

Cultural Tourism and Malay Vernacular Houses: Towards Integrating the Influential Attributes into the Design of Future Resorts in Langkawi, Malaysia

Rasoul Khojasteh, Zahra Mansourirad and AmirHosein GhaffarianHoseini*

*Faculty of Architecture and Built Environment,
Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Malaysia*

* amirhosein.ghh@limkokwing.edu.my

Abstract

It is demonstrated that cultural tourism is a critically important subset of tourism industry in various countries, particularly Malaysia. This study draws attention towards integrating the influential attributes of Malay vernacular houses as the embodiment of Malay cultural values into the design of future resorts in Malaysia while discussing on how these resorts will be effective to promote the concept of cultural tourist attraction from all over the world. In this regard, in essence, as the vernacular houses are efficiently intertwined with the local characteristics of regions and are considered as symbols of socio-cultural values, life style and belief of locals, the consideration of their embodied cultural values plays a significant role towards enhancing the cultural tourism industry. These cultural values could be successfully integrated into the design of future resorts in order to provide new platforms for tourists to understand the cultural meaning of Malay lifestyle. Nevertheless, this study argues that there are limited attempts towards designing such cultural environments and among those limited cases, superficial imitation of Malay architectural forms could be observed. By successful adaptation of cultural values into the resorts in Malaysia, particularly Langkawi as one of the most successful islands and an attractive tourist destination, this research focuses on the analysis of the essence of functional spaces of Malay houses as well as the resort case models including Berjaya Langkawi Beach and Spa Resort (modern vernacular style), Pelangi Beach Resort (post modern vernacular style) and Kampung Tok Senik Resort (old traditional style). The study concludes that there are profound vernacular features encompassing socio-cultural and environmental values, which are potentially influential in enhancing the tourism industry once successfully integrated into the design of future resorts in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Cultural Tourism; Malay Vernacular Houses; Socio-cultural Values; Functional Spaces*

1. Introduction

It can be debated that one of the most significant parts of Malaysia that attract every visitors in their trips are the cultural heritages. However, due to the rapid modernization of Malaysia as a developing country, less attention has been paid to the revitalization of cultural heritages with a viewpoint to the design of Malay house layouts and functional spaces as a neglected fundamental during the design and development of contemporary hotels and resorts. As culture and heritage are key motivators for tourists, this research will propose the essential stages toward revitalizing the overlooked Malay house layout and functional spaces in current Lankgawi resorts. As tourists want to investigate and experience different types of cultures by

traveling, the result of this study will contribute towards new circumstances of bringing back the Malay Identity into contemporary resorts while increasing the attraction rate of visitors. The findings provide an overview of the essence of Malay house functional spaces in comparison to the layout design of resorts in order to discuss and elucidate the incongruity among the elaborated issues.

2. Theoretical Framework

The research framework of this study is divided into three categories, which are as follows:

- Understanding the essence of cultural tourism
- Analysis of Malaysian culture and identity (through understanding the essence of Malay vernacular houses)
- Analysis of contemporary resorts of Langkawi, Malaysia

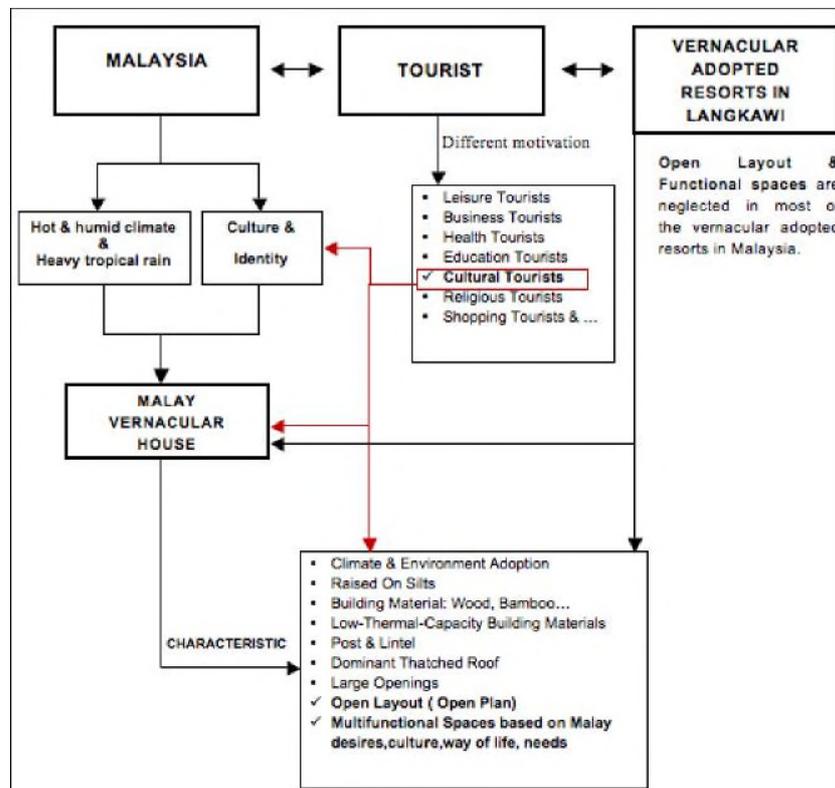


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Malaysia as a tropical country with hot and humid climate encompass the Malay vernacular houses, which are efficiently adapted not only to the local climate and environment but also to the local culture, identity and way of life of Malays [1]. The Malay vernacular houses have been repeatedly analyzed with regards to their advantages for the contemporary life, nevertheless, limited attempts are observed for integrating their cultural essence into the design of resorts as an innovative approach to enhance the cultural tourism. The study defines a cultural tourist as an individual who is mainly interested to become

