

## **Exploring tourist perceptions of royal arts, culture and heritage in Kuala Kangsar, Perak**

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Received: 19 September 2024; Accepted: 12 June 2025; Published: 20 August 2025

### **Abstract**

Royal tourism, an emerging niche in cultural tourism, offers unique opportunities for heritage preservation and economic growth, particularly in royal towns like Kuala Kangsar, Perak. This study aims to explore tourist perceptions of Royal arts, culture and heritage in the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, Perak. Guided by the Experience Economy framework, the research employed a quantitative survey involving 500 domestic tourists, selected using purposive random sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and supported by documentary analysis of government and tourism-related sources. Descriptive statistics, ANOVA and regression analysis were applied to explore patterns in tourist perceptions and experiences. Findings reveal that while tourists highly value the uniqueness and cultural richness of royal heritage elements such as the Royal Museum, Istana Iskandariah and traditional crafts, statistical analysis indicates that royal culture does not significantly predict the overall tourist experience ( $p > 0.05$ ). This suggests a perceptual appreciation that may not directly translate into experiential satisfaction, indicating a possible gap between cultural presence and tourism engagement. The study contributes to the tourism literature by highlighting the nuanced role of royal heritage in shaping tourism experiences and identifying potential gaps in heritage presentation and tourist interaction. It offers practical implications for policymakers and tourism stakeholders in enhancing interpretive strategies, experiential design and promotional efforts for royal towns in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Arts and culture, cultural heritage, domestic, Kuala Kangsar, royal tourism, royal town, tourist perception

### **Introduction**

In recent decades, cultural and heritage tourism has emerged as a significant driver of the global tourism industry. Among its diverse segments, royal tourism a niche form of cultural tourism centered on monarchy-related heritage and traditions has gained increasing attention. Royal tourism involves the exploration of royal places, regalia, rituals, architecture and cultural practices associated with monarchy and aristocracy. As part of broader cultural tourism, it offers immersive experiences linked to national identity, legacy and authenticity.

In Southeast Asia, countries such as Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia and Indonesia have successfully promoted royal tourism through their historical palaces, royal ceremonies and

preservation of regal traditions. In Malaysia, royal heritage plays a vital role in shaping national cultural identity, given the country's unique system of constitutional monarchy across nine Malay states. However, this potential remains underexplored within Malaysia's tourism development strategies.

Kuala Kangsar, located in the state of Perak, is officially recognized as Malaysia's Royal Town. It holds historical significance as the administrative and ceremonial seat of the Perak Sultanate. The town is home to prominent royal landmarks such as the Ubudiah Mosque, istana Iskandariah and the Royal Museum (formerly Istana Kenangan). Kuala Kangsar's association with royal culture dates back to the late 19th century, when it was established as the official royal residence. Its rich royal heritage, traditional crafts (e.g., tekat embroidery, keris-making) and regal architecture position it as a prime candidate for the development of royal tourism. Despite its cultural richness, Kuala Kangsar has not yet fully capitalized on its royal tourism potential. There is limited empirical research assessing the role of royal heritage in shaping tourist experiences and destination appeal. This study, therefore, investigates how royal cultural elements influence tourists' perceptions and experiences in Kuala Kangsar. It aims to provide data-driven insights to enhance tourism development strategies in royal towns across Malaysia.

The arts, culture and heritage of a city are highly complex, encompassing all human-made elements passed down through generations. Cultural arts are not limited to historical or past cultural products but also include contemporary culture, whether traditional or modern ways of life. Cultural arts represent a set of items classified as offerings that can be experienced during tourism activities. Culture-based tourism involves participation in any activity or experience that is not limited in scope.

Cultural tourism can be defined as the act of visiting a place of attraction, particularly a tourist destination, which classifies an individual as a cultural tourist. Consequently, any activity undertaken within this context is considered cultural tourism (McKercher & Cros, 2002; Cohen, 2001; Smith, 2006; Robinson, 1976). Cultural tourism can be divided into five categories: ethnic, cultural, historical, environmental and recreational. Culture, in this sense, refers to tourism activities that embody or symbolize the cultural elements that attract tourists. These attractions include performances, local community lifestyles, food and beverages, heritage, architecture, antique handicrafts and enterprises, as well as the distinctive hospitality extended to tourists, particularly tourists. These attractions collectively represent the way of life of the local community (Smith, 1977).

According to Zakaria and Ang (2022), the cultural aspects of tourism in Malaysia comprise a diverse community of various ethnicities, heritage and long-standing traditions of a society. Cultural products, which include historical, ethnic, artistic and museum aspects, are used to reinforce the image of that culture. All these aspects serve to emphasize the term "culture" and to highlight its unique selling points.

