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## **THE POTENTIAL OF HERITAGE TRAIL MAPPING IN BANDAR PENGGARAM, BATU PAHAT, JOHOR MALAYSIA: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION**

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### **Abstract**

This research assesses the potential of heritage trail mapping in Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat, Johor by observing the community's perceptions. This research intends to profile and map the cultural heritage descriptions of Bandar Penggaram as a unique town from historical, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental backgrounds. This research has adopted a mixed-method approach by disseminating questionnaire surveys to the respondents, and having focus group discussions with various public and private agencies. The result shows that the majority (76.2%) of the respondents perceived that the heritage zone of Bandar Penggaram has the potential to attract tourists and researchers to the town, while the cooperation between the authorities and stakeholders has been found to be necessary to create awareness among the communities of their historical glory within the heritage zone.

**Keywords:** Heritage Trail, Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat, Heritage Potential, Perceptions Study

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Bandar Penggaram or Bandar Batu Pahat has a unique cultural history and heritage; it has grown as a port city and is now the second-largest main town in the state of Johor. To date, Bandar Penggaram has about 430 pre-war buildings with façade and architectural styles influenced by the (i) Eclectic, (ii) Early Colonial/Anglo Indian, and (iii) Art Deco styles (Majlis Perbandaran Batu Pahat, 2016). To ensure that Bandar Penggaram is regarded as one of the tourist destinations that can generate economic returns, a new approach needs to be embodied through the heritage trail programme.

This approach is to document and profile the history of the town, which is a continuous effort to educate the younger generation on the cultural path of the heritage zone. The initiative to conserve the old buildings in Batu Pahat town was also found to be less encouraging than that in other districts in the state of Johor (Indera, 2022). Furthermore, there are many dilapidated colonial-era buildings found here, which are not given much attention, and these valuable heritage assets should be conserved by the authorities before they might disappear. The need to conserve the cultural heritage has been outlined in Johor's State Structure Plan 2030, which aims to 'Mainstream the sustainability of the state through the preservation of the natural assets and cultural heritage of the people of Johor which is invaluable, resilient to the challenges of global change' (PLANMalaysia, 2017).

This project produces the first cultural mapping of Bandar Penggaram's cultural heritage assets. The town previously did not have any cultural heritage mapping, which can be found in other heritage towns in Malaysia. This indirectly makes it difficult to identify the historical and heritage assets of the town that can be shared with the outsiders. The project intends to profile the historical descriptions of Bandar Penggaram as a unique port town from the historical, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental perspectives. This article emphasizes on the future growth of historical areas based on their potential as cultural tourism destinations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Heritage Trail**

A heritage trail is a designated route that links significant items of an area's heritage. It can be a walking trail or a driving route in urban and rural settings. Heritage trails are typically identified by signage and guidebooks that provide information about the cultural heritage associated with the trail (National Heritage Board, 2017). The heritage can include built architecture, cultural heritage narratives, and historical monuments (Hayes & Macleod, 2008; Lai, 2009; Vos, 2018).

According to Fienieg et al., (2008) and Rana (2015), heritage trails serve several purposes, such as community development, community participation, discovering community heritage, and promoting urban conservation activities. They can also encourage support for projects related to the conservation and protection of historical monuments (MacLeod, 2017). A heritage trail can consist of a single property or building, a trail or corridor, or a district comprising of multiple heritage sites (Silbergh et al., 1994). Additionally, a heritage trail can be part of a regional network of natural and cultural heritage sites (Antonson & Jacobsen, 2014; Lourens, 2007; MacLeod et al., 2009; Silbergh et al., 1994). According to Mastura et al., (2019), visitors are exposed to the rural lifestyle and culture, agricultural activities and farming, cottage industries, and other informal enterprises by constructing a history trail, which serve as important parts that can create income for the local community and the nation as a whole. Heritage trails keep history alive, protect cultural places, and let people experience the past and present (Nadianti et al., 2022).