familiar with a country or region's culture, and to get familiarized with the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, as well as their history, art, architecture, and religion as the fundamental constituents shaping a lifestyle. Cultural tourists in Malaysia principally desire to experience Malay culture and life style through different activities. Thus, this study proposes the adaptation of the cultural values of Malay houses into the resorts in Malaysia so that the tourist could experience such lifestyle during their visit.

Limitation of Study:

- Cultural Tourism
- Langkawi Resorts
- Neglected attributes of functional spaces within Malay vernacular houses in Langkawi resorts.

3. Analytical Reviews: Malay Houses, Cultural Tourism and Langkawi Resorts

3.1. Analytical Review of Malay Vernacular Houses

Malaysia with total area of approximately 330,000 square km is a crescent shaped in the center of Southeast Asia which is comprised of West Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia) and extends to East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak), located in the island of Borneo. Malaysia's climate is hot and humid with relative humidity about 80-90 % and the temperature averages of 70-90 F degrees throughout the year. Referring to recent studies [2,3], the Malay houses successfully respond to the local climate and natural environments through the following strategies:

- *Appropriate natural ventilation for cooling and reduction of humidity,*
- *Utilization of low thermal capacity building materials,*
- *Controlling the direction and intensity of solar radiation,*
- *Providing protection from rain and floods,*
- *Utilization of local materials, appropriate orientation of building and large openings,*
- *Application of open plan layout concept,*
- *Sufficient vegetation and plantation in the surroundings to provide a cooler micro-climate*

According to another study [4], "A Malay house satisfies the Malay inhabitants through addressing their actual needs while responding to the local environments." Likewise, versatile studies investigate and confirm that a Malay house is comprised of functional spaces reflecting Malay way of life, desires and requirements [2, 5, 6]. Referring to another study [3], the concept for designing the Malay vernacular houses is basically derived from an explicit understanding of Malay cultural values, actual needs, way of life and local environmental characteristics. Despite the repeatedly discussed focus of the aforesaid researches on the cultural values of Malay houses, it is claimed that other similar studies concentrates on the environmental performance of these buildings [7]. It is also to report that recent studies indicate that there are different types of Malay houses according to different regions [2]. Indeed, the essence of different types of Malay vernacular houses is identical with regards to

basic Malay house design, however, at the same time, particular differences are observed in different classification of these buildings which are dominantly related to the roof shapes [5, 8, 9]. Nevertheless, recent studies ensure that despite the minor differences among various types of Malay houses, the cultural meaning and the essence of the design with focus on the layout and spatial issues are similar. Thereby, the study concludes that the open layout, organization and spatial hierarchy of interior spaces and interrelations between spatial elements and functional requirements which are driven from the Malay culture, actual needs and socio-cultural interactions are similar in all Malay vernacular houses [10]. The following sections illustrate the outcome derived from the analysis of the layout of Malay houses.

Design and layout of Malay vernacular houses

The interior organization and spatial layout of Malay houses embrace an efficient relationship between the spatial allocations, the functional requirements and the cultural inputs [5, 11]. In addition, the conception of an activity which takes place in an interior space and its adjacent spaces is very determinant in the organization and arrangement of the interior layouts and likewise, it basically depends on the type, quality and time that the respective activity will be accomplished [5, 7, 9,]. Furthermore, recent studies represent the impacts of religion on the spatial organizations and layout of Malay houses as the privacy has an important role in Malay culture due to its potentials for creating public, semi-public and private spaces in the house [12]. According to the elaborated issues, a Malay house embraces three main functional spaces including Serambi, Rumah Ibu, and Rumah Dapur [2].



Figure 2. A typical Malay House, [2]

Referring to this segmentation of the level of privacy, the Malay house layout design comprises of two main zones, which are the front (public) and backspace area (private). The backspace area, which is inclusive of Rumah Dapur and Tengah, is allocated to the activities related to kitchen and dining zones and according the respective spaces mainly belong to females. The front area, which is inclusive of Serambi, Veranda and Rumah Ibu, is designed as public and semi-public spaces and are principally utilized for entertaining male guests and multifunctional activities during daytime.