Cultural tourism in a Royal town includes archaeological sites, monuments, museums, indigenous and traditional cultures, Royal institutions, education, religion and politics. Traditional cultural aspects cover programs and festivals, handicrafts, artistic creations, heritage and the local community's customs and way of life. Therefore, cultural tourism is characterized by the participation and activities of tourists, as well as the cultural products offered by tourism destinations classified as cultural.

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage each have their own advantages for development. According to Samsudin and Mohamad (2013), tangible heritage is easier to preserve or reconstruct because it consists of buildings or monuments from the past. Despite being centuries old, these

monuments can still be redeveloped as they remain intact and can be preserved. Developing cultural and historical heritage requires the collaboration of experts, including historians, architects, cultural figures and archaeologists.

In terms of cultural heritage, community involvement is essential to preservation, as these practices are passed down through generations (Borg et al., 1996). However, culture faces extinction as societies renew and adapt their ways of life over time. The Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture Malaysia recognizes two categories of heritage, considering the need for physical/spatial aspects and making slight adjustments for heritage preservation. The two main categories are tangible and intangible heritage.

Intangible heritage encompasses socio-cultural elements that are difficult to express in physical form because they are non-static, such as language/dialects, personal adornment and clothing. This includes any form of expression, language, dialect, proverbs, music, lyrics, songs, oral traditions, poetry, music, dance, as produced through performing arts, theater performances, sound and music composition, martial arts, which have existed or exist in relation to Malaysian heritage or any part of Malaysia, or in relation to the heritage of Malaysian society (Act 645).

Furthermore, Roders and Oers (2011) explain that intangible heritage can contribute to sustainable development and play a role in various layers of society and identity. This is due to the consideration of oral traditions and expressions, language, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and festive events. It encompasses knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, culinary arts and traditional craftsmanship. Intangible heritage also represents past manifestations that are recorded and documented for the advancement and continuity of creativity in cultural diversity for the present and future generations. Additionally, culture emphasizes the active involvement of tourists in explaining traditional or local cultures based on collections of products classified as cultural products (Nijimatul Adha & Rosilawati, 2013). However, culture not only focuses on past products but also includes contemporary culture (Tuah, 2022; Richards, 2001).

In Malaysia, cultural tourism in Royal towns has become a primary attraction. This is because Royal towns symbolize and exemplify traditional cities closely linked to the history of the Sultanate and the cultural customs of a society. Beyond the physical attributes of Royal towns, culture is also an essential perspective in defining the symbolism of such towns. Therefore, this study argues that cultural tourism in Royal towns must be comprehensively examined to assess the role of culture as one of the main attractions for tourists visiting these towns.

Despite its cultural richness, the Royal town of Kuala Kangsar has not yet fully capitalized on its royal tourism potential. There is limited empirical research assessing the role of royal heritage in shaping tourist experiences and destination appeal. This study, therefore, investigates how royal cultural elements influence tourists' perceptions and experiences in Kuala Kangsar. It aims to provide data-driven insights to enhance tourism development strategies in royal towns across Malaysia. The objective of this study is to explore tourist perceptions of Royal arts, culture, and heritage in the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, Perak. Based on these objective, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do tourists perceive the royal cultural and heritage assets in Kuala Kangsar?
2. What differences exist in the experiences of student, youth and family tourist segments?
3. To what extent does royal culture influence the overall tourist experience in Kuala Kangsar?

## Literature review

### *Cultural arts in the context of royal tourism*

Culture is a fundamental category that influences the development of a community within a given society. According to Hsu and Huang (2015), culture refers to the cultural elements in the form of customs, values, attitudes, norms and traditions that exist within a community. It includes tangible aspects such as art, literature, monuments and more (Bourdieu, 1986). Culture is considered an asset within economic activities that are based on cultural elements, whether encompassing heritage or other aspects, for the economic benefit of a region, including tourism activities (Poria et al., 2006). Mollegaard and Jaeger (2015) further explain that culture embodies the values held by a community and is expressed through their lifestyle.

Generally, culture is perceived as a way of life for a particular group or community. Oatey (2008) defines culture as the values, life orientations, beliefs, policies, procedures and behaviors shared by a group of people or a community, which ultimately influence the behavior of each member, giving meaning to the group. However, Bennett (2015) describes culture as the total way of life of a society, encompassing knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, values, norms and other abilities commonly acquired by individuals as members of society. Culture is also referred to as the beliefs, values and symbols present in a community (Kayat, 2002). At the same time, culture includes all aspects of society, including ideas, material tools and forms of expression, encompassing all creations and the legacy of communal living. Thus, based on the definitions provided by previous researchers, it is evident that the term "culture" has been described diversely and variably, depending on the researchers' backgrounds and perspectives.

