



PLANNING MALAYSIA:
Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners
VOLUME 16 ISSUE 3 (2018) Page 182 – 196

PROMOTING RURAL TOURISM IN PERAK TENGAH DISTRICT THROUGH THE EXPANDING OF HERITAGE INTERPRETATION AND PRESENTATION

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Abstract

The State of Perak is known for its richness and uniqueness in history and cultural heritage. However, the State's tourism promotion has been focusing more on the popular destinations, leaving out those with heritage significance especially those located in the rural area. This is due to limited knowledge on method to interpret the cultural resources in the rural area, as well as unorganized interpretation programmes. This research has two aims, which are 1) to identify potential cultural heritage significance in Perak Tengah; and 2) to outline an interpretation plan of the potential cultural heritage as new tourist attraction of Perak. This research involves three stages; observation and inventory of resources, focus group interview and interpretation proposal. Results from the focus group discussion indicate the need to customize the interpretation and presentation of rural heritage especially on physical experience in community cultural activities. In the end, this study outlines interpretation guidance for heritage site operators on how visitors can experience the cultural heritage in the rural area.

Keywords: cultural, heritage, interpretation, rural, visitor

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RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The rural area has a lot of cultural heritage resources in the form of unique culture and art, traditional knowledge, natural beauty and others. The traditional activities of rural community do not only benefit the image and appearance of tourist attractions, but also could be used as resources to increase the income of the community and as motivation to preserve socio-cultural activities (Susyanti, 2013). The importance of rural cultural resources is recognised in some of the national policies. For instance, the National Key Result Areas (NKRA) has identified tourism, as well as agriculture, farming and cottage industry, as areas to be emphasised in its goal of promoting economic revitalization and thus prevent migration of population as well as creating a strong encouragement for rural youth to remain in the village. The National Physical Plan 2 (NPP2) also highlighted cultural heritage and tourism as important to support the realization of the New Economic Model and the 1Malaysia Concept (FDCTP, 2016). The plan's policy 11 and 12 state that natural tourism resources, the authentic multi-cultural and historical heritage of the country shall be conserved. Tourism development zones in each state shall focus on specialized regional niche products based on their locational advantages and availability of resources. Similarly, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture also highlights the importance of cultural heritage and tourism. Its main vision is to develop Malaysia as a world-class tourist and cultural destination as well as to build the national identity based on art, culture, and heritage.

The State of Perak is known for its richness and uniqueness of history, tradition and cultural heritage especially the traditional Malay village. Figure 1 shows the most visited destinations by domestic tourists in Perak for year 2011-2013 (IDR, 2015). It can be seen that these were all leisure and entertainment destinations. Meanwhile, none of the cultural heritage destinations such as cultural community activities and traditions made the list. The Districts of Perak Tengah, Kuala Kangsar and Hilir Perak have lots of cultural heritage potential to be promoted especially on village life, arts, culture and agriculture activities. Therefore, programmes to attract tourists to these cultural heritage destinations should be encouraged, and the new attractions should be defined and interpret wisely especially in the rural area so that they can be beneficial to the community. It would take some effort to create effective interpretation – but if it is done right, it would not only help visitors understand the resources but also contribute to better management of the tourist attractions and at the same time can generate more revenues.