### **Historic Background of Batu Pahat**

Batu Pahat or Bandar Penggaram has a rich history that dates back to the fifteenth century. The name 'Batu Pahat' literally means 'chiselled stone', which possibly can be traced back through the history where the stone-well was carved by the Siamese army in search of drinking water - on its way to attack the Malacca Malay Sultanate in 1456 (Aziffah, 2019; Neil et al., 2017). The act of sculpting the stone has given its name to Batu Pahat, and the well is called the Batu Pahat well, which still exists today (MPBP, 2016). It was originally a fishing village and was later developed into a port town as a trading centre along the Batu Pahat river and the Straits of Melaka (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** An Old Photo Taken in 1920s Featuring the View of Bandar Penggaram  
*Source: Majlis Perbandaran Batu Pahat (2016)*

### **Bandar Penggaram Heritage Zone**

Bandar Penggaram Heritage Zone is in the center of the old port town (Figure 2 and Figure 3). It consists of old shophouses, civic buildings, mansions, building relics, and private property that has significant value for the heritage assets. There are more than 400 buildings that have been identified as historically valuable and in the process of being restored through the Bandar Penggaram Heritage Zone Transformation Programme by the Batu Pahat Municipal Council (MPBP).



**Figure 2:** The Old Japanese Club Building Was Built in 1925 and is One of the Most Iconic Buildings Alongside Jalan Shahbandar Facing Batu Pahat River  
*Source: Indera Syahrul (2022)*



**Figure 3:** Bird's Eye View of Bandar Penggaram Heritage Zone  
*Source: Southern Corridor Malaysia (2023)*

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research has adopted a mixed-method approach (see Creamer, 2017; Creswell, 2015) by disseminating questionnaire surveys to the respondents. For quantitative data, the sample of the study comprised of 172 individuals who participated through a web-based survey. On the other hand, focus group discussions (FGD) involved various individuals from public and private agencies, NGOs, and community representatives from federal, state, district, and local levels. The following are the approaches undertaken by this research.

### **Focus Group Discussion**

Held online on 30 September 2021 and 28 October 2021 with representatives from Batu Pahat District Office, Batu Pahat Municipal Council (MPBP), Tourism Johor, PLANMalaysia, Johor Economic Planning Division, ICOMOS Malaysia, Think City, Malaysian Tourist Guide Council, Dept. of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA), Batu Pahat History Society, communities and school headmasters.

### **Survey**

The survey was conducted online from January to March 2022 through Google Forms. A total of 172 respondents were involved in this survey.

### **Interview**

Interviews were conducted with the respondents within the Batu Pahat heritage zone, and included professionals, community representatives, shopkeepers, and the public.

### **Site Observation**

Site observation was conducted in Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat to observe the current scenario and the site's potential from the perspective of the researcher(s) (Figure 5). This task also included photo shoots which included buildings, sites, monuments, historical remains, and others.

*Indera Syahrul Mat Radzuan, Seow Ta Wee, Mohd Akmal Rohiat, Nor Hisham Md Saman, Tiong Kian Boon  
The Potential of Heritage Trail Mapping in Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat, Johor: An Empirical  
Investigation*



**Figure 4:** Diagrammatic Map of Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat, Johor  
*Source: Adapted from Google Map (2023)*

## **EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

Bandar Penggaram or Batu Pahat has a unique cultural history and heritage, and it has grown as a port city and is now the second largest main town in the state of Johor (Figure 5). Online survey instruments were prepared based on the insights to investigate respondents' perceptions towards local heritage, their willingness to participate in heritage programmes, and the potential of Bandar Penggaram to be established as a tourist destination, and to identify a wide range of tangible and intangible elements such as the built and natural heritage for heritage trail development. The findings revealed the socio-economic profile of 172 respondents who participated in this survey.



**Figure 5:** Bandar Penggaram is the Second Largest Town in Johor and Well Known for Its Textile and Garment Industry  
*Source: Southern Corridor Malaysia (2023)*

### **Respondents Profile**

Table 1 provides the summary statistics for the respondents' social profiles. The gender breakdown for respondents was 59.3% male and 40.7% female. The most represented race group was Malay (83.1%), followed by Chinese (8.7%), Indian (5.2%), and others (3.0%). Most of the respondents were aged 36-45 years (28.5%), followed by 46-55 years (24.3%), 18-25 years (22.1%), and 26-36 years (19.8%), while the remainder were above 55 years. Almost all respondents had undergone a formal education (Table 2). Roughly 74% of the respondents had attended university; 11% had completed college education, 14% had attended up to secondary school, and less than 1% had attended up to primary school.

