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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### TOURIST PERCEPTION ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF UNESCO'S HERITAGE SITE IN GEORGE TOWN, PENANG

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#### ABSTRACT

Development is meant to improve human condition, as well as human environment, places to stay & visit; hence, sustainable development should ensure the survival of the system at a higher level, or otherwise it is not worth doing it. The purpose of this study is to assess Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) dimensions in contributing to tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit at the UNESCO's world heritage site in Penang, Malaysia. Prior to the data collection, questionnaire were established and self-administered distributed among 180 respondents. Descriptive analysis was used to determine the travel experience characteristics and socio demographic background. Correlation and multiple regression analysis were also utilized to determine relationship between independent and dependent variable. The findings of the study revealed that all the dimensions of SAM are correlated with tourist satisfaction. Hence, authenticity dimension is the best predictor in determining tourist satisfaction and revisit intention for heritage sites. This research contribute to the bigger perspective of developing quality tourist attraction and sites through the sustainability of environmental, social, authenticity and service dimension perspectives. Consequently, heritage site managers, operators and authorities may implement a sustainable tourism practices, thus to sustain the image and value of these UNESCO's world heritage sites in a long term.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most progressive industry in many countries around the world, including Malaysia. Malaysia was ranked as the fourth most visited country in the Asia & Pacific in 2015 (UNWTO, 2016). From January to December 2015, Malaysia received a total number of 25.7 million tourists and RM69.1 billion tourism receipts (Tourism Malaysia, 2016). Among the states that has been recorded a tremendous development, Penang is one of the most top visited state in Malaysia. Buletin Mutiara (2015) has reported that Penang has remains as the third most visited tourism destination state in Malaysia with the total arrivals of 4.89 million tourist recorded from January to September 2014. Tourists flock to Penang for many reasons, but the major focus is the fact that the capital city of Penang, which is George Town, is designated as a

UNESCO World Heritage Site along with Malacca since July 2008. The influences of Asia and Europe have endowed the towns with both tangible and intangible multicultural heritage values (UNESCO, 2008). This designation was a huge achievement for Malaysia generally and for Penang specifically. Sustainable tourism is impossible without the participation of tourists as they gives perception on the tourism destination and play an important role in relation to issues of sustainability. Tourist motivations to visit a destination are the main factors that influencing the decision to travel. Thus, in order to understand tourist perceptions and experience, it is essential to know the context within which tourism operates and tourists become engaged (Cheang, 2011). As the number of tourists in Penang is growing from year to year, several issues and problems have been identified that would threaten the sustainability of George Town as the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Therefore, to ensure the sustainability of a tourism destination, or in this case specifically referred to George Town, Penang as a cultural-heritage tourism site, the

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attraction providers need to implement a proper tools to provide a good service quality to the tourist. This case study is important for both factor; sustainability of attraction in terms of continuous ability to increase tourists visitations, as well as contributing to the wealth of indicators in measuring tourism sustainability, particularly in tourism sector.

**Sustainability of UNESCO's World Heritage Site in Georgetown, Penang:** Georgetown, Penang is designated as UNESCO's World Heritage Site since 2008. However, it was reported in the local newspaper, *The Star* in 2016 that the status of Georgetown as the UNESCO's World Heritage Site was threatened due to a report sent to UNESCO about the transportation development at the heritage sites. Consequently, recently, many problems and issues had aroused that can threatened its status, such as rapid development and growing population would also threaten its world heritage listing. As stated in the local newspaper, *The Star* in 2016, the status of Georgetown as the UNESCO's World Heritage Site was threatened due to a report sent to UNESCO about the transportation development at the heritage sites. The researcher did preliminary interviews with the local business operators and observation sat the UNESCO heritage sites and found the existence of social problems, which relate to foreign tourist lifestyle and culture. The social problem highlighted by the interviewees is increase in number of social activity at premises such as late night pub and bar, which also will lead to increase in crime events and may bring negative influence to the local youth. The researcher further reported from her interview with the local business operators and tourist that there are several social issues such as drug addicts, drinkers' activities in public, hookers and snatchers' activity at the UNESCO's heritage site. Issue related to environment was also reported such as lack of security well-being at the UNESCO's sites where very occasionally those police officer scan be found on duty.