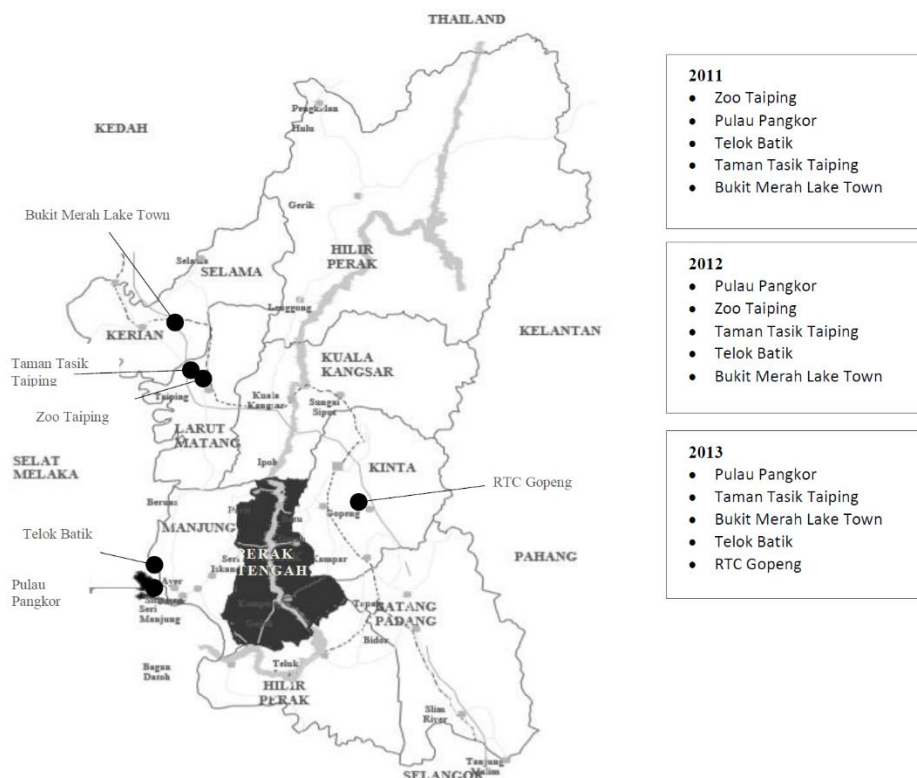


Figure 1: Most visited destination by domestic tourist in Perak
 Sources: IDR, 2015

LITERATURE REVIEW

Heritage can be classified into two categories: tangible cultural heritage (TCH) and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Both are the national treasure that should be preserved and conserved for future generations. TCH is synonymous with physical objects that can be touched and seen as historic architecture, monuments and buildings. Meanwhile, ICH includes any form of expressions, languages, songs, folk songs, oral traditions, poetry, music, dances, martial arts, that may have existed or exist in relation to the heritage of Malaysia (National Heritage Act 2005). To increase awareness towards cultural heritage, the interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage elements should be highlighted and shared with the locals and visitors (Lenzerini, 2011). It is easy to describe the "tangible" things; the physical characteristics of resources. However, it is tougher to link those things to "intangible" things; the ideas and emotions behind it. The goal of interpretation is to engage visitors' senses while challenging them to think about what things mean – to look at them in entirely new ways. Interpretation can create

memorable and meaningful experiences for visitors, and inspire them to learn more (Lancaster County Planning Commission, 2002).

The cultural heritage resources are widely available in the rural area in the form of a unique culture and art, expertise and traditional knowledge, natural beauty, ecological resources and others, and very representative of the community culture. They enhance the image and appearance of tourist attractions, and also could be used as resources to increase the income of the community and as motivation to preserve socio-cultural activities (Susyanti, 2013). Tourists are very interested to see how life or culture and heritage interpretation that can help enrich their experience. They are seeking to understand the sense of place in communities which are unique personalities. All these can be seen in the rural area. According to Saidatulakmal (2012), the terms rural tourism and heritage tourism are commonly used in tourism industry to refer to any form of tourism that showcase the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural location, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interactions between tourists and locals for more enriching tourism experiences.

Interpretation Principles

Interpretation is an informational and inspirational process including educational activities that aim to reveal meanings of our cultural and natural resources. Tilden (1977) established six principles of interpretation, which have been referred to in preparing interpretation programme of heritage sites worldwide. These principles are:

- i. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
- ii. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information.
- iii. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural.
- iv. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
- v. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than apart and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
- vi. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of 12) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach.