**Table 1:** Respondents' Social Profile

Profile	Numbers	Percentage (%)
Number of respondents	172	100.0
Gender		
Male	102	59.3
Female	70	40.7
Race		
Malay	143	83.1
Chinese	15	8.7
Indian	9	5.2
Others	5	3.0
Age		
Below 17 years	0	0
18-25 years	38	22.1
26-36 years	34	19.8
36-45 years	49	28.5
46-55 years	42	24.3
56-65 years	7	4.1
66-75 years	2	1.2
Above 76 years	0	0

Source: Author (2022)

**Table 2:** Respondents' Education Background

Profile	Numbers	Percentage (%)
University	128	74.4
College	19	11.0
Secondary school	24	14.0
Primary school	1	0.6

Source: Author (2022)

### Awareness of Local Heritage and Interest Level by Race

Table 3 presents cross-tabulation data that sheds light on patterns or disparities in awareness of local historical heritage across various racial groups. The data shows that Malay respondents exhibit the highest level of awareness compared to other racial groups. Among Malays, the majority (129 out of 145) are aware of the existence of local heritage, while 16 Malay respondents reported being unaware. Conversely, Chinese and Indian respondents show lower levels of awareness compared to the Malays, with 11 and 6 respondents respectively indicating awareness. Among other racial groups, only 1 out of 3 reported awareness, representing the lowest level of awareness across all racial groups. This underscores the necessity for targeted initiatives aimed at enhancing awareness and appreciation of local heritage across all segments of society.



**Table 3:** Awareness of the Existence of Local Heritage\*Race Crosstabulation

		Race				Total
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others	
Awareness on the existence of local heritage	Yes	129	11	6	1	147
	No	16	4	3	2	25
Total		145	14	9	3	172

*Source: Author (2022)*

As illustrated in Table 4, respondents were queried about their reactions toward the local historic sites and heritage buildings in the town. Upon comparing responses across racial groups, it becomes apparent that Malays demonstrate the highest level of interest, followed by Chinese, Indians, and others category. Disparities in interest levels across races may be attributed to several factors, including cultural heritage, historical significance, or personal experiences associated with these sites within each community.

**Table 4:** Reaction to the local historic sites and heritage buildings\*Race Crosstabulation

		Race				Total
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others	
Reaction to the local historic sites and heritage buildings	Not interested	8	3	0	0	11
	Less interested	29	2	0	0	31
	Neutral	39	6	3	0	48
	Interested	45	3	5	1	54
	Very interested	24	1	1	2	28
Total		145	15	9	3	172

*Source: Author (2022)*

### **Educational Attainment, Willingness and Engagement Perceptions**

Furthermore, all the respondents were asked about their willingness to participate in a heritage-related programme in the town. The provided cross-tabulation in Table 5 illustrates the relationship between individuals' willingness to engage in a heritage-related volunteer programme and their respective levels of education. Analysis of the willingness reveals variations across different educational levels. Notably, the highest count of individuals willing to participate is among those with a university education (66), followed by those uncertain (52), and individuals with a secondary school education (11). Conversely, there are no respondents with a primary school education who express willingness to participate. In summary, the most apparent result is the disparity in willingness to participate based on educational attainment, with higher levels of education correlating positively with a greater willingness to engage in the heritage-related volunteer programme.

**Table 5:** Willingness to be Involved in Heritage-Related Volunteer Programme \*Education Level Crosstabulation

		Education Level				Total
		University	College	Secondary	Primary	
Willingness to be involved in heritage-related volunteer programme	Yes	66	10	11	0	87
	No	10	0	5	0	15
	Uncertain	52	9	8	1	70
Total		128	19	24	1	172

*Source: Author (2022)*

The cross-tabulation data in Table 6 presents an examination of the relationship between respondents' levels of education and their corresponding responses categorized as 'Yes', 'No', or 'Uncertain'. Within each educational category, the breakdown of responses is as follows: among respondents with University education, 118 individuals responded affirmatively, 3 answered negatively, and 7 expressed uncertainty. In the College education group, 15 respondents provided positive responses, 2 responded negatively, and 2 were uncertain. For individuals with a Secondary education background, 21 respondents answered 'Yes', 2 replied 'No', and 1 expressed uncertainty. Only one respondent with a Primary education level provided a positive response. The total count of responses across all categories indicates 155 'Yes' responses, 7 'No' responses, and 10 uncertain responses. This tabulated data offers valuable insights into the distribution of responses across different educational levels. Notably, there is a discernible trend wherein the likelihood of affirmative responses decreases as educational attainment decreases. Additionally, variations in uncertainty levels across educational categories are apparent.