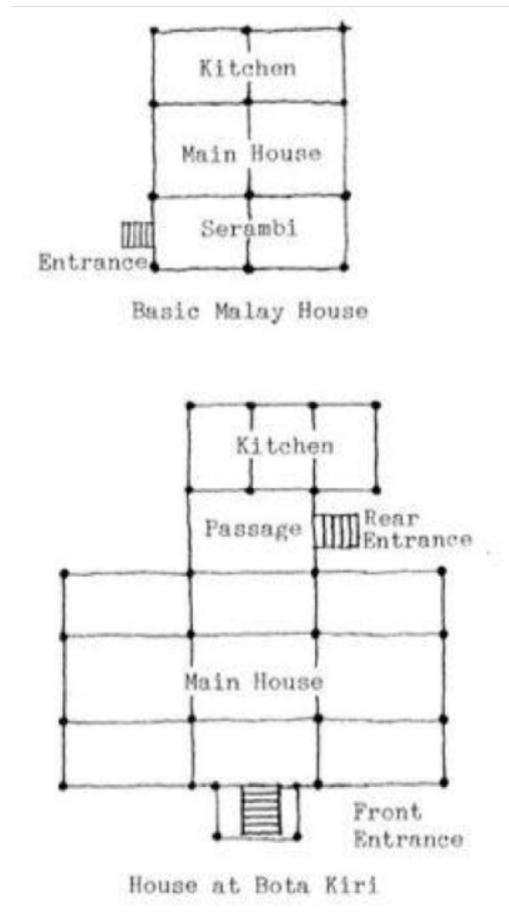


Figure 3. A Typical Spatial Layout of a Malay House, [7]

According to this segregation of spaces, the daily activities such as sleeping, praying, entertaining guests, etc; are taken place in the main part of the house as Rumah Ibu and Serambi. The open plan layout of Malay houses provides the opportunity to make the optimal use of space while encompassing multi-functional spaces. The two parts of the houses are connected to each other through a joint area called Selang. It is argued that this understanding of the level of privacy is not taken into account during the design and development of contemporary houses and resorts in Malaysia [3]. Beside the fundamental role of privacy, it is claimed that there are other important aspects representing the social and cultural attributes of Malays according to different allocated spaces.

Referring to key references in this field of research, it is reflected that each particular space is allocated to certain functions. Anjung and the entrance area are the first functional spaces in the priority level of spatial hierarchy and are utilized for welcoming and entertaining guests, cleaning, storage and even sleeping. Through Anjung, it is possible to reach Serambi Gantung which is adjacent to Rumah Ibu and Serambi Samanaik [5, 7].

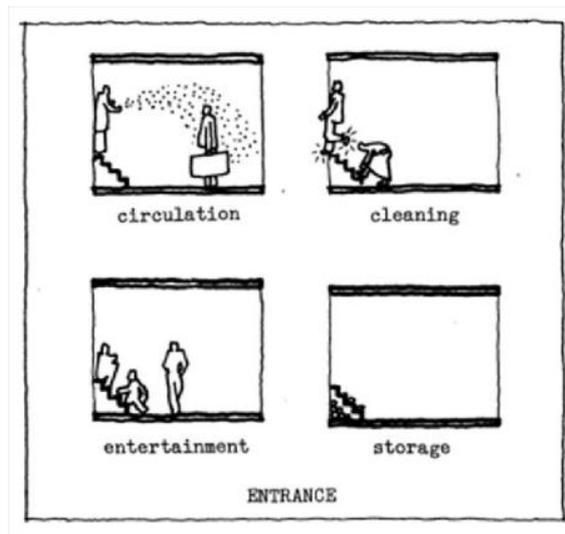


Figure 4. The Allocated Functions of the Main Entrance, [7]

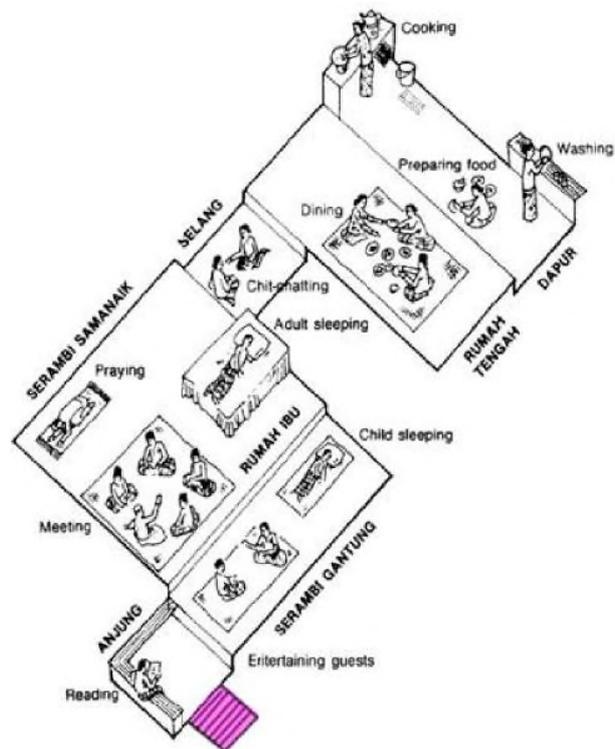


Figure 5. Malay House Distinctive Zonning, The Main Entrance, [8]

At the main entrance of the Malay house, stairs exist leading to the porch area as Anjung. It is important to denote that unfamiliar guests could be entertained at this level and accordingly, the impact of privacy is represented once again while the variety of allocated functions confirm the multifunctionality of these spaces.

