

The Design of Themed Resorts in the Intersection of Cultures: Feature Analysis and Mutual Learning Ideas of Malaysia and China

Xu Ping, Fauzi. Naeim.Mohamed

City University Malaysia

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90400287>

Received: 24 March 2025; Accepted: 05 April 2025; Published: 11 May 2025

ABSTRACT

This paper delves deep into the profound influence of the local cultures of Malaysia and China on the design of themed resorts. Through meticulous comparison, it elaborates on the similarities and differences between the cultural resorts of the two countries in terms of the utilization of cultural elements and the creation of tourist experiences. Moreover, it proposes practical countermeasures and constructive suggestions for mutual learning in response to the challenges encountered during the development process. Research indicates that the cultural resorts of both countries have distinct features and unique values. Strengthening exchanges and mutual learning can not only vigorously promote the prosperity of the cultural tourism industry but also effectively facilitate cultural inheritance and international dissemination.

Keywords : Malaysian Culture; Chinese Culture; Themed Resorts; Cultural Elements; Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

In the current context of the rapid development of global tourism, themed resorts, as a crucial pillar of characteristic tourism, are attracting tourists from all over the world with their unique and immersive cultural experiences. Malaysia and China, two countries with a long history and profound cultural heritage, have their local cultures playing an indispensable role in the design of themed resorts. It not only endows the resorts with a unique charm but also shoulders the important mission of cultural inheritance and innovative development. Delving deep into the characteristics of the cultural resorts of the two countries is of far - reaching and significant importance for promoting the sustainable development of the cultural tourism industry.

Characteristics of Malaysian Cultural Resorts

The Foundation of Design Laid by the Integration of Diverse Cultures

Malaysia, a typical representative of a multi - ethnic country, has seen the Malay, Chinese, Indian and other ethnic cultures collide and integrate deeply in the long historical process, jointly forging an extremely rich and unique cultural heritage. This undoubtedly provides an inexhaustible source of inspiration and a profound foundation for the design of its themed resorts.

In terms of architectural style, the traditional Malay stilt house often serves as an important source of design inspiration. The stilt house generally adopts a unique structure with an elevated ground floor. This ingenious design perfectly adapts to the hot and rainy tropical climate of Malaysia. It can not only effectively prevent moisture and ventilate, creating a comfortable living environment for residents, but also embodies the unique living wisdom and cultural traditions of the Malay people. In terms of decorative details, colorful and

exquisitely crafted wood carvings are widely used in architectural components and interior decorations. These wood carvings have a wide variety of patterns, ranging from mysterious Malay folklores to solemn religious connotations, all of which demonstrate the unique aesthetic taste and cultural connotations of the Malay people. At the same time, delicate batik fabrics are also common decorative elements. Their unique color combinations and patterns are not only highly visually impactful and decorative but also iconic symbols of

Malay culture, serving as important windows to showcase the charm of Malaysian culture. For example, in some themed resorts with Malay culture as the theme, tourists can see that the building exterior ingeniously imitates the style of Malay stilt houses, from the unique roof shape to the elevated ground - floor structure, all of which are authentic reproductions of the traditional Malay architectural style. When entering the interior, the extensive use of wood carvings and batik fabrics vividly presents the Malay style, making tourists feel as if they have been instantly transported into the wonderful world of Malay culture.

Rich and Diverse Cultural Experience Activities

In order to enable tourists to have a more in - depth and comprehensive understanding of the unique charm of local Malaysian culture, Malaysian cultural resorts have carefully planned and carried out a rich variety of cultural experience activities.

Traditional Malay dance performances are undoubtedly classic and essential programs in many resorts. Whenever night falls, dancers dressed in gorgeous and uniquely ethnic costumes take to the stage. Accompanied by lively and passionate music rhythms, they vividly demonstrate the unique charm of Malay culture with their graceful, flexible and energetic dancing postures. Every movement and every look in their eyes seem to be telling the history and stories of the Malay people, immersing the audience in it and making them fascinated. Batik - making workshops are also highly popular among tourists. Here, under the careful guidance of experienced and skilled professional craftsmen, tourists can personally participate in the entire production process of this ancient traditional batik craft. From drawing patterns, applying wax to dyeing and rinsing, every step is full of fun and challenges, allowing tourists to deeply feel the creativity and infinite artistic charm of Malay culture in practice. In addition, the resorts also regularly hold Malay cuisine - making courses. Tourists can learn how to make authentic Malay delicacies, such as the fragrant nasi lemak and the sour and spicy laksa. Through the experience of taste buds, they can further deepen their understanding and perception of Malay culture. Traditional music concerts are also an important part of cultural experience activities. The melodious melodies played by unique Malay musical instruments create a strong cultural atmosphere for tourists, allowing them to fully feel the unique charm of Malay culture in the ocean of music.