To fit today's world on interpretation, Knudson, Beck and Cable (2003), and Beck and Cable (2011) have updated Tilden's principles by adding new principles that provide a more elaborate interpretative philosophy that focuses more on the interpreter's role and method of interpretation. According to Beck and Cable (2011), every place has a history, and interpretation can bring the past

alive to make the present more enjoyable and the future more meaningful. To achieve this, interpreters must concern themselves with the quantity and quality of information presented. Focused and well-researched interpretation will be more powerful than longer discourse. Quality interpretation depends on the interpreter's knowledge and skill, which must be continually developed over time and at the end of the interpretation should instil in the people ability, and the desire, to sense the beauty of their surroundings and could provide spiritual uplift and to encourage resource preservation. International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Charter (1999) gives a guiding direction on what heritage interpretation programmes should be considered. The main aspects are retention of the heritage authenticity and culture experiences which include:

- i. Enhance the appreciation and understanding of that cultural heritage;
- ii. Present the significance of the culture in a relevant and accessible manner;
- iii. Use appropriate, stimulating and contemporary forms of education, technology, and personal explanations;
- iv. Encourage high levels of public awareness and support of heritage;
- v. Encourage visitors to experience the wider cultural/natural heritage of the region; and
- vi. Involvement of all parties, including the local and/or indigenous community representatives is necessary to achieve a sustainable tourism industry.

Interpretation can be used to promote cultural heritage to build national, regional, and community identities. Many visitors want to learn about the places they visit and interpretation can convey factual material, for examples the history of the buildings, their architectural styles and their building technique (Aplin, 2002; Timothy, 2011). The goal of interpretation is not instruction but to change attitudes and behaviour, to motivate and inspire, and to take information and make it meaningful and exciting. Interpretation is not just glossy brochures, appropriate signage, and well-edited videos; it is the art of telling a story of a community. The interpretation story can inspire and will provoke people to broaden their knowledge (National Trust of Australia, 2014). The daily life also can be subjects of interpretation for the visitors. The experiences of spending a few days immersed in a village's way of life will stay with tourists for longer than if they had spent the time looking at the monument or building. The tourist seeks various physical experiences and satisfaction. The nature of these will largely determine the destination chosen and the activities enjoyed (Goeldner, 2000).

Interpretation Practices

Studies on heritage interpretation and presentation worldwide, commonly highlight the issues and challenges of managing tourist in heritage sites. How to

do the best interpretation of heritage and give the best experience to the visitors? A lot of unfavourable factors have been identified by Asfaw and Gebreslassie (2016), like the limited capacity of heritage interpreters and lack of organized interpretation and presentation. Most of the heritage interpretation and presentation manuals and guidelines by European countries have structured and organized interpretation practice into three steps (Lancaster County Planning Commission, 2002; FI NTDA, 2012; Tilkin, 2013). The first step is to make an inventory of heritage resources, next is to define significance and third is the development of the story through an effective media. To achieve good interpretation, Binoy (2011) emphasised that the role of interpreters at heritage sites must provoke curiosity, attention, and interest among the visitors to listen, participate and actively involved in the heritage interpretation process. However, Leanza, Porto, Sapienza and Cascone (2016) highlighted that the tourist itineraries are seen as good opportunities for the development of tourism in the rural areas that possess natural or cultural resources. According to Leanza et al. (2016), heritage interpretation-based itinerary is able to influence tourists who visit famous rural heritage site, to extend their stay in the related rural area and, as a consequence, consume more tourist products. Tourist itinerary needs to be supported by suitable interpretation media and connects several heritage attractions located in a given rural area with a heritage site selected as a tourist catalyst.

The important criteria in creating interpretation are to know the audience. Interpreters must know who are the visitors; will they understand and appreciate what they are told through the interpretation? The best way to tell a story is to depend on the physical features that are connected with the story. Good interpretation is about "show and tell", for example, if we discuss how to make traditional food, the visitors will want to see a demonstration of the cooking process. Good interpretation will inspire future exploration.

Harun (2007) has explored the different interpretation between two historical sites in Perak; Kellie's Castle and Pasir Salak Historical Complex. The interpretation of Kellie's Castle came from the building itself which displays the architecture and history of the castle. However, interpretation of Pasir Salak Historical Complex is through the creating of interpretation elements, which associates the site and the history of Malay heroes against the first British Resident of Perak, J.W.W. Birch whom was assassinated in 1875. The interpretation elements including the diorama at the historical time tunnel gallery, traditional Perak house, and memorial monuments.