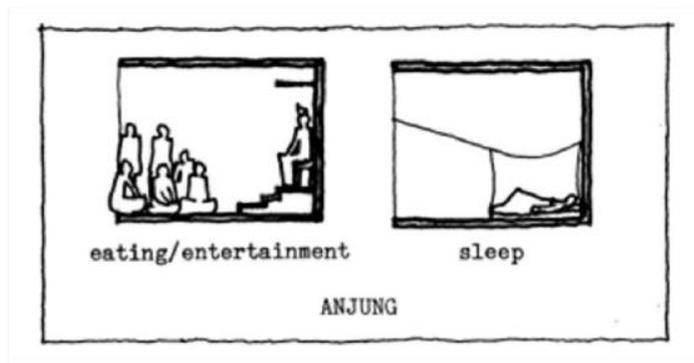


Figure 6. The Allocated Functions of Anjung, [7]

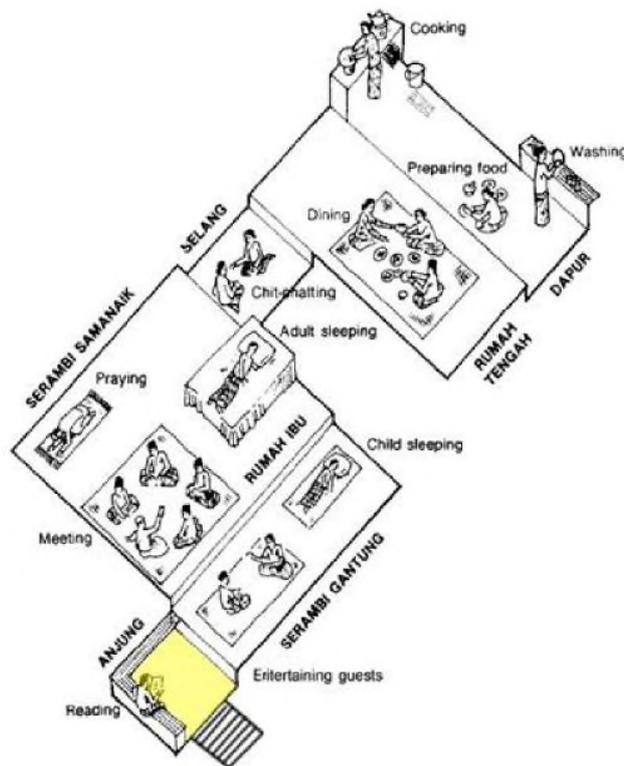


Figure 7. Malay House Distinctive Zonning, Anjung, [8]

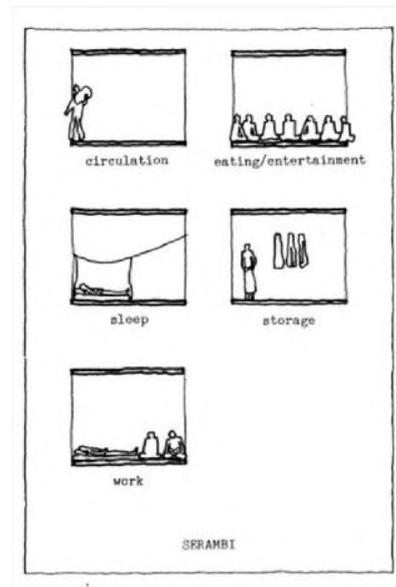


Figure 8. The Allocated Functions of Serambi, [7]

Serambi is a rectangular space adjacent to the Anjung and very close to the main entrance. It is also adjacent to the Rumah Ibu (main house). Mainly, Serambi is assigned for entertaining and socializing. It is obvious that Serambi is designed for specific activities like circulation, eating, entertainment, sleeping, storage and even working. Low windows in Serambi help to create better natural ventilation [2, 5, 7].

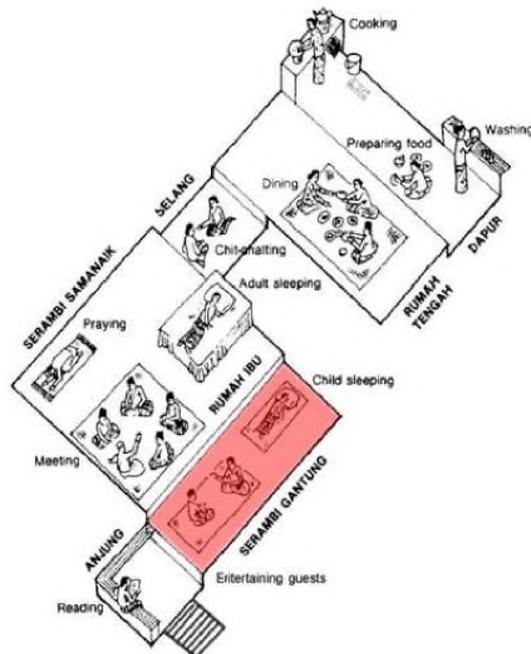


Figure 9. Malay House Distinctive Zoning, Serambi, [8]

Rumah Ibu is the core of the house, which is the main and multifunctional space, and accordingly, most of the activities of the family members take place in this area (Example: praying, eating, gathering, household chores such as sewing and ironing, *etc.*). Usually the family members tend to sit, sleep and rest on the floor. Indeed, Rumah Ibu is the most important zone of the house which could be extended by Serambi spaces [2]. In this regard, it is noticed that Rumah Ibu has the highest floor level in comparison to other functional spaces of the house indicating the importance of this space as the core area of a Malay house [1, 2]. Likewise, Rumah Ibu encompasses large openings to create proper natural ventilation while receiving optimal daylighting in the house [8].