Hygiene issue such as cleanliness were also an important factor observed by the researcher at heritage sites and surrounding area. Therefore, the attraction operators need to implement a proper tools of sustainable development in order to keep the value as well as gives satisfaction to the visitors. In measuring sustainable tourism, the focuses have largely been on environmental factors and practices, thus giving less emphasis on other indicators (Park et al., 2011). However, Hassan et al. (2014) has proposed a new mix dimensions referred as Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) indicators that is more comprehensive and covering several issues in tourism sustainability. This study will provide an assessment of SAM dimension in order to determine level of satisfaction and revisit intention for the development of successful sustainable tourism implementation in UNESCO's World Heritage Site in George Town, Penang. About the reviewed literature and identified issues identified this study had generally aimed at identifying the new factors of SAM by assessing local and international tourist perception on the sustainability of UNESCO's heritage attractions specifically in George Town, Penang. Hence, the specific objectives of the study are to identify tourist's socio demographic background in George Town, Penang; to examine the impact of successful Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) dimension on tourist satisfaction; and to examine the relationship between tourists satisfaction and revisit intention.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study attempts to assess tourism attractions in UNESCO World Heritage Site, George Town, Penang. Similarly, this study discusses in details the factors that contribute to tourism sustainability and whether tourist have met their overall satisfaction and revisit intention using Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) indicators. However, based on the issues identified from the researcher's preliminary interview and observation, SAM model was modified whereby few new variables were added into social and service delivery dimensions. A self-administered survey was used and conducted to collect the data from 200 visitors of UNESCO's Heritage Site in George Town, Penang in February 2017. The convenience sampling is used for this data collection, which involves collecting information from members of the population who are conveniently available to provide the information. The number of sample size was calculated by using Yamane's formula, (Yamane, 1967). A survey questionnaire instrument was used in this study. Each respondent had to spend about 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The survey involved face-to-face interview to ensure the quality of data, to elicit the respondents to answer the question accurately and to confirm a full returned questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to obtain information, which will be used to investigate the linkage between SAM's indicator with satisfaction and revisit intention (Abdullah, 2011). The questionnaire is composed of five main sections, which are Visiting Information, Evaluation of SAM's Indicators, Overall Satisfaction, Revisit Intentions, and Socio-demographic Information. The items used in the questionnaire are the combination of relevant questions used in previous studies (for existing factors) and newly developed questions. Based on reliability test, the actual set of questions consisted of 4 factors and 29 items. Data collected from the questionnaires were coded and then scored for analysis. Quantitative data analysis using SPSS was used to run descriptive data analysis to summarize and described the data; then, multiple regression was used to determine the implications and relative importance of the four SAM dimension in predicting the overall satisfaction level and revisit intentions of visitors. In this study, the dependent variables are the overall satisfaction level and revisit intentions of visitors while the independent variables is the four construct of SAM's indicators; environment, social, authenticity and service delivery. Finally, correlation analysis was also utilized to examine the relationship between the independent variables, which is the SAM dimensions with dependent variable, which is tourist satisfaction. This analysis is important to predict the relatable or influence between both variables.

## RESULTS

The study of tourist perception on the sustainability of UNESCO's heritage sites in George Town, Penang was conducted in a week, which is in the middle of February 2017. Three specific objectives of the study were to identify tourist's socio demographic background in George Town, to examine the impact of Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) dimension on tourist satisfaction and finally to examine the relationship between tourists satisfaction and revisit intention. The data was obtained from 180 respondents with different socio demographic background. The findings of this study revealed that the majority of the respondents were female with

**Table 1. Suggestion on how to improve and sustain the image of the heritage sites**

Suggestion	Frequency	Percentage %
Signage	12	6.7
Maintenance	24	13.3
Promotion	10	5.6
Involvement & proper management	14	7.8
Conservation & preservation	6	3.3
Security	8	4.4
No answer	100	55.6
Keep the way it is	6	3.3
Total	180	100.0

67.8% while male represents only 32.2% from the total population. The difference about the percentage might be due to the willingness to be approached as respondents is easier for female as compared to male. The higher age percentage is 21-30 years old with 72.2% from the total respondents, the least is 61 and above, which is 2.2%. It is revealed that the majority of the tourists visiting the UNESCO heritage attraction sites are young adults who are between 21-30 years old. This situation is maybe because most of the tourists were students and young backpackers who love to travel. Heritage city of George Town is not preferred by senior citizen, as this might be due to the crowdedness or heavy traffic condition, which will slow down their movements from one attraction to another. Next, about the 'marital status' of the respondents, it is found that the highest status was single with 78.9% of the total respondents while the least is divorced with 2.8% from the total respondents. Meanwhile regarding the item 'origin', the highest percentage of the respondents were domestic tourist which represented by 62.2%, while other 37.8% is from international tourist. The difference in the number of percentage might be due to the willingness to participate by the local tourist compare to international. Furthermore, language barrier is also one of the factors as several international tourists were not fluent English. The highest percentage of 'occupational' categories is students, which are 47.8%, and the least percentage is retired tourist with 3.3%. The highest percentage that is represent by students is because of the data was collected during semester break and weekend.