Jimura (2011) explains that within a community, there is a focus on prevention and preservation, driven by a sense of pride in being part of heritage and for the continued benefits of future development. However, there is concern and anxiety regarding negative attitudes toward tourism development, particularly when cultural heritage is overshadowed by commoditized assets, leading to a loss of momentum and neglect of preservation efforts. This clearly indicates that heritage experiences shape an individual's collective identity. Furthermore, a tourist's experience or understanding is influenced by negative cognitive constructs, meaning that social and cultural factors in perception remain significant. Therefore, socio-cultural distance affects tourists' emotional experiences and understanding when visiting heritage tourism destinations. This concept is supported by Joseph and Gilmore (1998) and further endorsed by Poria et al. (2003), who emphasize the importance of emotional experiences when visiting heritage sites and destinations.

However, previous studies have not explicitly addressed the psychological distance in relation to differing socio-cultural roles, which have identified the momentum between psychological distance and heritage experience (Leung et al., 2005). They explain that there are three dimensions from previous studies: socio-cultural, spatial and experiential. All three dimensions are intertwined with economic aspects. The unique culture in Malaysia, characterized by its diverse ethnicities and races, also plays a significant role in the selection of Royal towns as tourist destinations. Tourists have the opportunity to experience various festive celebrations and Royal events. Royal towns are also known for their culinary diversity, offering Malay, Chinese, and Indian cuisines. Vegetarian and halal meals are readily available at reasonable prices. Culture is perceived as both material and non-material and it serves as a driving factor for various activities. Some scholars emphasize that values, culture, religion, lifestyle and traditions shape the activities

that can be undertaken during tourism. Additionally, some scholars highlight ethnicity as a determinant of culture (Malcolm, 2004; Zeppel, 2002).

Clearly, all cultural aspects in Malaysia are rooted in religious and national rituals. The diversity of cultures has been developed into a tourism product as a result of the nation's own civilizational development. Malaysian civilization is not rooted in a single origin but is instead a combination of various civilizations and religions practiced by all ethnic groups. Each ethnic culture has its own history, myths, memories, legends and nostalgia, as well as core elements that differ from those of other ethnic groups (Yuszaidy et al., 2013; Siti Salina & Zuliskandar, 2018). These elements contribute to the unique and segregated nature of Malaysian civilization. Culture serves as a foundation that reflects human thoughts, practices, ways of life, customs and ceremonies, as well as celebrations passed down from one generation to the next.



**Figure 1.** Istana Kenangan, constructed in 1926, now known as the Kuala Kangsar Museum

#### *Heritage cities as an element of royal cities*

Space, location and property are considered vital values and assets of a heritage city. The legal context varies depending on where the heritage asset is situated. In determining the value of such heritage, several methods are considered, including the process and outcome, heritage space, place, and different forms. Three core principles in the concept of heritage cities, as emphasized by Runnalls (2007), Bandarin et al. (2011) and Wiktor-Mach (2019), focus on economic, social and environmental development. However, several characteristics define a heritage city, such as uniqueness and aesthetic value, which distinguish it from ordinary cities.

Globally, a heritage city is generally defined as one that is over 100 years old. However, in the context of Malaysia, there are still relatively few cities or buildings that are over a century old. According to Syed Zainol (1992), heritage cities in Malaysia emerged before World War II (pre-1945) and possess distinctive uniqueness. These heritage cities have their own identity, marked by both tangible and intangible heritage and culture. Therefore, any city that contains these characteristics has the potential to be classified as a heritage city.

Heritage cities in Malaysia are identified and classified based on various elements, such as tangible and intangible heritage, natural heritage, colonial buildings and shophouses built before

and after World War II, specific ethnic groups, dialects and languages, as well as the integration of economic, social and environmental aspects. Tourist attractions in Malaysia now primarily focus on heritage cities that have been declared World Heritage Sites. These heritage cities play a significant role in generating national economic revenue through the tourism sector while simultaneously preserving important heritage and cultural values essential for the country's development. Heritage cities in Malaysia have also become popular tourist destinations due to their beautiful architecture, unique history and culture (Mohamad Zaki et al., 2008).

