them to be less inhibited in approaching strangers, perhaps in the knowledge that those visiting the site were interested in learning about culture. Hence, the opportunity was used to socialise and learn about cultures beyond those being showcased at the site. This can be observed in the following interview excerpts.

“Places such as this is nice because we are able to meet people from other countries. We can talk and exchange our opinion.” (Participant 4)

“I am able to get new friends from other countries at the setting and be able to exchange knowledge.” (Participant 5)

In general, findings for the visitor factors indicate that visitors often used the self as both the filter and the lens to experience and find meaning in cultural heritage. Visitors strove to make connections between the self and the heritage sites, and this to some extent, encouraged them to be mindful of the different cultures in their social environment. Moreover, their experiences at the cultural heritage sites also opened doors to establishing social connections with people of different cultural backgrounds.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings provide strong support for the mindfulness framework as suggested by Moscardo (1996, 2008). All participants mentioned at least one of the main key factors that contribute to mindfulness. The findings of this study confirm the relevance of the framework in explaining the various experiences of visitors at heritage sites.

Novelty emerged as the communication factor most associated with the state of mindfulness. This is so because people are less likely to have routine behavioural scripts to rely on in such situations (Moscardo, 2008). It is always a challenge for the management of a destination to encourage and instil interest among tourists in appreciating cultural heritage. Hence, to overcome this difficulty, managements can emphasize and provide opportunities for visitors to experience lesser-known attributes of the heritage or culture of a particular setting. To capture tourists’ attention, the use of novelty in themes, titles and introductions to less well-known information may be of value.

The second most mentioned communication factors associated with mindfulness were variety and perceived visitor control. The variety of information or interpretations of the heritage showcases aroused visitors’ curiosity and encouraged them to seek more information about certain displays or cultures. Thus, the activities or tours organised at heritage sites should incorporate the element of variety to further encourage mindfulness among tourists. Incorporating a wide range of different media in the development of activities that vary in terms of physical and mental input and that strike a balance between more active and more contemplative opportunities will help create variety in experiences. In terms of perceived control, heritage site managements can consider designing better maps or introductions to the sites with clearer labels to assist the visitors while they tour the setting.

Most importantly, the findings indicate that mindfulness is strongly influenced by the connection made by visitors between self and the heritage setting. The results identified self-connectedness as key in terms of visitor factors and it is reflected in the subthemes of ‘cultural heritage and self’, ‘culture of others’ and ‘social self.’ Interestingly, the findings also indicate that to a certain extent, visitors’ reflecting on their own cultural background influenced their perception as well as their understanding of the cultural heritage visited. This is because visitors might have observed their own culture being replicated or reflected in the heritage setting, leading them to have a better understanding of it as compared to those whose cultures are distinctly different. For visitors, a sense of belonging appeared strongest when they connected the self to the heritage. This is because, visitors who are able to connect themselves to the destination that they visited would be able to relate and understand them with little information given. On the other hand, visitors who are unable to connect themselves would require more information to further understand the place visited. Self-connection was shown to display incremental influence upon the destination visited (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Bryce, Curran, O’Gorman & Taheri, 2015). As such, a clear introduction on certain cultures or settings of heritage is necessary so that tourists themselves can form connections to the displays. The management of the destination can provide a background introduction of the place before starting the tour or before the visitor decides to visit the destination, to give them an idea of the cultural heritage presented. This can be achieved via a short video or iconic objects/structures placed at the entrance of the setting to provide an initial description to the visitors. According to Ram, Bjork and Weidenfeld (2016), iconic objects or structures are the best representations of a destination especially in heritage tourism.

According to scholars like Lee and Sparks, (2007) and Chen and Rahman (2018), ethnic identity has recently been identified as a chief factor impacting the attitudes and behaviours of specific cultural groups and customer segments within countries. Increased accessibility to international travel has rendered this factor even more significant to the concerns of the tourism sector. Hence, it is important to focus on promoting cultural exchange and providing authentic experiences to tourists through effective host-tourist interactions. Based on the literature review, it is suggested that cultural contact significantly and positively influences memorable tourism experiences, which in turn positively affect revisit intentions and intentions to recommend. Thus, for cultural destinations, emphasis should be placed on ways to increase and improve interactions between tourists and hosts so that fruitful cultural exchanges can take place (Chen & Rahman, 2018).