Characteristics of Chinese Cultural Resorts

The Meticulous Creation of Traditional Chinese Style

Chinese cultural resorts are deeply rooted in the fertile soil of the long - standing and profound Chinese civilization. The Chinese Garden style, as an outstanding representative of traditional Chinese culture, often serves as an important source of inspiration for the design of resorts.

In these resorts, designers skillfully use the gardening techniques of traditional Chinese gardens to carefully create a unique landscape with pavilions, terraces and towers scattered in an orderly manner, rockeries and ponds setting off each other, and winding paths leading to secluded places (Zhou et al., 2012). Wandering in it, one seems to be in a beautiful landscape painting, filled with a peaceful and distant artistic conception everywhere, which fully demonstrates the Chinese people's unremitting pursuit and profound understanding of the harmony between man and nature since ancient times. Resorts with Huizhou - style architecture as their feature vividly display the gentle and elegant charm of the Jiangnan water town. The unique architectural style with white walls, black tiles and layered horse - head walls is like a beautiful poem and a delicate painting, giving people a strong visual impact and aesthetic enjoyment. At the same time, traditional crafts such as wood carving, stone carving and brick carving are widely and exquisitely used in architectural decorations (Feng & Du, 2015). These exquisite carving works have a wide range of themes, from ancient myths and legends, magnificent historical stories to vivid flowers, birds, fish and insects, all of which show the exquisite skills and profound cultural connotations of traditional Chinese crafts. Every carving detail contains the painstaking efforts and wisdom of the craftsmen. They are not only works of art for architectural decoration but also important carriers for inheriting traditional Chinese culture.

In - Depth Cultural Experience Projects

Chinese cultural resorts attach great importance to vividly and vividly transmitting the rich connotations of

traditional Chinese culture to every tourist through a series of in - depth cultural experience projects (Cheng & Chen, 2022).

Calligraphy experience activities are an important part of them. In the antique calligraphy studios, under the guidance of professional calligraphy teachers, tourists can personally experience the unique charm of writing brushes, ink, paper and inkstones. From the practice of each stroke to the creation of calligraphy works, tourists can feel the artistic beauty of Chinese characters and the profoundness of traditional Chinese culture in the touch between the rice paper and the writing brush, as if they are having a spiritual dialogue with ancient literati across time and space. Tea art performances and tea - tasting activities are also very popular among tourists. In the elegant and quiet tea rooms, tea masters dressed in traditional costumes demonstrate the unique charm of traditional Chinese tea art with their skillful and elegant movements. From the brewing, pouring and tasting of tea, every step contains rich etiquette and cultural meanings. While savoring the fragrance of tea, tourists can not only appreciate the long - standing Chinese tea culture but also feel the peaceful and introverted spiritual realm advocated by traditional Chinese culture in this peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. Tai Chi teaching activities are also one of the characteristic projects of many resorts. In the spacious and bright practice venues, professional coaches patiently guide tourists to learn every move of Tai Chi (Lin, 2016). As a treasure of traditional Chinese martial arts, Tai Chi has a unique style of combining hardness with softness and movement with stillness, containing profound philosophical thoughts. In the process of learning Tai Chi, tourists can not only exercise their bodies and enhance their physical fitness but also appreciate the wisdom of the balance of yin and yang and harmony and unity in traditional Chinese culture in every move.

Comparative Analysis of the Cultural Resorts of the Two Countries

Differences in the Utilization of Cultural Elements

Malaysian cultural resorts focus on the integrated presentation of multi - ethnic cultures, skillfully interweaving the cultural elements of different ethnic groups such as the Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups to form a unique and colorful cultural landscape. For example, in some resorts, tourists can see Malay - style stilt houses and traditional Chinese courtyard houses standing adjacent to each other, and the colorful religious decorations of the Indian ethnic group complementing Malay wood carvings and batik fabrics. The cultural elements of different ethnic groups coexist harmoniously here, jointly forming a beautiful picture of the integration of diverse cultures, fully reflecting the inclusive spirit of the harmonious coexistence of diverse cultures in Malaysia.