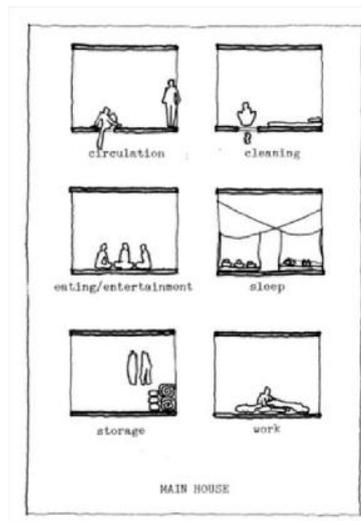


Figure 10. The Allocated Functions of Rumah Ibu, [7]

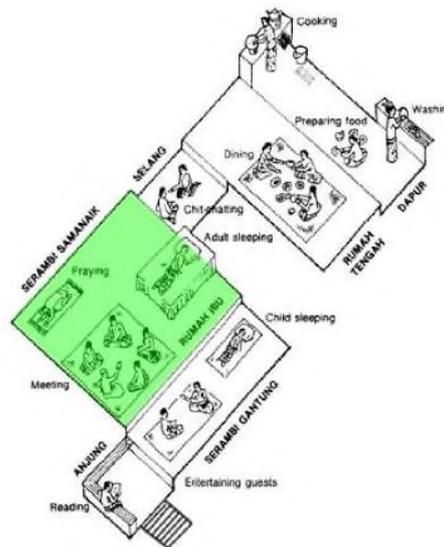


Figure 11. Malay house distinctive zoning, Main house, [8]

Selang is basically considered as a walkway or linkage between the front and back spaces (public and private spaces). It is mainly allocated to women to gather and chat with other females. It is also characterized as a space to promote the natural ventilation according to its openings and location as a joint space. Subsequently, Rumah tengah is defined as a dining area which is adjacent to the kitchen zone and from the other side to Selang. Thus, it could be inferred that it is considered as a linkage between the core area and kitchen zone [8]. Rumah Dapur is the kitchen area and is accordingly designed based on the certain activities that take place in the kitchen, such as preparation of food, cleaning, circulation, storage, work, and even particular entertainments. Rumah Dapur is the private space of the house and is allocated to females of the family. Lowest floor level of the house is this area denotes its private characteristics [2, 8]. To summarize, privacy, the open plan layout, multifunctionality of spaces, family intimacy, and community intimacy are identified as the influential sociocultural attributed embodied in Malay houses according to the culture, belief and way of life of local users.

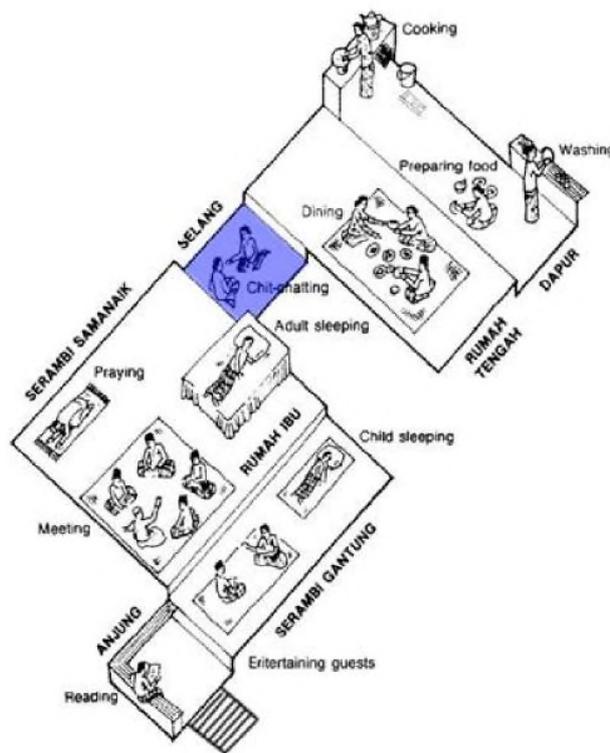


Figure 12. Malay House Distinctive Zonning, Selang, [8]