### *Tourist experiences: Segmenting by student, youth and family tourists*

The segmentation of tourist experiences among students, youth and family tourists reveals distinct patterns and preferences that cater to their unique motivations and behaviour. Each group exhibits specific characteristics that influence their travel choices and experiences, which can be categorized into several key segments. Understanding tourist experience is central to enhancing destination competitiveness. The tourist experience is shaped not only by place and product but also by tourist background and expectations (Kim & Brown, 2020; Tung & Ritchie, 2011, Saidi et al., 2020). Different demographic groups interact with heritage differently, bringing diverse motivations and preferences. Students often visit in groups for educational exposure, valuing structured information, hands-on workshops and opportunities for cultural learning (Poria et al., 2006). Youth tourists, which includes young adults and university students, are typically motivated by social media exposure, uniqueness of experience and personal meaning-making (Richard, 2018). Family tourists seek recreational, safe and intergenerational experiences that combine leisure with learning (Schanzel & Yeoman, 2015).

Youth tourists are often segmented based on their activity preferences. It includes culture lovers, fun lovers, sun and beach lovers and nature lovers. These segments differ significantly in terms of socio-demographics, travel motivations and interaction with locals and other tourists (Eusebio & Carneiro, 2015). According to Pavlic and Koderman (2014), youth tourism is substantial, accounting for a significant portion of global tourism flows. In heritage destinations, youth tourists are motivated by factors such as individual background, ethnic origin and education. They can be further divided into general and specific cultural tourists, each with distinct motivations and perceptions (Boukas, 2013).

Students, particularly, show varied travel habits, with preference for certain destinations, travel duration and organizational aspects of their trips (Pavlic & Koderman, 2014). Family tourists are driven by motivations that include seeking collective experiences and the benefits of those holidays. These experiences are shaped by the desire for family bonding and shared adventures, which are central to their travel motivations (Pomfret, 2019). While tourism studies in Malaysia have explored general satisfaction and motivation, few have examined segmented tourist experiences in royal towns. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how different tourist groups engage with royal arts, spaces and narratives in Kuala Kangsar, framed through the lens of the Experience Economy Model. This segmentation provides actionable insight for targeted tourism development.

While the segmentation of tourist experiences provides valuable insights into the preferences of different groups, it is important to recognize the dynamic nature of these segments. Factors such as changing socio-economic conditions, technological advancements and evolving cultural trends can influence tourist behaviors and preferences over time. Understanding these shifts is crucial for adapting tourism offerings to meet the needs of diverse tourist segments.

### *Conceptual framework*

A conceptual model was developed to illustrate the relationships between royal cultural heritage, tourist segments, experiential dimensions and resulting tourist experiences outcomes. The model is anchored in Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy framework (1999), which posits that memorable tourism experiences are shaped by four experiential realms which is entertainment, education, esthetic and escapism. These dimensions serve as mediating mechanisms through which tourists engage with cultural and heritage elements. Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy framework (1999) also influences tourist experiences by emphasizing the importance of four dimensions. All dimensions shape how tourists engage with cultural institutions, enhancing their overall experience (Ristevska-Jovanovska et al., 2024). As consumers increasingly prioritize unique experiences over traditional offerings, these dimensions foster greater arousal, leading to increased customer loyalty. This shift towards an experience-driven economy is crucial for competitive advantage in the tourism industry, as highlighted by various studies in the research.

At the foundation of the model lies the royal cultural and heritage offerings of Kuala Kangsar, including traditional arts), architectural landmarks and royal traditions. These elements are experienced differently by three core tourist segments identified in this study are students, youths and families. Each group brings distinct motivations and engagement styles shaped by age, purpose of visit and social expectations. The heritage city context referring to the spatial, historical and symbolic identity of Kuala Kangsar as a royal town further influences tourist perceptions and contextualizes the cultural offerings. As tourists interact with the place through segment specific lenses, their experiences are shaped by the four experiential dimensions. Ultimately, these interactions lead to measurable experience outcomes, including satisfaction, cultural learning and emotional engagement.

This model provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing how different tourist demographics perceive and interact with royal culture and heritage in a heritage city setting. It also supports the study's aim to propose targeted strategies for enhancing royal tourism in Malaysia based on segment-specific experiential preferences.

### **Method and study area**

This study employed a quantitative research design using a structured survey to collect data from domestic tourists visiting the Royal town of Kuala Kangsar. The methodology is organized into four subsections: research design, study area, sampling procedure and data collection and analysis. The Royal City of Kuala Kangsar was selected as the study area. The credibility of Kuala Kangsar as a Royal City made it a preferred choice due to its prominent Royal features and unique heritage tourism implications not found in other cities. The selection of Kuala Kangsar as the study area is based on the city's main attraction being its Royal government, along with the Royal elements and concepts prominently displayed throughout the area. Additionally, the status and recognition of the Royal City drive Kuala Kangsar's development. This status has transformed the city's development landscape, establishing it as a major tourist attraction both domestically and internationally. Economic, social and political developments are aligned with changes such as the establishment of service centers and infrastructure, educational institutions, economic and management sectors, housing and settlement sectors and other forms of development.