Chinese cultural resorts, on the other hand, focus more on the inheritance and interpretation of traditional Chinese culture. Although Chinese culture itself also has rich regional and ethnic diversity, in the design of themed resorts, it often focuses on the in - depth exploration and display of a certain core cultural element. For example, a themed resort with Confucian culture as the theme will comprehensively display the etiquette norms, moral concepts and humanistic spirit of Confucian culture through architectural layout, decorative details and cultural activities. A resort with Taoist culture as the theme will pay more attention to creating a natural and peaceful atmosphere, reflecting the Taoist ideas of "following nature" and "governing by non - action". This in - depth exploration and systematic display of core cultural elements emphasize the systematicness and coherence of traditional Chinese culture, enabling tourists to have a more in - depth understanding and perception of the essence of traditional Chinese culture.

Differences in Tourist Experiences

In terms of creating tourist experiences, Malaysian resorts create a happy and lively cultural atmosphere through enthusiastic and vibrant folk activities, allowing tourists to fully feel the vigorous vitality and unique charm of different cultures during their active participation (Zakaria & Hua, 2024). For example, in the lively Malay dance performances, the enthusiastic dancing postures of the dancers and the cheerful music rhythms can quickly ignite the enthusiasm of tourists, making them involuntarily integrate into this happy atmosphere and personally experience the enthusiasm and vitality of Malay culture.

Chinese resorts, on the contrary, focus on creating a quiet environment and providing in - depth cultural experiences, emphasizing guiding tourists to understand the introverted and implicit Oriental wisdom in a peaceful and quiet atmosphere. When tourists participate in activities such as calligraphy and tea art, they need to calm down, abandon the hustle and bustle of the outside world, focus on every detail, and savor the cultural connotations contained therein. This way of experience pays more attention to the tourists' inner perception and spiritual nourishment, allowing them to appreciate the profoundness of traditional Chinese culture in tranquility and feel the unique charm of Oriental wisdom.

Similarities and Differences in the Challenges Faced

Both countries' cultural resorts face some non - negligible challenges in the development process. The design of Malaysian themed resorts needs to accurately strike a balance in the display of multi - ethnic cultures, avoiding over - emphasizing certain ethnic cultures while neglecting others, and ensuring that every ethnic culture can be fully respected and displayed (Anderson, L. 2013). At the same time, in the wave of international development, it is necessary to be highly vigilant against the over - commercial packaging of cultural elements, preventing cultural elements from losing their original cultural connotations and authentic flavors during the commercialization process and degenerating into mere commercial symbols.

Chinese cultural resorts face the difficult problem of finding the best fit between modern design concepts and traditional culture. On the one hand, it is necessary to meet the needs of modern tourists for a comfortable and convenient life by introducing modern facilities and services. On the other hand, it is essential not to damage the original flavor of traditional culture during the modernization process and maintain the integrity and uniqueness of traditional culture. In addition, how to make Chinese traditional cultural elements more attractive in the global tourism market, achieve wider international dissemination, and enhance the international influence of Chinese cultural resorts is an important issue that needs to be urgently addressed in the development of Chinese cultural resorts.

It can be seen that although the challenges faced by the cultural resorts of the two countries are somewhat different, they all revolve around core issues such as cultural inheritance and development, the balance between culture and modern needs, and the expansion of the international market. These common issues provide a basis for mutual learning between the two countries.

Mutual Learning and Development Suggestions Key Points for Malaysia to Learn from China

Malaysia can fully learn from China's model of in - depth exploration and systematic inheritance of traditional cultural elements (Smith, M. K. 2016). Through long - term practice and exploration, China has accumulated a large amount of valuable and mature experience in cultural heritage protection and inheritance and has constructed a complete set of cultural heritage protection systems and professional research institutions. Malaysia can draw on this model and organize professional teams to conduct a comprehensive, detailed review and in - depth research on the cultural elements of all ethnic groups in its country. Through methods such as field investigations and literature collations, a cultural element database covering detailed information such as the historical origins, production techniques, and cultural connotations of cultural elements can be established, providing rich, accurate, and authoritative cultural materials for the design of themed resorts and ensuring the accuracy and integrity of cultural elements during their application.

At the same time, Malaysia can learn from China's education and promotion model for cultural inheritance. Incorporate local cultural education into the national education system and comprehensively and multi - level strengthen the education and popularization of local culture from school education to social training. By offering relevant courses and holding cultural activities, the awareness and sense of identity of the public towards local culture can be improved, and a group of professionals who love and are familiar with local culture can be cultivated, providing a solid talent support and a broad social foundation for the development of cultural resorts.

Directions for China to Learn from Malaysia

China can actively refer to Malaysia's open attitude and successful experience in multi - cultural integration.

Against the backdrop of globalization, Chinese cultural resorts can appropriately broaden their horizons and integrate international cultural elements with a more open - minded and inclusive attitude to enhance the international level of the resorts. For example, on the basis of retaining the core elements of traditional Chinese culture, some internationally popular design concepts and service models can be skillfully introduced to achieve an organic combination of tradition and modernity, and the East and the West, creating cultural tourism products that not only have Chinese cultural characteristics but also meet international aesthetic needs.