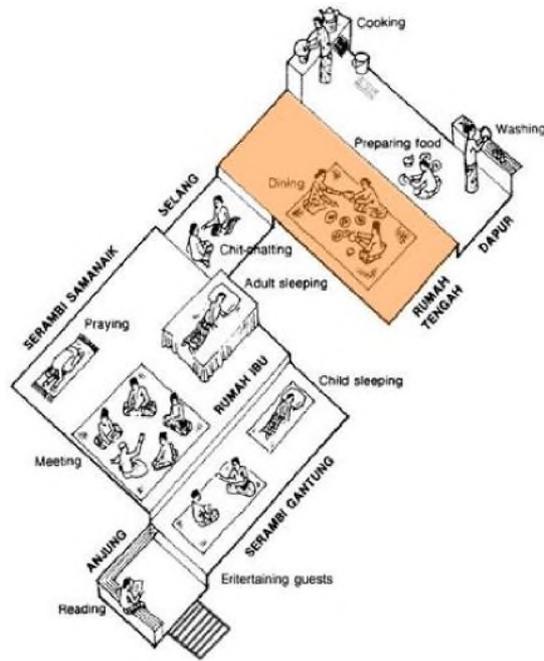


Figure 13. Malay House Distinctive Zonning, Rumah Tengah, [8]

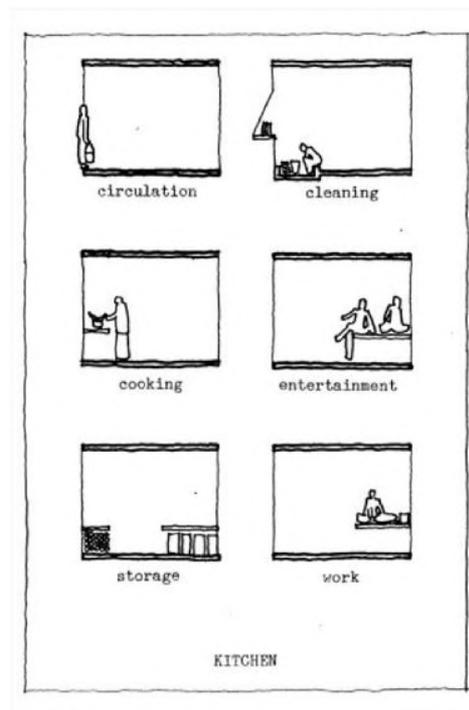


Figure 14. The Allocated Functions of kitchen, [7]

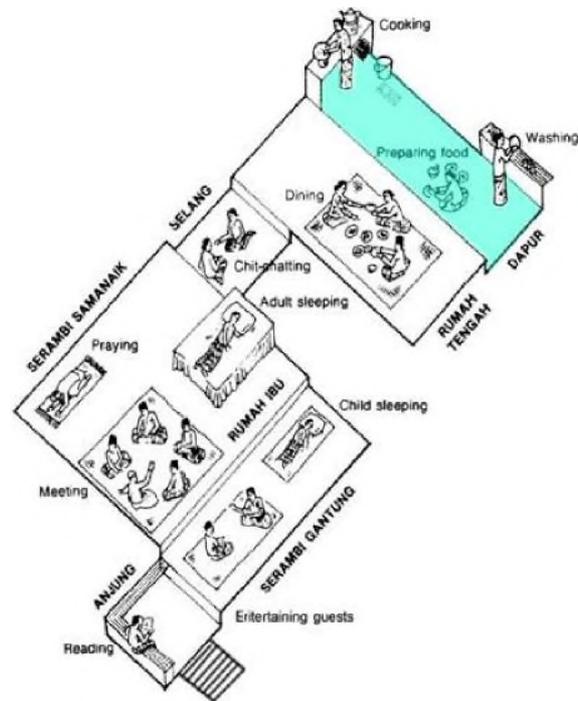


Figure 15. Malay House Distinctive Zonning, Rumah Dapur, [8]

3.2. Cultural tourism

Customs and traditions of different countries, climatic attributes of different regions, business missions and a number of other reasons cause people to travel. There are two fundamentals affecting this movement as push and pull factors. Most of the push factors are intangible or intrinsic desires of the individual travelers. However, pull factors, on the contrary, are derived from the perception of travelers according to the attractions of a particular place [13]. Likewise, travelers are also divided into several categories such as recreational, leisure, business and cultural tourists. Focusing on cultural tourism, it is denoted that cultural tourists are the people who are more interested to explore, experience and investigate various characteristics of a region including the lifestyle of locals [14]. Cultural elements which are rolling as pull factors are museums, festivals, architecture, historic ruins, heritage sites and artistic performances and accordingly, the study draws attention to the aforesaid factors as influential parameters for enhancing the cultural tourism industry. The study concludes that Malay traditional culture is one of the main pull factors for cultural tourists in Malaysia. Thus, as the respective tourists are willing to experience and understand the Malay cultural attributes, resorts encompass great potentials to represent and reflect these values. Thus, future implementations towards the adaptation of cultural values into the design of resorts are encouraged.