Consequently, the concept of a Royal City, recognized as a part of heritage cities, has been introduced to ensure the preservation and conservation of both tangible and intangible heritage while not neglecting urban development. Kuala Kangsar is one of the Royal Cities with a unique architectural style, royal image and identity, colonial-era buildings and a heritage city environment. Moreover, there is an increasing trend of tourist visits to this Royal City over time. As a result, Kuala Kangsar has been identified as a city that develops the elements of a heritage city and has been elevated to the status of a Royal City.

### *Research design*

A quantitative approach was adopted to collect standardized data on tourist experiences and perceptions related to the arts, culture and heritage of Kuala Kangsar. This design was chosen to enable statistical comparison across tourist segments (students, youths and families) and to evaluate the relationship between cultural elements and overall tourist experience.

### *Participants and sampling*

The target population comprised domestic tourists who visited Kuala Kangsar. Based on data from Perak Town and Country Planning Department and the Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council, the total number of domestic tourists was reported as 133,290 in 2020, compared to 47,100 in 2010. The sample size of 382 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula. To enhance reliability and reduce sampling error, a total of 500 respondents were selected using simple random sampling. Respondents were categorized into three tourist segments which are student, youth and family.

### *Research instrument, pilot test and data collection tools*

This study employed a structured questionnaire designed which consisted of both closed-ended and limited open-ended questions. The questionnaire predominantly closed-ended questions, supplemented by a small number of open-ended items to capture nuanced tourist perspectives. Key variables measured included demographic information such as age, gender, marital status, occupation and education. The question also includes duration of stay in the area, tourist perceptions of royal cultural elements as well as motivational factors and levels of satisfaction with the royal tourism experience.

To ensure consistency and ease of interpretation, the majority of responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5). This allowed for a standardized assessment of attitudinal and perceptual variables, facilitating statistical analysis and comparison across different tourist groups.

In addition to the primary data collected through the questionnaire, secondary data sources were systematically reviewed to provide contextual depth and support the interpretation of findings. These included official documents from tourism-related government agencies, planning and development reports issued by local councils and archival records pertaining to heritage conservation and urban planning in royal towns. The triangulation of these sources not only informed the development of questionnaire items but also strengthened the validity of the study by embedding the analysis within the broader historical and administrative context of royal cultural tourism.



### *Data collection procedures and analysis*

The data analysis procedure employs both descriptive and inferential analysis. This study utilizes a quantitative approach with a descriptive design, relying on objective measurements to produce numerical data. The research approach used is a survey study. Data collection methods include questionnaires, open-ended and closed-ended questions, government documents and time sources. Domestic tourists are influenced by the attractions of the visited destination. IBM SPSS 26 software was used to analyze the study results. Initial analysis involved descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to examine the demographic characteristics of the tourist segments. A t-test was used to determine the tourist profile. Mean analysis was conducted to identify the level of attraction for the Royal City destinations. Finally, comparative analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA to analyze differences in tourist numbers across the five destinations visited.

## **Results**

### *Demographics of domestic tourists*

The study found that 65.8% of the tourists were female and 34.2% were male. Over 30% of the tourists were aged between 20-25 years, followed by 22.0% in the 15-19 years' age group, indicating that most tourists are young adults. The majority of tourists were Malay, accounting for 88.6%, while Chinese and Indian tourists represented 7.0% and 4.4%, respectively. Regarding educational background, 47.0% of tourists had a Bachelor's degree from both domestic and international institutions. More than 60% of the tourists were single, while 28.6% (143 individuals) were married or had families and 2.6% (13 individuals) were widowed or divorced. In terms of income, 51.2% of the tourists were unemployed, which includes students and youth still pursuing higher education or secondary school. The working tourists comprised professionals such as teachers, doctors, engineers, accountants, executives, administrative officers, managers and lecturers, making up 21.6% (108 individuals). Additionally, there were other occupations including traders, technical groups and support staff. Government sector employees were the most numerous at 26.8% (134 individuals), followed by those employed in the private sector at 14.2% (71 individuals).