Ahmad (2012) applied interpretation concepts towards restoration work of heritage buildings. He found that historical buildings have intrinsic values that need to be explored through suitable interpretation medium. He also suggested that it is necessary to establish authentic assessment and validated interpretations of heritage resources. Authenticity in heritage is very important because the

genuine historic building preservation will provoke the visitor's intention and gives distinctive experiences.

STUDY AREA

The District of Perak Tengah has a lot of cultural heritage potentials which can be developed as tourism attractions and destinations. The Perak Tengah District Local Plan 2013 has proposed the strategies to strengthen and utilise all tourism potentials in the rural area, especially the activities that are based on history and water (Perak River). The plan also specifies that all tourism activities need to be supported with appropriate infrastructure for visitors convenience. The Plan's main proposal of tourism strengthening includes current cultural resources; promoting Pasir Salak Historical Complex, promoting handcraft industries and developing royal tombs as tourist attraction. Other tourism resources needed to be improved are Terrapin Wildlife Conservation Centre, Dato Sagor Motor Sports Circuit and Parit Town. Additionally, the Plan proposes the development of a tourist information centre in the District.

Based on authors' observation and interviews, potential cultural heritage attractions in the District have their own identities and located on route that can be linked to allow easy exploration by visitors. Unfortunately, these attractions are not being promoted sufficiently and lacking on-site support facilities especially in terms of interpretation and presentation. This included incomplete tourist itinerary document, limited interpreters, unclear tourist trail and lack of information on heritage resources.

The study area for this research involves the 69 *kampung* (villages) along Perak River in Perak Tengah District. The villages along Perak River are very attractive with unique and pleasant panorama of village and farming areas. The communities are also active with their culture activities. All these represent the rural heritage image that should be given priority to be highlighted as new tourism products.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data collection was carried out through inventory and mapping of cultural heritage significance, and focus group interviews. The focus group consisted of 21 tourist operators and homestay owners in Perak Tengah District (Table 1). The interviews sought to identify which cultural resources should be highlighted in Perak Tengah, what are the existing interpretation medium, what should be the interpretation programmes to promote rural cultural heritage resources, and what would be the threats and challenges.

Table 1: List of homestay/accommodation in Perak Tengah District

No.	Homestay/Accommodation	Address/Location
1	Green Village Resort	Pasir Salak

2	Insan Chalet	Kampung Bendang Besar, Bota
3	Rumah Rehat Kampung Gajah	Kampung Gajah
4	Lanai Casuarina Rest House	Pekan Parit
5	Yeop Temah Lodge	Kampung Bidara, Parit
6	D'River Lodge	Kampung Aji, Bota Kiri
7	Impinana J& Z Homestay	Kampung Gajah
8	Homestay Kampung Gajah	Jalan Pejabat Pos, Kampung Gajah
9	Parit Homestay	Kampung Bandar Lama, Kampung Gajah
10	Homestay Pendiati	Tanjung Tualang
11	Homestay Cikgu Mat	Kampung Pendiati, Bota Kanan
12	Homestay Faris	Kampung Gajah
13	D'Waris Inap Desa	Kampung Gajah
14	Al-Qayyum Homestay	Kampung Bandar Lama, Kampung Gajah
15	Razak Homestay	Taman Murni, kampung Gajah
16	D'Cahaya Homestay	Kampung Sadang, Parit
17	Tasha Homestay	Taman Cahaya, Kampung Gajah
18	KPK Homestay	Taman Setia, Parit
19	Setia Homestay	Taman Parit Setia, parit
20	Damai Homestay	Kampung Pasir Putih, Pulau Tiga
21	Homestay Bajet Pasir Salak	Kampung Gajah

The result of focus group interviews would help to identify the interpretation that will influence and capture the visitors' interest to visit and experiences culture heritage in the study area. Subsequently, this study proposes an interpretation guidance that focuses on the development of visitor's expectation and experiences. The proposal is a process of heritage interpretation and involves three main stages; 1) Identifying rural cultural heritage significance; 2) Subject of interpretation – what story to tell and how to tell, and 3) Interpretation medium.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Cultural Heritage Significance