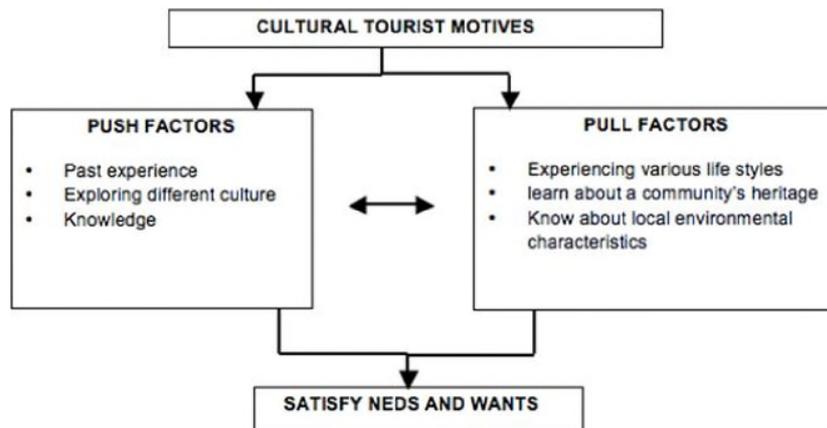


Figure 16. Cultural Tourism

3.3. Analytical Review of Resorts in Langkawi, Malaysia

The study concentrates on three case models to investigate if the observed socio-cultural values are integrated into the design of resorts in Langkawi Island in Malaysia. The study targets to provide new insights for future design of resorts in order to attract cultural tourists and to improve the cultural tourism industry.

1. Berjaya Langkawi Beach and Spa Resort

Berjaya Langkawi Resort is located among the seashore and constructed several meters upper the sea level. The resort is located at the end of the hill slope attached to the high green pattern of the nature, which has been designed according to the modern vernacular architecture style [15]. According to the comparison, Berjaya Langkawi Resort has not been mainly designed according to the cultural attributes of Malay houses. The design of this case model is mainly focused to resemble the shape of Malay houses by applying the physical features and building forms.



Traditional Malay vernacular House Characteristics	Adoption	Berjaya Langkawi Resort vernacular adoptions
Climate Adoption	X	Except the roof form
Raised on stilts	✓	
Exterior Features	Natural Building materials	X
	Post and lintel structure	✓
	Dominant Thatched roof	X
	Large opening	✓
	Carving and decorative elements	X
	Open layout	✓
	Multifunctional spaces	X
Interior Features	Interior finishes	X
	Toilet Facilities	✓
	Bath Facilities	X
		✓

Figure 17. Berjaya Langkawi Beach and Spa Resort,
Source: (www.cerita24seven.blogspot.com)

2. Pelangi Beach Resort

Pelangi Beach Resort is located in the west coast of Langkawi Island. The architectural style of this resort is postmodern vernacular which is a combination of modern and vernacular styles. It is reflected that in designing the Pelangi Beach Resort, a combination of modern and traditional style is observed. Nevertheless, similar to the previous case model, the analysis confirms that the design of resort is mainly focused on imitating the physical forms of Malay houses as the analysis of the interior layout does not confirm adaptation of cultural values.



	Traditional Malay vernacular House Characteristics	Pelangi Beach Resort vernacular adoption
Exterior Features	Climate Adoption	With low thermal materials and large openings ✓
	Raised on silts	But unlike the Malay houses, it is only one meter raised from the ground ✓
	Natural Building materials	X Combination of wooden and modern materials
	Post and lintel structure	✓
	Dominant Thatched roof	✓ It is a complex roof form, based on the incorporation of the traditional 'Long Roof Form' (Bunbung Panjang), 'Perak Roof Form' (Bunbung Perak) and Anjung type of roof form.
	Large opening	✓
	Carving and decorative elements	✓ It has a few decorative elements on the exterior walls and roof
Interior Features	Open layout	X Many interior walls are used to separate different spaces
	Multifunctional spaces	X Each specific space is dedicated to certain activity, by putting permanent wall or furniture. Such as bedroom, living room, dining area.
	Interior finishes	X The architect tried to emphasis on wooden material by usage of heavy wooden color but with different materials. For example usage of wood pattern parquet for floor.
	Toilet Facilities	X Each room has its own toilet unlike the Malay houses
	Bath Facilities	X Bathroom is allocated inside the chalet with modern bathtub unlike the Malay houses

Figure 18. Pelangi Beach Resort, Source: (www.pelangilangkawi.com)

3. Kampung Tok Senik Resort

Kampung Tok Senik resort is also located in the Lagkawi hills. It is declared that the respective resort is design and arranged in order to reflect the essence of the ambient of a real kampong. Unlike, the previous case models, it is inferred that the attempts towards the adaptations of cultural values in the design is observed in this model. The study indicates that various features of the original Malay vernacular houses have been applied in the design of this resort, nevertheless, the level of adaptation is not sufficient as particular values such as the open plan layout and multifunctional spaces are not integrated into the design. Hence, the utilized space planning of this resort is still superficially implemented and it is mainly based on the resort's requirements rather than resembling the original culture of Malay people.