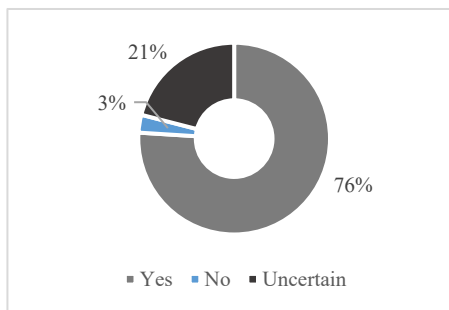
**Table 6:** Engagement between Authorities and Stakeholders, (Private Sector, Communities, and NGOs) is Essential\*Education Level Crosstabulation

		Education Level				Total
		University	College	Secondary	Primary	
Engagement between authorities and stakeholders (Private, Community, NGOs etc.) is essential?	Yes	118	15	21	1	155
	No	3	2	2	0	7
	Uncertain	7	2	1	0	10
Total		128	19	24	1	172

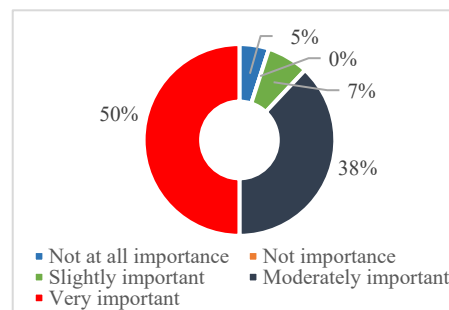
*Source: Author (2022)*

### Perception of Heritage Trail Potential

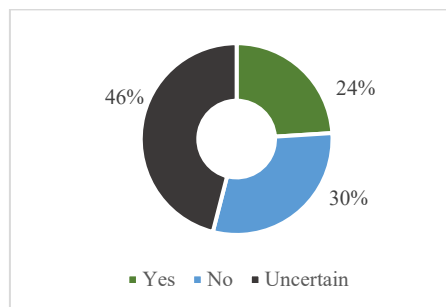
Figure 6 shows respondents' evaluation on the view of whether Bandar Penggaram has a potential to attract researchers and tourists. It was found that 76% of the respondents were positive of this and agreed that Bandar Penggaram has potential, while 3% disagreed, and another 21% felt uncertain. The survey also encouraged the respondents to rate the importance of community engagement in the aspect of planning and implementing a heritage trail on-site. Figure 7 shows that most of the respondents rated it as very important (50%), many others rated it as important (38%), and very few of them rated it as slightly important (7%) and not at all important (5%).