In terms of cultural tourism marketing, China can learn from Malaysia's diversified publicity channels and innovative marketing methods. Utilize various channels such as the Internet platform, social media, and international tourism exhibitions to conduct all - round and multi - angle publicity and promotion of Chinese cultural resorts. By holding international cultural exchange activities and launching characteristic themed tourism routes, the attention of more international tourists can be attracted, and the popularity and influence of Chinese cultural resorts in the international tourism market can be improved.

DISCUSSION ON COMMON DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The two countries should further strengthen cooperation and exchanges in the cultural tourism field and build a regular communication platform. Regularly hold cultural tourism seminars, themed resort design exchange activities, etc., providing face - to - face communication opportunities for experts, scholars, designers, and tourism practitioners from both countries. Share each other's experiences and technologies in the development of cultural tourism, and jointly explore industry development trends and the problems faced.

Jointly develop cultural tourism projects, integrate the rich cultural tourism resources of the two countries, and jointly create cross - border cultural tourism routes. For example, combine the multi - ethnic cultural experiences of Malaysia with the traditional cultural landscapes of China to design a tourism route that can not only experience the enthusiastic and vibrant cultural atmosphere of Malaysia but also feel the profound charm of traditional Chinese culture, attracting more international tourists to come and experience.

In addition, strengthening cooperation in the cultivation of cultural tourism talents is of great significance. Through methods such as mutual dispatch of international students, conducting academic exchange activities, and holding joint training courses, a group of cultural tourism professionals with an international perspective and proficient in cross - cultural communication can be cultivated. These professionals will become the backbone force for promoting the sustainable development of the cultural resorts of the two countries and inject new vitality into the prosperity of the cultural tourism industries of the two countries.

Directions for Future Research and Development

Case Studies and Empirical Research

To enhance the practical relevance and depth of the study on themed resorts in Malaysia and China, future research should incorporate empirical case studies that offer grounded insights into resort operations, design, and cultural engagement. Specifically, qualitative investigations involving stakeholder interviews—such as resort designers, developers, policy makers, and community representatives—are instrumental in revealing the complexities of cultural representation and operational decision-making in resort contexts (Abd Hamid et al., 2024). For instance, a study on Redang Island in Malaysia utilized in-depth interviews with 30 stakeholders to critically assess the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism development, highlighting the challenges in implementing responsible tourism practices and balancing economic goals with sustainability imperatives (Hamid et al., 2024).

Visitor feedback analysis is another valuable empirical tool for evaluating the effectiveness and authenticity of cultural presentations within resorts. In Langkawi, stakeholder interviews demonstrated how the cultural, environmental, and economic impacts of tourism development were perceived and navigated by local actors, offering critical insights into the benefits and trade-offs experienced at the community level. Similarly, case study analysis of the Kandis Resource Centre found that interviews with tourism professionals helped identify the motivational factors behind visitor engagement and the potential for cultural education through tourism

infrastructure (Fikri & Fikri, 2007).

Overall, such empirical approaches provide nuanced and context-specific data that illuminate how cultural authenticity is maintained or diluted in real-world resort environments. Incorporating these methods into future studies will not only deepen theoretical understanding but also inform best practices for sustainable and culturally respectful resort development.

Sustainability and Environmental Considerations

Incorporating environmental sustainability into the design and operation of themed resorts in Malaysia and China is essential for minimizing ecological impact and promoting long-term viability. Resorts are increasingly adopting strategies to mitigate environmental degradation associated with construction, resource consumption, and tourist activities. For instance, Tanjong Jara Resort in Malaysia emphasizes environmental conservation by integrating natural ventilation systems to reduce reliance on air conditioning, thereby decreasing energy consumption (Tanjong Jara Resort | WATG, 2023).

Sustainable architectural practices play a pivotal role in this endeavor. The Marang Resort and Safaris in Malaysia exemplifies this approach by utilizing local materials and preserving existing vegetation during construction, which harmonizes the built environment with the natural landscape. Similarly, the InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland in China is constructed within a repurposed quarry, demonstrating innovative use of land reclamation and eco-friendly design principles (Waldek & Resorts, 2019).

The integration of eco-cultural tourism models further aligns cultural preservation with ecological responsibility. Eco-cultural tourism combines ecological and cultural aspects to create sustainable tourist experiences that benefit both the environment and local communities. In Malaysia, resorts such as The Datai Langkawi engage in rainforest conservation and support local communities, exemplifying the successful implementation of eco-cultural tourism (Geetha, 2025).

