

The heritage servicescape: Authenticating the heritage hotel experience within a world heritage historic city

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Heritage is ubiquitous as a significant tourism feature in destination marketing and promotions globally. Destinations frequently capitalize on their unique tangible and intangible cultural heritage resources to enhance their tourism pull factors, market appeal and competitive advantage (Lee & Chhabra, 2015). Thus, crafting distinctive tourism encounters and experiences within heritage sites is important for promoting positive destination image and preservation of local heritage.

To enhance ethnic character and historical appeal, vernacular architecture and design elements are often favored as focal points on heritage properties, particularly those (a) imbued with a strong historical legacy or legendary status; and (b) located in proximity to historically prominent places and/or affiliations with renowned persons (Henderson, 2013). Concurrently, the servicescape concept and the implications of servicescape cues on customer behavior, experiential outcomes and quality perceptions has been widely discussed (Ardley et al., 2012; Mari & Poggesi, 2013). Within the context of heritage tourism and hospitality, such servicescape dimensions can have significant impact on perceptions about authenticity and cultural legitimacy. Historically-significant conservation buildings are popular as tourist accommodations and increasingly showcased in heritage tourism within destination planning and marketing initiatives. Heritage hotels not only provide lodging services, they also serve as cultural, historical and ethnic markers at the destination to create a unique sense of place. However, despite its significance, literature and research on heritage-listed lodging properties remains limited (Lee & Chhabra, 2015; Xie & Shi, 2019). Whilst there has been a myriad of literature on managing service encounters, servicescapes, heritage tourism and heritage hotels within services marketing and tourism and hospitality management discourse, there has been no significant study investigating the dimensions of servicescape for heritage-listed hotel properties situated within a world heritage historic city in Southeast Asia.

Using the case-study approach, this work examines heritage servicescape dimensions within the context of heritage hotels in a world heritage historic city. Specifically, it advocates the need to move beyond extant notions of servicescape as a spatially-bounded environment influencing service encounters (Ardley et al., 2012; Bitner, 1992; Clarke & Schmidt, 1995). Beyond the physical, functional, sensory and vernacular, the heritage servicescape needs to synergistically integrate the affecting and interrelating elements of symbolic, socioethnic, emotional and interpretive dimensions within the visitor's experiential journey.

The heritage-listed property featured in this study is *Hotel Puri*, a beautifully refurbished and conserved heritage hotel located in Melaka, a UNESCO World Heritage listed historic city in the Straits of Malacca. With a prominent history dating back to 1822, this historic Peranakan (Straits Chinese) house is located on one of the oldest streets within the old historic precinct of Melaka. As the ancestral home of renowned Straits Chinese businessman and philanthropist, Tan Kim Seng (Hotel Puri, 2015), the legendary heritage property offers guests an experiential journey and glimpse into the life and times of the Straits Chinese from a bygone era. Whilst this work focuses on the Straits Chinese heritage and properties, its observations can be applied to other heritage-listed properties and destinations. A conceptual framework for heritage servicescape is also proposed.

Keywords: Servicescape, Service encounter, Heritage hotels, World heritage site, Heritage tourism, Experiential marketing, Authenticity