With regards visiting experience information, the item of 'number of previous visits', the highest percentage showed 31.1% for the first visit experience and the least is 3-4 times (13.3%). The highest percentage for the first visit experience was because of the number of international respondents, followed by several domestic respondents who visited this site for the first time. As for the item of 'length of stay', it was found that most of the respondents (42.2%) who are the backpackers indicated to stay for 1-2 days and only 8.9% of them indicated to stay for 6 days in Georgetown. Regarding the statement of 'travelling companion', most respondents, which were 60% of them, travel with friend and the rest of the respondents (2.2%) travel with group tour. Among the 37 attraction listed under UNESCO's heritage sites, the three most visited attraction site are Street Art, Kapitan Keling Mosque and Fort Cornwallis with total of 167, 92 and 89 tourist out of 180 respectively. Concerning the open-ended question on the tourist suggestion as shown in table 1 below, the highest percentage is 55.6%, which accounted for 100 respondents left the section blank. However, 13.3% of the respondents left their comments and suggestions in regards to the historic buildings, which are to rebuild, to repaint the old historic building, to safeguard buildings from vandalism. The list percentage (3.3%) of respondents hope for conservation, preservation and keep the buildings as the way it is.

The satisfaction towards SAM dimensions were measured by using descriptive analysis. The results obtained from the analysis is illustrated in Table 2. Overall, visitors are satisfied with the entire SAM dimension that gives a total mean of 3.68. This indicates that these dimension are suits and presentable in determining the implementation of sustainable attraction management in UNESCO's heritage site in George Town, Penang. On the aspects of attributes, the highest rated dimension from the visitor's perception is authenticity (mean=4.00), followed by social (mean=3.68), service delivery (mean=3.57) and the least is environment (mean=3.48). Authenticity is the highest performed dimension with mean=4.00 out of 5.00. This is probably because of the attraction sites and artefacts are well preserved and interpreted that gives a high level of authenticity towards visitors. Among the four dimension, environment gives the least mean value which is mean=3.48. As overall, visitors are still satisfied with this dimension, but the least mean value indicates that, this might be probably due to the crowdedness. This can be prove as stated by Malaysia Airport Berhad (2014), Penang is one of the most visited states in Malaysia with 6.3 million tourist arrival for both international and domestic tourists in 2014. Thus, a high number of tourists will create more issues and problems, for example pollution, air and water quality are reducing. In order to examine the impact of successful Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) dimension on tourist satisfaction, correlation and regression analysis is used. The correlation analysis was conducted to determine the significant correlation among independent variables; authenticity, social, environment and service delivery with dependent variable, visitor's satisfaction. All four dimension gives a significant influence towards tourist's satisfaction by show a positive intermediate correlation with the highest value represent by authenticity,  $r=0.395$ ,  $p=0.000$ , followed by social,  $r=0.365$ ,  $p=0.000$ , environment,  $r=0.356$ ,  $p=0.000$  and the least is service delivery,  $r=0.287$ ,  $p=0.000$ . Table 3 below showed the correlation association between independent variable.

After finding that all independent variables were correlated to dependent variables, multiple regression analysis was conducted. Based on the result, the coefficient of determination  $R^2$  of 0.272 is indicating an explanation for the 27.2% variation of tourist satisfaction level. A low  $R^2$  value said to be normal for those models, which are human behavior study that have  $R^2$  values less than 50% because human behaviour is indeed hard to predict. The significance value of three dimensions; authenticity, social and environment was less than the significant level of 0.05 indicating that the regression model was statistically significant. The results as revealed in Table 4 proven that the three elements of SAM are positively affected the tourist overall satisfaction level in visiting George Town, Penang, while beta value indicates that the dimension of authenticity was the best predictor in measuring level of satisfaction (Beta=0.244). Other dimension, which is service delivery, showed statistically insignificant influence on visitor's satisfaction. As stated by Swinyard (1993), customers who have previous experiences that they perceive as highly valuable in terms of efficient and economical aspects will be more likely to have revisit intentions. Thus, in order to analyze relationship between visitors satisfaction and revisit intention, correlation analysis was conducted. Tourist satisfaction has a significance influence towards visitor's revisit intention that gives a positive intermediate correlation  $r=0.504$ .