By adopting these sustainable practices, themed resorts can effectively balance cultural authenticity with environmental stewardship, ensuring their operations contribute positively to both the preservation of cultural heritage and the health of the natural environment.

CONCLUSION

The cultural resorts of Malaysia and China both take their unique local cultures as the core and demonstrate distinctive charm and irreplaceable value. Through in - depth analysis of the characteristics of the cultural resorts of the two countries, we have deeply realized the crucial position and important role of culture in the design of themed resorts. Although there are differences between the two countries in terms of the utilization of cultural elements, the creation of tourist experiences, and the challenges faced, there are also many aspects that can be learned from each other.

In future development, the two countries should strengthen exchanges and cooperation, uphold an open and inclusive attitude, and continuously explore the integration and innovation path of culture and design. Actively respond to various challenges, give full play to their respective advantages, and achieve mutual benefit and win - win results. It is believed that with the joint efforts of the two countries, the cultural resorts of the two countries will shine more brightly in the international tourism market. They will not only strongly promote the prosperity of the cultural tourism industries of their respective countries but also become important windows for the inheritance and international dissemination of the cultures of the two countries, enhancing cultural exchanges and understanding among different countries and ethnic groups and making positive contributions to the development of the global cultural tourism industry.

Future research can further explore the specific application models and innovative methods of the cultural elements of the two countries in the design of themed resorts, as well as how to better achieve the sustainable development of culture and the enhancement of international influence through the development of themed resorts. For example, research on how to use modern technological means to innovate the way of cultural

display and how to develop innovative cultural experience projects in combination with market demand can provide more targeted and operable theoretical support and practical guidance for the development of the cultural resorts of the two countries.

REFERENCE

1. Abd Hamid, A. H., Abdul Aziz, Y., School of Business and Economics, University Putra Malaysia, Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development, University Malaysia Terengganu, Abdullah, N. H., Hanafiah, M. H., Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, University Technology MARA, & Abd. Rahman, A. (2024). Tourism Development Impact in Redang Island, Malaysia: A Stakeholder's View. In *International Journal of Business and Society* (Vol. 25, Issue 2, pp. 613–638).
2. Anderson, L. (2013). *Federal solutions to ethnic problems: Accommodating diversity*. Routledge
- Cheng, Z., & Chen, X. (2022). The effect of tourism experience on tourists' environmentally responsible behavior at cultural heritage sites: The mediating role of cultural attachment. *Sustainability*, 14(1), 565. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14010565>
3. Feng, G., & Du, Z. (2015). Traditional Chinese rites and rituals. In Jieting Huang & Yinjie Jiang (Trans.), *The Chinese Way*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/resources/pdfs/978-1-4438-7833-3-sample.pdf>
4. Fikri, A., & Fikri, A. (2007). *Pembangunan Kandis Resource Centre - pemangkin pelancongan pendidikan*. Geetha. (2025, February 18). Sustainable Travel & Ecotourism: Discover 5 sustainable hotels and resorts in Malaysia. Holiday Ogogo.
5. Hamid, N. a. H. A., Aziz, N. Y. A., Abdullah, N. N. H., Hanafiah, N. M. H., & Rahman, N. a. A. (2024). Tourism development impact in Redang Island, Malaysia A stakeholder's view. *International Journal of Business and Society*, 25(2), 613–638. <https://doi.org/10.33736/ijbs.7620.2024>
6. Lin, S., & Ban, X. (2021). Study on cultural and creative design of traditional Chinese calligraphy tools in digital era. *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Arts, Design and Contemporary Education (ICADCE 2020)*, 515, 427–430. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210106.083>
7. Lin, Z. (2016). On Chinese Tai Chi Culture: Contemporary values and international communication. *Asian Social Science*, 12(10), 273. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v12n10p273>
- Smith, M. K. (2016). *Issues in cultural tourism studies* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
8. Tanjong Jara Resort | WATG. (2023, November 14). WATG.
9. Waldek, S., & Resorts, I. H. A. (2019, March 7). This is how China was able to build the world's first subterranean hotel. *Architectural Digest*.
10. Zakaria, Z., & Hua, A. K. (2024). Exploring the Cultural Tourism of Malaysia: A Comprehensive review. *Deleted Journal*, 1(2), 96–107. <https://doi.org/10.53623/sein.v1i2.478>
11. Zhou, Q., Zhang, J., & Edelman, J. R. (2012). Rethinking traditional Chinese culture: A consumer-based model regarding the authenticity of Chinese calligraphic landscape. *Tourism Management*, 36, 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.11.008>