Another common factor described under visitor factors is the social self. Interactions with others often helped visitors to develop a better understanding and a wider perception towards situations that they encounter. In the socialisation process, they exchange information and share their experiences with each other. Therefore, by creating a conducive setting, tourists can be provided with more opportunities to enhance their understanding and interpret information from different perspectives. Social interaction, according to Chen and Rahman (2018), is important and can be established by engaging tourists through guided tours, staff-tourist interactions and multimedia resources.

This study confirms and reinforces the importance of communication and visitor factors established in the extent. Notably, it identifies self-connectedness as a new key factor for visitors as reflected through the aspects of ‘cultural heritage and self’, ‘culture of others’ and ‘social self’. Undoubtedly, heritage is often imbued with cultural meanings in terms of identity and sense of belonging. It is recommended that these aspects of self-connectedness are incorporated into the framework of mindfulness. The proposed revised framework will help explain how tourists

organise information at heritage sites into a coherent framework, and aid in understanding why this is significant. In applying the framework at a heritage setting, evoking the themes of ‘cultural heritage and self’, ‘culture of others’ and the ‘social self’, tourist experiences can be accentuated, creating visits that are more meaningful and that subsequently, encourage greater satisfaction and appreciation of the heritage.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study offers implications for the heritage tourism sector by producing more mindful visitors. Destinations and tourism organisations should integrate both factors in the mindfulness framework to produce more visitors with a greater capacity for learning, understanding and satisfaction (Moscardo, 2008). In other words, destination managers are encouraged to promote mindfulness to produce more satisfied and loyal visitors (Lorraine, Taylor & Norman, 2018). Furthermore, having mindful visitors would also promote sustainability as they would also cultivate desirable attitudes and behaviours leading to the preservation and conservation of the destination (Moscardo, 2014).

The preliminary findings of this research indicate that the aspect of self-connectedness should be further explored to inform future tourism research. Additionally, the focus on the tourists who visited the multi-cultural heritages in Penang as its sole respondents are not able to strengthen and generalise the results through the prediction of variables. Therefore, future research works should include other multicultural heritage spots in Malaysia such as Melaka and Ipoh, natural heritage recreational areas such as Gunung Mulu National Park and Kinabalu Park and archaeological heritage sites such as Lenggong Valley and Bujang Valley (some of them are also accredited by UNESCO) when examining the variables of Communication and Visitor Factors to help procure more substantial results. It is hoped that this study will, to a certain extent, assist in designing more meaningful experiences that will help boost tourism at heritage sites. As an industry, it would be beneficial to induce mindfulness at heritage sites, as the results of this study also indicate that mindfulness can help develop better learning experiences, understanding and satisfaction amongst visitors.

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Dr. Tan Poh Ling

is a lecturer at School of Media and Communication, Taylor's University. She received her doctorate from Universiti Sains Malaysia on Tourism Communication with a focus on interpretation. Her research interests include heritage communication, persuasive communication and environmental communication.

Dr Shuhaida Md Noor

is a senior lecturer at School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia. She holds a BSc. of Commerce (University of Virginia, USA), Master of Arts (Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia) and PhD (University of Sydney, Australia). Her research interests include customer-based brand equity, self-relevance in branding, destination branding and consumer memories.

Dr Hasrina Mustafa

is a senior lecturer at School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia. She received her doctorate from Universiti Putra Malaysia on new media. She also serves as the IMC Programme Coordinator at USM campus in Kuala Lumpur and also as the Deputy Dean of Institute of Postgraduate Studies, USM@KL.

Dr. Shaian Kiumarsi

is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, where he earned his PhD. He is interested in business IT, service innovation, marketing, and tourism. He has several journal articles and conference presentations to his name and more than ten years of educational experience.