Based on observation and mapping on existing cultural heritage potentials along Perak River, the resources were found to be unique and project a beautiful image of the rural community of Perak Tengah District, with some offering three categories of resources – natural, culture and visual. These would be the best for heritage interpretation because they present the whole image of Perak Tengah District. For example, both banks of the Perak River have not only become the sites of historical events, but also the sites of growth and expansion of national culture (Ghozali, 2010). Along the river banks, there are many traditional *Kutai*

houses with unique architecture and remain in sturdy condition. According to Abd Rashid (2015), there are about 40 *Kutai* houses that still survive but only 30 in intact condition. The beautiful view of paddy fields, durian orchards, and farms would become interactive information that can be used for interpretation. A nature guide or cultural guide of these resources will not only be providing information but can reveal the deeper meaning of cultural heritage in rural areas and can attract visitors.

The existing Pasir Salak Historical Complex at Kampung Gajah is already a well-known tourism product in Perak Tengah. However, the interpretation for visitors was limited to the gallery and not fulfilling the expectation of visitors. Based on interpretation principles, interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, giving full range of experiences to visitors and building a relationship with the heritage site, especially to the rural community. Based on the results of the focus group interviews, the homestay managers suggested and agreed on six main cultural heritage resources that associated with the cultural heritage of Perak Tengah (Table 2). These cultural heritage resources can be categorised into heritage buildings, traditional crafts, historical sites, rural culture and natural heritage. From the list of main cultural heritage resources in Perak Tengah; Pasir Salak Historical Complex, traditional *Kutai* house, *labu sayong* craft and royal mausoleum trails were agreed by the focus group members as the most distinctive attractions and destinations for tourism in Perak Tengah.

Table 2: Main cultural heritage resources in Perak Tengah

Cultural Heritage Resources	Location	Categories	Remarks	Rank (n=21)
Pasir Salak Historical Complex.	Pasir Salak	Heritage building	The historical complex is housed in traditional Malay house. It features various memorials erected to honour Malay heroes.	1 (28.57%)
Traditional <i>Kutai</i> house and panoramic view of traditional village.	Bota Kiri, Padang Tenggala, Parit	Heritage building	There are about 40 <i>Kutai</i> houses with 30 still intact.	2 (23.80%)
<i>Labu sayong</i> .	Kampung Pulau Tiga, Kampung Bidara, Kampung Gajah	Traditional craft	<i>Labu sayong</i> or water container made of clay.	3 (19.05%)

Royal tomb (mausoleum).	Bota, Belanja, Pulau Tiga and Kampung Gajah,	Historical site	They are about 14 royal tomb sites along Perak River in Perak Tengah.	4 (14.28%)
Terrapin Wildlife Conservation Centre.	Bota Kanan	Natural heritage	An informative visitor centre on river terrapin species.	5 (9.52%)
<i>Pekan sehari</i> (day market).	Bota Kiri, Parit, Lambor, Kampung Gajah	Rural culture – daily life of community	Malay traditional market – selling daily needs.	6 (4.76%)

Heritage Itinerary

According to Leanza et al. (2016), the planning of tourist itinerary should have occurred within an appropriate heritage interpretation strategy as a working method, which could facilitate the understanding and social use of the heritage sites. The mapping of heritage itinerary for Perak Tengah District was done based on the cultural heritage categories, the location, the route (trail) and linkages between resources. An example of heritage itinerary is shown in Figure 3. The itinerary begins with a starting point, a heritage site that is already well-known based on the rank of tourist attractions in Table 2 above. Several other tourism products were selected for each *mukim* in Perak Tengah. The mapping of tourist attractions shows that most of the cultural heritage locations were concentrated in three small towns; Pekan Parit, Pekan Bota, and Kampung Gajah-Pasir Salak. Based on this mapping, the tourist route or heritage trail can be developed including the development of heritage interpretation strategy.