	Traditional Malay vernacular House Characteristics	Kampong Tok Senik resort vernacular adoptions
Exterior Features	Climate Adoption	Usage of wood as low thermal material and large openings ✓
	Raised on silts	✓
	Natural Building materials	Extensive usage of timber and dominant thatched roof ✓
	Post and lintel structure	✓
	Dominant Thatched roof	✓
	Large opening	✓
	Carving and decorative elements	Extensive wood carving and decorative elements ✓
Interior Features	Open layout	X Interior walls are used to separate different spaces
	Multifunctional spaces	X Each specific space is dedicated to certain activity, by using permanent wall or furniture. Such as bedroom, living room, dining area.
	Interior finishes	Usage of timber and wood as the main material for interior elements (walls and floor) ✓
	Toilet Facilities	X Each room has its own toilet unlike the Malay houses
	Bath Facilities	X Bathroom is allocated inside the chalet with modern bathtub unlike the Malay houses

Figure 19. Kampong Tok Senik Resort, Source: (<http://www.seatholidays.com>)

4. Conclusions: Final Remarks

According to the analytical study and observations, it is illustrated that in all three case models, the influential attributes of Malay houses encompassing the cultural values of Malays are not properly taken into consideration. The analysis reveals that mainly, the exterior of resorts is influenced by the Malay houses, hence, the recent practical attempts have been predominantly concerned about the physical characteristics and exterior forms. As a result, the Malay culture does not play a significant role in the current design and development of resorts in Langkawi, Malaysia. On the other hand, looking retrospectively at the significant importance of cultural tourism, these resorts

must embody cultural and traditional attractions. Among the selected case models, it is inferred that Kampung Tok Senik Resort is more harmonized with the cultural attributes of Malays as extracted from Malay houses, nevertheless, the study concludes that there is still a substantial need to consider an explicit understanding of the essence of Malay houses in order to revitalize these values during the design of future resorts.

To summarize, the study refers to the embedded cultural values as identified by this study and supported by recent researches [2]. This is to highlight that not all the features of Malay houses could be utilized in contemporary architecture. Hence, among all, the concepts of privacy, optimal use of space, multifunctionality, flexibility, simplicity and family intimacy as theorized and developed by GhaffarianHoseini [2], are confirmed and corroborated through the findings of this study. Thus, despite the limited cultural, social and environmental adaptations in current resorts such as randomly arrangement of chalets for cross ventilation, usage of timber material for external surfaces, elevated chalets from the ground level, use of traditional embellishments and carvings as well as roof shapes and other physical features, the identified cultural values as the influential attributes are highly encouraged to be utilized for future development of Langkawi resorts towards enhancing the cultural tourism industry.

References

- [1] A. GhaffarianHoseini, *et al.*, "Identification of the Malay Vernacular Spatial Features within Malay Vernacular Houses", *International Journal of the Arts in Society*, vol. 4, no. 4, (2009), pp. 137-152.
- [2] A. GhaffarianHoseini and N. D. Dahlan, "The Essence of Malay Vernacular Houses: Towards Understanding the Socio-cultural and Environmental Values", *ISVS e-journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, (2012), pp. 53-73.
- [3] A. GhaffarianHoseini, R. Ibrahim, M. N. Baharuddin and A. GhaffarianHoseini, "Creating green culturally responsive intelligent buildings: Socio-cultural and environmental influences", *Intelligent Buildings International*, vol. 3, no. 1, (2011), pp. 5-23.
- [4] W. Hashim and A. H. Nasir, "The traditional Malay house", Oxford Fajar, Malaysia, (2011).
- [5] L. J. Yuan, "The Malay house: rediscovering Malaysia's indigenous shelter system", Institute Masyarakat (phoenix press), Malaysia, (1991).
- [6] A. Lundberg, "Material Poetics of a Malay house", *The Australian journal of anthropology*, vol. 19, no. 1, (2008), pp. 1-16.
- [7] W. B. W. Abidin, "The Malay House: Rationale and Change", MArch. Thesis, MIT, Cambridge, (1981).
- [8] W. H. Wan Ismail, Houses in Malaysia "Fusion of the east and the west", Johor darul ta'zim, Malaysia (2005).
- [9] A. S. Hassan and M. Ramli, "Natural Ventilation of Indoor Air Temperature: A Case Study of the Traditional Malay House in Penang", *American J. of Engineering and Applied Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 3, (2010), pp. 521528.
- [10] T. M. Rasdi, M. Ali, E. Nihan, S. A. I. S. Ariffin, R. Mohamad and G. Mursib, "The architectural heritage of the Malay world – The traditional houses", Johor Darul Ta'zim, Malaysia, (2005).
- [11] E. H. G. Dobby, "Settlement patterns in Malaysia", *The geographical review*, vol. 32, no. 2, (1886), pp. 211232.
- [12] A. H. Hashim, H. M. Ali and A. A. Samah, "Urban Malays' user-behaviour and perspective on privacy and spatial organization of housing", *Archnet-IJAR, International Journal of Architectural Research*, vol. 3, no. 1, (2009), pp. 197-208.
- [13] A. M. A. M. Basher and P. M. S. Ahmad, "An Analysis of Push and Pull Travel Motivations of Foreign Tourists to Jordan", *International Journal of Business and Management*, vol. 5, no. 12, (2010).
- [14] P. Bahareh, K. Mohammad and K. Metin, "A comparative study of cultural tourism development in Iran and turkey", (2009), ISSN 1833-3850 E-ISSN 1833-8119.
- [15] A. H. Sanusi, E. Aymen and K. A. K. Hassan, "Development of Successful Resort Design with Vernacular Style in Langkawi, Malaysia", *Asian Culture and History*, vol. 2, no. 1, (2010).