**Table 1.** Demographics of domestic tourists

Component	Total	% Sample	Component	Total	% sample
<i>Gender</i>			<i>Age</i>		
Male	171	34.2%	15 – 19	110	22.0%
Female	329	65.8%	20 – 24	169	33.8%
<i>Etnic</i>			25 – 29	95	19.0%
Malay	443	88.6%	30 – 34	71	14.2%
Cina	35	7.0%	35 – 39	23	4.6%
India	22	4.4%	40 – 44	15	3.0%

<i>Marital status</i>			45 – 49	12	2.4%
Single	344	68.8%	50 >	5	1.0%
Married	143	28.6%	<i>Occupation/ profession</i>		
Widow/ widower	13	2.6%	Top management	16	3.2%
<i>Education</i>			Professional Group	108	21.6%
Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM)	162	32.4%	Business/ Self employed	28	5.6%
Diploma / STPM	26	5.2%	Technical/ Intermediate group	20	4.0%
Bachelor's Degree	235	47.0%	Support group	72	14.4%
Master's Degree	72	14.4%	Unemployed	256	51.2%
Doctor of Philosophy	5	1.0%			

Source: Field study

### *Tourist segments*

The domestic tourists are categorized into three segments: students, youth and families. For the student segment, there were 44 male and 60 female respondents, totaling 104 respondents. In the youth segment, there were 80 male and 159 female respondents, making up a total of 239 respondents. The family segment recorded 48 male and 109 female respondents, with a total of 157 respondents.

**Table 2.** Domestic tourist segment

st Segment	Gender		Total
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Student	44 (42.4)	60 (57.6)	104
Youth	80 (33.5)	159 (66.5)	239
Family	48 (30.6)	109 (69.4)	157
<b>Total</b>	<b>171 (34.2)</b>	<b>329 (65.8)</b>	<b>500</b>

### *Duration of visits to the royal town of Kuala Kangsar*

On average, tourists in each segment spend only 1-2 days visiting Kuala Kangsar. According to Table 3, 18.4% (57 individuals) of students, 48.4% (150 individuals) of youth and 33.2% (103 individuals) of families choose to visit for 1-2 days. This duration is considered highly appropriate due to the proximity of Kuala Kangsar's key attractions to each other.

**Table 3.** Duration of visit

Tourist segment		A week	1 – 2 Days	3 – 4 Days	5 – 6 Days	>Per week
Student	No. / %	11 (10.7)	57 (18.4)	33 (21.4)	6 (9.5)	10 (14.9)
	Mean	1.11	1.55	1.32	1.06	1.10
Youth	No. / %	59 (57.3)	150 (48.4)	71 (46.1)	46 (73.0)	37 (55.2)
	Mean	1.25	1.63	1.30	1.19	1.15
Family	No. / %	33 (32.0)	103 (33.2)	50 (32.5)	11 (17.5)	20 (29.9)
	Mean	1.21	1.66	1.32	1.07	1.13
<b>Total / (%)</b>		<b>103 (20.6)</b>	<b>310 (62.0)</b>	<b>154 (30.8)</b>	<b>63 (12.6)</b>	<b>67 (13.4)</b>

### *Cultural and royal heritage of Kuala Kangsar*

The cultural aspects highlighted by the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar reveal that domestic tourists are able to observe the preservation of traditional customs, such as those related to childbirth, marriage and death. A significant 78.0% (390 individuals) of tourists identify culture as a primary reason for visiting Kuala Kangsar. The cultural aspects introduce them to the customs, attire that reflects the Perak Sultanate and the multicultural and multi-religious fabric of the society.

Beyond the natural beauty of the area, the primary "asset" of tourism in the Royal Town is its multicultural society. The unique blend of natural beauty and the rich diversity of cultures, traditions, history and lifestyles of various ethnic groups has become an attractive theme for promoting tourism, especially the Royal Town's tourism products. The study findings indicate that tourists have a positive view of the town, perceiving that the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities live in harmony and mutual respect for each other's ethnicity and religion (mean=4.06, sd=0.79). Tourists also express a strong sentimental value towards the Sultan's personal collections, the preservation of traditional customs like birth, marriage and death and the traditional attire worn by the community, with mean values ranging from 4.00 to 4.03. However, tourists also noted a lack of friendliness from the local community and a limited understanding of the Sultan's customs and traditional practices.