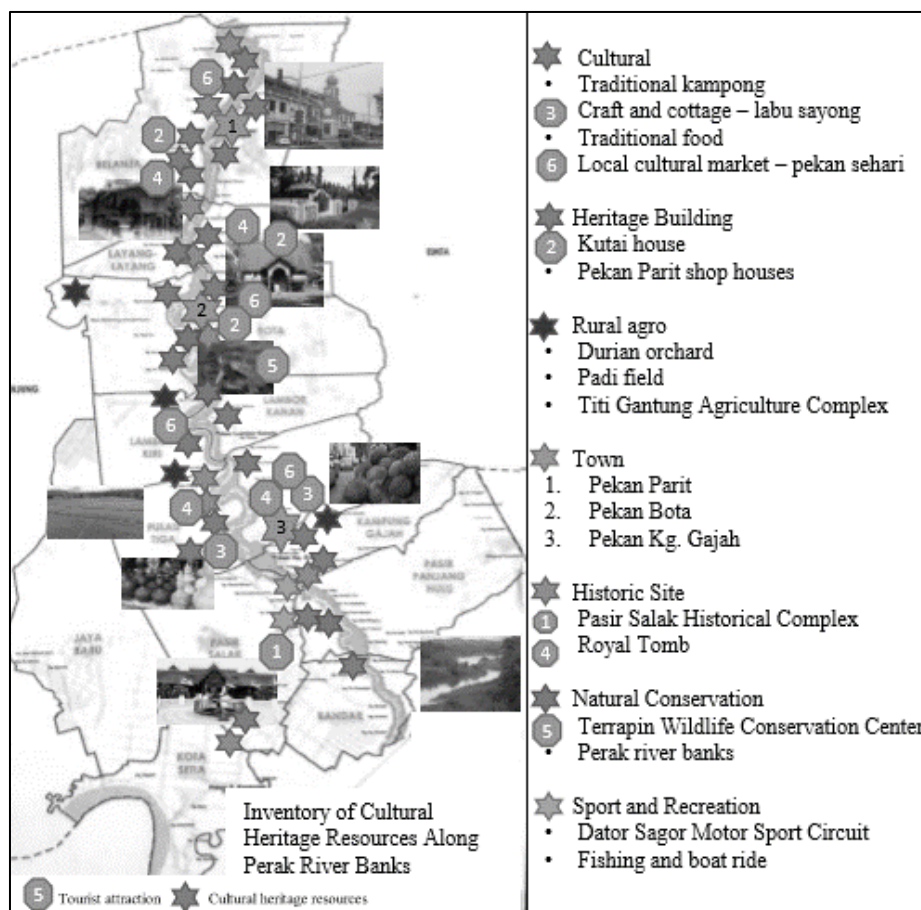


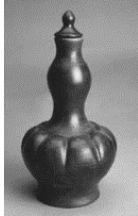

Figure 2: Area of Itinerary for cultural heritage tourism in Perak Tengah District


Interpretation Proposal

Heritage interpretation is an educational process that aims to reveal the meanings of our culture. Good interpretation enhances our understanding, appreciation, and therefore, protection of natural and cultural sites. Interpretation is an integral part of conservation (Beck & Cable, 2011). Interpretation guidance of Perak Tengah cultural heritage as proposed by this research was developed based on interpretation principles advocated by Tilden (1957), ICOMOS (1999), Beck and Cable (2011), and Tilkin, G. (2013) and manual of heritage interpretation by Lancaster County Planning Commission (2002) and FI NTDA (2012). In short, interpretation is a process to know and understand the meaning of cultural heritage. Besides the guiding principles on how the culture can be presented and what story to tell, interpretation is also an engagement programme between visitors and the heritage subjects. The interpretation guidance of cultural heritage

presented in this paper (Table 3) focuses on main resources, which were found (through focus group interviews) as most distinctive attractions and destinations for tourism in Perak Tengah District. It involves cultural heritage interpretation located in outdoor context.