**Table 2. Tourist satisfaction towards Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) dimension**

SAM Dimension		Percentage of the Valid Respondents (%)					Mean
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
MEAN ENVIRONMENT		3.48					
1.	Beautiful and breathtaking scenery	0.0	1.1	15.6	57.2	26.1	4.08
2.	Conservation of landscape						
3.	Few tourist and less crowded	1.7	4.4	31.1	48.9	13.9	3.69
4.	Environmental pollution (eg: water quality at minimum level)	8.9	23.3	34.4	23.9	9.4	3.02
5.	Environmental management (eg: recycling program)	2.2	1.2	44.4	28.3	7.8	3.22
5.		2.8	11.7	42.2	33.9	9.4	3.36
MEAN SOCIAL		3.68					
6.	Local culture and traditions are still practice	0.0	5.0	22.8	52.8	19.4	3.87
7.	Tourist feel safe and secure						
7.	Tourist learn about local culture						
8.	Residents learn about tourist's culture	6.0	5.6	24.4	30.6	33.4	3.83
8.	Hardly can see policeman on duty in this area	0.0	3.9	26.7	46.1	23.3	3.89
9.		1.1	9.4	38.3	39.4	11.7	3.51
10.		6.1	15.6	36.1	27.2	15.0	3.29
MEAN AUTHENTICITY		4.00					
11.	Each attraction represents the past bringing thoughts of past history/development						
12.	The attraction/artefacts exhibited appears to be true to the original object	0.0	1.7	16.7	59.4	22.2	4.02
12.	Each tourist attraction presents unique characteristics						
13.	Architecture and historic building are well maintained	0.6	1.1	17.2	62.8	18.3	3.97
14.		0.0	2.2	15.0	61.7	21.1	4.02
15.		0.6	3.3	21.7	44.4	30.0	4.00
MEAN SERVICE DELIVERY		3.57					
15.	Quality service offered by staff at each attraction & tourist information counter	0.6	5.6	32.8	50.0	11.1	3.66
16.	Signage & interpretation are reliable and informative						
17.	Facilities (eg: public transportation & toilet are in a good condition	1.7	7.2	25.6	51.7	13.9	3.69
18.	Convenient & accessible distance from one attraction to another						
18.	UNESCO's heritage sites should have a proper bicycle lane for tourist	0.6	5.6	33.3	47.2	13.3	3.67
19.	Trishaw riders are not qualified as tourist guide						
19.	Trishaw riders are mostly old and not physically fit	1.1	1.7	23.9	45.0	28.3	3.98
20.	Trishaw riders are not wearing presentable uniform						
21.	Trishaws are not in a good condition	0.6	5.6	21.1	35.6	37.2	4.03
22.		10.0	16.1	39.4	21.7	12.8	3.11
23.		3.3	9.4	42.8	33.3	11.1	3.39
		4.4	8.3	45.6	30.6	11.1	3.36
		5.0	12.8	44.4	26.7	11.1	3.26
OVERALL MEAN		3.68					

Note: Mean indicate the average point by 180 respondents for each level based on 5 point Likert scale with scale 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

**Table 3. Correlation between independent and dependent variables**

Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient, r	P-Value
Authenticity	0.395**	0.000
Social	0.365**	0.000
Environment	0.356**	0.000
Service Delivery	0.287**	0.000

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 4. Sustainable tourism dimensions influencing overall tourist satisfaction level in George Town, Penang**

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient			
	B	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.762	0.303	5.823	0.000
Authenticity	0.244	0.64	3.799	0.000
Social	0.219	0.70	3.147	0.002
Environment	0.188	0.61	3.086	0.002

Note: Significant at t-value > 1.960 and p-value < 0.05 (5% alpha level)  $R^2 = 0.272$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.260$

This shows that if the tourist is satisfied, they will probably have intention to revisit in the future, and in contrast, if the tourist not satisfied, they might be do not have intention to revisit in the future.

## DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study is to assess the local and international tourist perception on the sustainability of UNESCO's Heritage attractions in George Town. Thus, the specific objectives of this research were to identify tourists' socio demographic background in George Town, Penang, to examine the relationship between tourists satisfaction and revisit intention and to examine the relationship between tourists satisfaction and revisit intention. Based on the specific objectives that have been stated above, the first objective of this study was to identify tourist's socio demographic background in George Town, Penang. From the results, it is revealed that there were several differences among social demographic factors of the respondents. Every respondent had different characteristics, which would give different kind of perception, based on the way they were thinking and responded to each questions. The second objective of this study is to examine the impact of successful Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) dimension on tourist satisfaction. The correlation and regression analysis were conducted to determine the significant correlation and regression between independent variables; authenticity, social, environment and service delivery with dependent variable which is visitor's satisfaction. All four dimensions demonstrate significant influence on tourist's satisfaction by confirming a positive intermediate correlation and regression value, hence, confirms that SAM dimension shows a positive impact towards tourist satisfaction. Cronin & Taylor (1992) who indicated that customer satisfaction is critically significant as it reflects subjective customer evaluations of the attribute performance associated with the consumption experience support this finding. The third objective is to examine the relationship between tourists satisfaction and revisit intention, which was analyzed by using correlation analysis. As stated by Swinyard (1993), customers who have previous experiences that when they perceive as highly valuable in terms of efficient and economical aspects will be more likely to have revisit intentions. Thus, in order to analyze the relationship between visitors satisfaction and revisit intention, correlation analysis was conducted. Tourist satisfaction has a significance influence on visitor's revisit intention that gives a positive intermediate correlation.

This shows that if tourists are satisfied, they will probably have the intention to revisit the sites in the future, and in contrast, if tourists are not satisfied, they might not have the intention to revisit in the future. All in, the study findings showed that visitors are distinct and diverse in their socio-demographic characteristics. For both international and domestic visitors, it can be concluded that both of this demographic are presenting young and independent travelers, who are eager to explore something new. As the data was collected during semester break, this proves why the highest number of respondents is a student. Most of the tourist attractions are not really implementing a proper Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) in managing their sites. Thus, we can see many problems or issues aroused in any tourist attraction site such as cleanliness, safety and others. In this study, four dimensions of SAM were found to be significantly related in predicting the overall satisfactions level and revisit intentions of tourists at the UNESCO World Heritage Site in George Town, Penang.

The findings of this study revealed that the tourists' perceptions towards environment, social, authenticity and service delivery influenced their overall satisfaction levels and their revisit intentions. As both analysis of correlation and multiple regression provided a positive significance relationship between independent and dependent variables, it is confirmed that if the tourists are satisfied with each item in the SAM dimension, they will be satisfied with the overall visiting experience and will have the intention to revisit the UNESCO heritage sites in future. The outcomes of this study may provide awareness and reference to the managers of the attraction sites and Penang Tourism Board about the current perception levels of tourists' satisfactions towards all the items in Sustainable Attraction Management (SAM) dimensions. Therefore, they make take the action to improve the conditions and situations in relation to SAM dimensions at each attraction. Thus, they may take the effective steps on improving the sustainability of each attraction sites. As indicated by Fyall, Garrod and Leask (2003), visitor attractions have introduced a form of visitor management, the aim being to moderate the impacts of visitors while still enabling them to come onto the site, interact with whatever is to be found there and achieve a satisfying experience from their visit. Furthermore, the results of socio demographic and perception about SAM dimensions that influence satisfaction level and revisit intention can be taken into consideration for any related policy or plan implementation in the future to sustain the images of the sites.

Apart from that, UNESCO heritage sites of Georgetown Penang are currently facing the problem where its UNESCO's title would be revoked due to its current condition that do not fits the criterion required by UNESCO organization. Thus, it is expected that this study or any future study can help in improving the image and status of Georgetown by implementing the sustainable tourism practices management to conserve the sustainability of this heritage site.

### Conclusion

This study provided the authorities, and business operators to ensure tourist satisfaction and revisit intention implement an insight that describes the major sustainable tourism practices management, which may. However, this finding represents few dimensions from the sustainable practices in relation to heritage sites, which is environment, social, authenticity and service delivery. Future study is recommended to utilize and develop these dimensions of scale and model for a better improvement as tourism sector are growing from time to time. Several problems aroused during the data collection, one of it was to predict the tourist spots as UNESCO heritage site is an open area with approximately 109.38 hectares. Thus, tourists were scattered around the location of the study, as they were always moving from one attraction to another. Future studies are recommended to improve the data collection method by strategizing or planning a proper solution to ease this problem. Several suggestions from the visitors on how to improve and sustain the image of heritage sites need to be considered by the tourism authorities and business operator. For example, the highest number of visitors suggested the keeping of the heritage sites the way it is by securing the sites from rapid development in order to sustain the originality of the heritage sites in a long term.

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Penang Tourism Information Centre

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