**Table 4.** Level of royal Kuala Kangsar art and culture

Culture	Mean	SP	Interpretation	No.	%
I visited other tourist attractions in the Royal City with the support of the local community	3.81	0.929	Moderately High	340	68.4
I observed a high sentimental value attached to the personal items from the Sultan's collection on display	4.03	0.824	High	370	74.0
I feel that the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities are united and show mutual respect for one another	4.06	0.791	High	384	76.8
I understand that the coronation ceremonies, traditional rites and other customs possess rich cultural artistry	3.97	0.790	Moderately High	368	73.6

I feel that the community still preserves customs and traditions related to birth, marriage and even death		0.810	High	390	78.0
I observed that the clothing worn by the community still highlights aspects of the Perak Sultanate, such as songket and batik fabrics	4.00	0.831	High	371	74.2
I noticed that customs such as nazam, marhaban and adat merisik are still being continued by the current generation	3.98	0.838	Moderately High	373	74.5

#### *Tourists' experiences in the royal cultural heritage of Kuala Kangsar*

Tourists' experiences with the culture in Kuala Kangsar involve an introduction to traditional customs, rituals and heritage passed down through generations. Kuala Kangsar, as a Royal Town, is no exception in familiarizing tourists with a multicultural society comprising various ethnicities, races and religions. Cultural arts play a crucial role in introducing tourists to the cultural institutions of a Royal Town. Table 5 presents the regression analysis of culture, revealing that  $F=1.395$  and  $\text{sig}=0.238$ , indicating a non-significant variance with a significance level of  $\text{sig}=0.23$  ( $p>0.05$ ). Therefore, culture does not contribute to the experiences of domestic tourist segments.

**Table 5.** Cultural regression

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	0.713	1	0.713	1.395	0.238 <sub>b</sub>
Residual	254.669	498	0.511		
<b>Total</b>	<b>255.382</b>	<b>499</b>			

Although culture does not significantly contribute to tourists' experiences in their visits to the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, it remains an essential element in shaping Kuala Kangsar as a multicultural town. Culture serves as a foundational aspect of urban development. Overall, culture offers interesting experiences; however, it is not the primary factor attracting tourists to Kuala Kangsar. Nevertheless, culture is inseparable from the development of the Royal Town, as it progresses in tandem with tourism in Kuala Kangsar. This is because there is a persistent cultural sentiment that draws domestic tourists seeking to understand the local culture.

#### *Comparison of tourist experiences across student, youth and family segments in relation to the royal culture of Kuala Kangsar*

The analysis reveals that the cultural aspect scores a moderately high mean among different segments: students with 3.17, youth with 3.53 and families with 3.35. Notably, the youth segment exhibits the highest mean compared to the other two segments, indicating that young people have a greater appreciation of the culture compared to families and students.

**Table 6.** Cultural Levels Based on Tourist Segments

Product	Student		Youth		Family		F value	Sig.
	Mean	SP	Mean	SP	Mean	SP		
Culture	3.17	1.02	3.53	0.72	3.35	0.83	7.210	0.001
Comparison of cultural experiences based on tourist segments								
	Tourist segment		(J) Tourist segment		Mean difference (I-J)		Standard error	Sig.
Culture	Student		Youth		-.35830*		.09718	.001
			Family		-.17724		.10459	.239
	Youth		Student		.35830*		.09718	.001
			Family		.18106		.08499	.104
	family		Student		.17724		.10459	.239
			Youth		-.18106		.08499	.104

The analysis reveals a significant difference in cultural experiences across different tourist segments. The youth segment exhibits the highest mean score (mean = 3.53, SD = 0.72), while the student segment shows the lowest mean (mean = 3.17, SD = 1.02). This difference is statistically significant, with  $F = 7.210$  and  $p = 0.001$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). The results indicate a significant difference between the student and youth segments. However, there is no significant difference between the student and family segments ( $p = 0.239$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), as well as between the youth and family segments ( $p = 0.104$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, the overall findings suggest that there is a significant difference between students and youth, but not between students and families or between youth and families.

## Discussion

The cultural aspect of Royal tourism reveals that students do not prioritize this element as much as other groups. In contrast, the youth segment shows a higher appreciation for cultural experiences, particularly valuing the sentimental aspects of the Sultan's personal collections. This segment also perceives that the local community in Kuala Kangsar still preserves traditional customs such as childbirth rituals, weddings and traditional attire like songket and batik. On the other hand, the family segment focuses more on observing cultural performances such as nazam and marhaban during their visits.

Domestic tourists typically spend only 1-2 days visiting Kuala Kangsar, which is sufficient to explore the recommended cultural destinations. This finding aligns with Er Ah Choy's (2013) study, which suggested that 1-2 days are adequate for heritage visits in a tourism destination. Other studies have also discussed the duration of tourists' visits to royal towns, indicating that most tourists do not spend an extended amount of time in these destinations. This is primarily because the royal sites they visit—such as palaces, royal mosques and historical buildings—require only a short time to explore (Saidi et al., 2020; Yunus et al., 2021; Mohamad et al., 2023).