Table 3: Interpretation guidance for cultural heritage in Perak Tengah District

Cultural Heritage Significance	Subject of Interpretation & Development of Story		Interpretation Medium
	What story to tell	How to show and tell	
<p>Traditional Craft: <i>Labu sayong</i></p> <p>Location: Kampung Pulau Tiga</p>  <p>Traditional water pitchers known as <i>labu sayong</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The history of <i>labu sayong</i> should associate with the place and people. E.g: <i>Labu</i> means pitcher while <i>Sayong</i> is a name of a small village near the river in the royal town of Kuala Kangsar. 2. The philosophy/ culture/ folks behind the craft making. E.g: it is believed that the drinking water stored in the <i>labu sayong</i> has certain health properties to cure common ailments like cough and fever. 3. How to make <i>labu sayong</i> pottery. Explain the steps and the design elements - clay motifs/decorations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A potter demonstrates his skills in the art of traditional pottery, using a table top hand-wheel to create a <i>labu sayong</i> 2. Visitors try their hands at making their own <i>labu sayong</i> 3. Activities for children – art clay project. Interpretation for children should stimulate children active participation in the theme 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printed materials - hand-outs, brochures, visitor guides on pottery making 2. Panels and banners – interpretive contents to attract visitors to take photo of before leaving the site. 3. Short video on <i>labu sayong</i> pottery 4. Souvenirs and handicraft for visitors
<p>Heritage building: Traditional <i>Kutai</i> House</p>  <p>Impressive Malay architecture of <i>Kutai</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The history of <i>Kutai</i> house. E.g: The traditional Malay house in Perak is called '<i>Rumah Kutai</i>'. '<i>Kutai</i>' means old. 2. Background and origin of <i>Kutai</i> house. Who built it? Who lived 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visitor guide explaining the “what story to tell” to visitors. Architectural details of the house can be interpreted to tell a story 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printed materials - hand-outs, brochures on <i>Kutai</i> house 2. Signage, interpretive map/plan showing the interior or layout of <i>Kutai</i> house

<p>house mainly located on the banks of Perak River</p>	<p>there? How did the building change over time? What factors led to the changes?</p> <p>3. The architecture style and typology. What philosophy has influenced the design and space? What are the materials and construction methods of the house?</p>	<p>2. Living history interpretation – stay or spending a few days to experience the life in <i>Kutai</i> house and <i>kampung</i></p>	<p>3. Gift and handicraft for visitors</p>
<p>Historical Site: <i>Makam DiRaja</i> or royal tomb (mausoleum)</p>  <p>The tomb of the Perak Sultanate is one of the heritage monuments that still exist and preserved</p>	<p>1. The history of Perak Sultanate and the ruling system</p> <p>2. Tell about the settlement along Perak River and relationship with the tombs</p>	<p>1. Historical trail of royal tomb starting from Bota to Kampung Gajah</p> <p>2. Story telling by interpreter/tourist guide</p>	<p>On-site installation or tailor-made interpretation</p> <p>1. Information signage on history of the sultanate</p> <p>2. Continuous way finding along Perak River to the tombs. The signage or way finding should be of distinctive design that associates with the history of the royal sultanate and can become a prominent landmark for the site</p>

CONCLUSION

The purpose of interpretation is to make visitors see the place visited in a wider perspective. However, this research has identified several issues in heritage interpretation such as lack of organized interpretation programme in the rural area, incomplete tourist itinerary document, limited number of interpreters, unclear tourist trail, and lack of information and interpretation on heritage resources. Although the District of Perak Tengah has many cultural heritage resources, unfortunately without proper guidance on interpretation and presentation, the resources could not be promoted as tourist attractions. This paper has presented that effective interpretation plays the main role in promoting heritage tourism in the rural area. Interpretation plan is a document that provides

the process and strategies for interpretation and presentation of heritage. The plan identifies the heritage itinerary, key themes, storylines, and audiences and provides recommendations about interpretation media. It includes practical and specific advices on how to implement the plan. There is no doubt that formulating the interpretation plan will be a challenging one for those involved, but the results will be rewarding.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank the Academic Affair Office, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, for partly funding this study. The authors would also like to thank Majlis Daerah Perak Tengah, students of Town and Regional Planning Programme of UITM Perak Branch, and all individuals who have contributed to this study.

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