**Figure 6:** Potential to Attract Researchers and Tourists  
Source: Author (2022)



**Figure 7:** Importance of Community Engagement in the Aspect of Planning and Implementation  
Source: Author (2022)



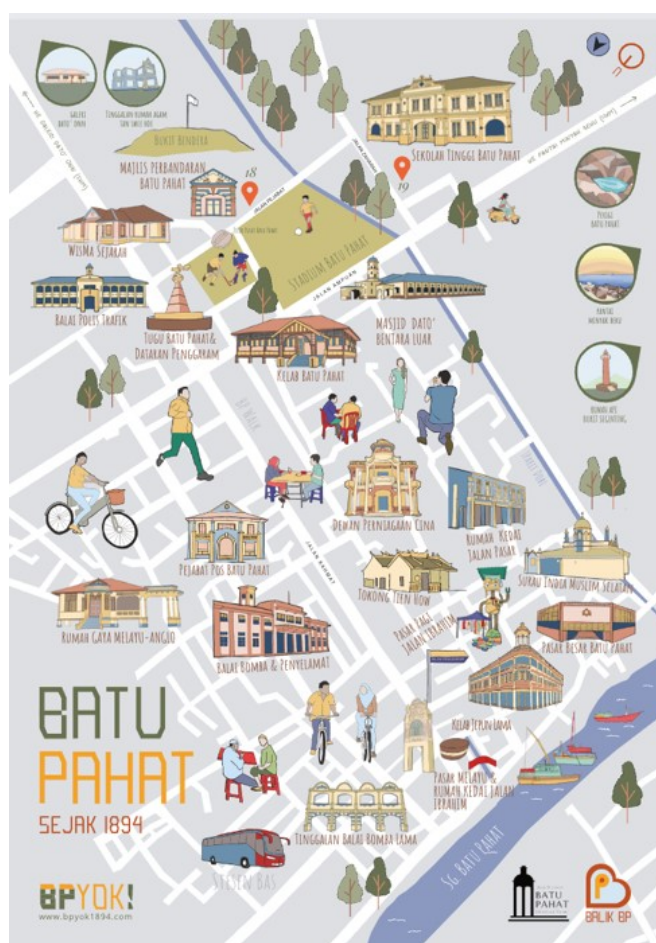
**Figure 8:** Satisfaction of Quality of Service by the Local Authority in Safeguarding Heritage Buildings  
Source: Author (2022)

Figure 8 shows the data of the residents' view on the question, 'Are you satisfied with the quality of service performed by the local authority in safeguarding heritage buildings in Batu Pahat?'. The result shows that majority of the respondents (46%) felt uncertainty here, 30% were found to be unsatisfied

Indera Syahrul Mat Radzuan, Seow Ta Wee, Mohd Akmal Rohiat, Nor Hisham Md Saman, Tiong Kian Boon  
*The Potential of Heritage Trail Mapping in Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat, Johor: An Empirical Investigation*

with the quality of service, and 24% were satisfied. The following evidences have been recorded in the survey, which states that: *“Many historic buildings are dilapidated, less promotion about Batu Pahat cultural heritage, no expertise to treat the old buildings, conservation works have been done but not following the international best practices, local authorities are not proactive enough, and information about heritage buildings in Batu Pahat needs to be recorded”*.

## OUTCOME



**Figure 9:** Proposed Heritage Trail Map for Batu Pahat Town  
 Source: Indera Syahrul (2022)

Figure 9 shows the proposed heritage trail map for Batu Pahat with 25 historical assets and cultural heritage. It was based on the town's unique and authentic historic built environment as an economic driver, which in turn, will provide an important reason for conservation activities and community development. The heritage trail map covers an area of 15 km radius from the Batu Pahat heritage zone, up to the Minyak Beku beach in the southwest, and Jalan Kluang towards the northeast. In this sense, this trail is expected to help visitors explore, understand, and appreciate the town's heritage in ways that give it a new image, identity, and a sense of place. Thus, heritage interpretation would enable visitors to have a rewarding and meaningful experience exploring the historic town (Yunus et al., 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

This research is a collective effort to document the history and heritage of Bandar Penggaram and to educate the younger generations on the cultural path of their historical areas. The findings showed that Bandar Penggaram displays strong evidence of tangible and intangible elements in historical facets, based on the unique architecture of the shophouses, landmarks, sites' natural beauty, monuments, and historical significance. This potential could help educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation concerning its distinctive cultural heritage value.

It is found to be a catalyst to mobilise a stronger collaboration, especially between the university and stakeholders, including local authorities, industry, community, and NGOs to formulate new programmes and innovations in the field of tourism, history, cultural heritage, and local culture. Given today's post-pandemic challenges, tourism is often seen as a self-serving 'industry', thus leading to incorrect implementations. Tourism acts as an engine of economic growth and most importantly as a social force. Tourism is much more than an industry or the 'government's business' - it is people. Perhaps it is time to rethink the 'industry' classification and find ways to connect with all stakeholders involved in this potential sector.

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#### **Author's Ethical Statement**

We, the author(s) of this research paper, affirm our commitment to ethical conduct in all aspects of our work. We have upheld integrity, transparency, and accountability throughout the research process. We have obtained appropriate consent, minimized conflicts of interest, and followed ethical guidelines for data collection and analysis. We aim to contribute to knowledge while maintaining the highest standards of integrity.

Indera Syahrul Mat Radzuan, Seow Ta Wee, Mohd Akmal Rohiat, Nor Hisham Md Saman and Tiong Kian Boon

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