The cultural heritage displayed in Kuala Kangsar appeals to 78.0% of tourists, who are interested in learning more about the traditional customs practiced there. Key customs include

those related to childbirth and Perak's wedding traditions, such as the stages of courtship, engagement and marriage. In Malay society, traditional customs are still observed, especially in major ceremonies like weddings, often taking precedence over other aspects of life. This is encapsulated in the Malay proverb, "*biar mati anak, jangan mati adat*" ("better to lose a child than to lose tradition"). This finding is consistent with Abdullah et al.'s (2015) research, which highlighted that customs are a significant attraction and are continuously chosen for both formal and informal learning. Other studies have also reported findings indicating that tourists are attracted to the cultural and historical elements of the town. These visits connect various heritage assets such as traditional houses, mosques and palaces, thereby helping tourists to understand and appreciate the cultural diversity and historical significance of the royal town (Yunus et al., 2021; Majid, 2020; Rahman, 2005).

During their visits, 76.8% of tourists observed the close-knit relationships among the diverse ethnic and religious communities in Kuala Kangsar, noting the mutual respect and unity in maintaining the area's good reputation. Additionally, 74.5% of tourists experienced cultural performances such as nazam and marhaban, which allowed them to immerse themselves in the local cultural atmosphere. These performances, along with customs like the engagement ceremony, contribute to the distinctiveness of Kuala Kangsar's cultural heritage.

Regarding traditional attire, 75.2% of tourists expressed a desire to learn more, particularly about garments like the Princess of Perak's attire, which symbolizes royal heritage. Furthermore, 74.0% of tourists appreciated the sentimental value of the Sultan's personal items and collections on display. Additionally, 73.6% of tourists gained an understanding of the royal customs showcased, such as the coronation ceremony and the tabal pusaka, which reflect the rich cultural artistry of Kuala Kangsar.

Previous studies have consistently emphasized the importance of preserving the unique characteristics of Malaysia's royal towns, such as architectural styles, cultural practices, and historical values. These cultural elements underscore the need for continuous preservation and promotional efforts to ensure the sustainability and development of cultural tourism in royal towns. The formation of heritage trails in Kuala Kangsar has been explored with a focus on integrating cultural, natural, social and historical elements to enrich the tourist experience. The application of experience design principles has played a vital role in developing these trails, which connect key cultural landmarks within the royal town. The area of Bukit Chandan, in particular, stands out for its rich Malay cultural heritage, including traditional crafts, music and architecture.

Malaysia's rich multicultural legacy is widely recognized as a powerful tool for promoting and publicizing cultural tourism. This enhances tourists' perceptions of Malaysia's cultural image and identity. In conclusion, this study shows that culture plays a unique role in shaping tourists' visits to the Royal town of Kuala Kangsar. Various cultural aspects, including Royal customs, language, arts and heritage, should be highlighted and presented to tourists. Furthermore, elements such as traditional attire, language and the interplay between traditional and modern culture should not be overlooked. Although modern elements are increasingly introduced, Kuala Kangsar still maintains its unique civilization and cultural identity, making it a favored destination for both domestic and international tourists seeking to understand and appreciate this cultural tourism. Therefore, various stakeholders must consider and ensure the development, advancement and preservation of Kuala Kangsar as a prosperous cultural tourism hub that endures through the ages.

## Conclusion

The study of cultural arts in the context of royal tourism emphasizes how important culture is in developing the uniqueness and development of royal towns. Culture, which includes rules and regulations, values and traditions, is a major encouragement for tourism activities, particularly in royal towns such as Malaysia. Although culture is not frequently a primary attraction for tourists, it strengthens their experiences, especially through the preservation of local customs and traditions. Malaysia's unique multicultural past, as declared through multiple ethnicities, festivals and Royal events, plays an important role in attracting tourists. This cultural variety helps tourists understand Malaysia's heritage and develops the bond of emotion they experience when visiting royal towns.

Furthermore, heritage cities offer a significant part in royal tourism through preserving not only their aesthetic and architectural splendour, but also the tangible and intangible heritage assets that express them. The recognition of heritage cities based on their unique historical and cultural characteristics highlights the importance of conserving these places for future generations. As Malaysia's heritage cities continue to contribute to national economic growth through tourism, their unique identities must be preserved. The complementary balance of economic, social and environmental issues ensures that historic cities continue to be vital tourist attractions while conserving the cultural richness that represents the fundamental foundation of the nation's culture.

## Acknowledgement

The author would like to take this opportunity to express sincere gratitude to MyBrain15 and the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (KPT) for funding this research. A heartfelt thank you is also extended to the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar for serving as the research location and to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for their support in the publication of this journal article.

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