

Examining Tourist Perceptions towards Historical Heritage Destination: A Case of Bukit Melawati, Selangor

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ABSTRACT

Despite its role as one of the popular cultural and natural heritage destinations, Bukit Melawati is also known as a historical landmark in Selangor that plays an important role in the development of the local tourism industry. Nevertheless, due to the commercialized attractions highlighted by the marketers, its historical and heritage value are relatively neglected. This study was conducted to determine the factors that influence tourist revisit intention to Bukit Melawati as a historical heritage destination in Selangor. Several factors that consist of destination authenticity, destination awareness, and destination image were highlighted as important predictors of tourists' revisit behaviour. This study was conducted based on a cross-sectional research design, where the self-administered questionnaires were distributed among multiple tourists visiting Bukit Melawati. Based on the convenience sampling technique, a total of 290 responses were collected from the target sample. The technique analysis of multiple linear regression was employed for data analysis. The research findings discovered that destination authenticity and destination image significantly influence tourist revisit intention. While destination awareness showed no significant influence. In addition, the analysis also indicates that a total of 49.6% of the variance in tourist revisit intention to Bukit Melawati can be explained by these three predictors. This study provides valuable information to the authorities and the marketers about the importance of maintaining the element of authenticity and image of a historical heritage destination. Regardless of creating awareness of the existence of the destination, publicity should address the uniqueness of the history. In conclusion, all parties, including the authority, industry players, and the local community, play a vital role not only to encourage tourists' interest but to ensure sustainability practices as well.

Keywords: Historical destination, Heritage tourism, Revisit Intention

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, Selangor recorded a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of RM432.1 billion (Invest Selangor, 2025). This statistic has recognized Selangor as the largest contributor to Malaysia's economy. Apart from that, the tourism industry is acknowledged as one of the key sectors that significantly contributes to the economy of Selangor. Noteworthy, in 2024, Selangor received the highest visitors among all Malaysian states with 34.5 million visitors, followed by Kuala Lumpur (27 million) and Perak (21.8 million) (Tourism Selangor, 2025). Notably, one of the tourism products in Selangor that significantly contributes to the industry's growth is the culture and heritage product, including heritage destinations such as Bukit Melawati. Factually, the name "Selangor" is connected with the Selangor River, which played an important role in shaping the identity of Selangor. Basically, Selangor consists of nine districts, and among them, Kuala Selangor stands out as a prominent destination for heritage tourism. The name "Kuala Selangor" originates from its geographical location at the confluence of the Selangor River. This is making it a popular town on the outskirts of the river. In addition, Kuala Selangor also holds historical importance as it served as the capital of the Selangor Sultanate in the early 18th century before the capital was relocated to Kuala Langat and later to Klang in the 19th century (District Office of Kuala Selangor, 2020a). After several times of transitions, Kuala Selangor town has now become the largest urban centre in the region, which also encompasses areas such as Ijok, Tanjung Karang, Puncak Alam, Bestari Jaya, and Jeram (District Office of Kuala Selangor, 2020b). Due to its diverse attractions, Kuala Selangor is now significantly popular as a tourism destination in Selangor. Some of the most popular products include cultural

and heritage tourism, nature-based experiences, and gastronomy (Mahdzar & Gani, 2018). In terms of cultural and heritage tourism, one of the most renowned destinations in Kuala Selangor is Bukit Melawati, which is known as a site rich in historical and cultural value.

In the context of tourism, one of the main pillars that significantly contributes to the industry's growth is heritage and culture. Previous literature shows that research related to heritage and culture tourism emphasizes tourists' motivational factors, memorable experiences, attitudes, and behaviours (Lee & Xue, 2020; Mohamad et al., 2021, 2022; Park et al., 2019). Despite attracting tourists' interest to visit, the components at the historical heritage destination can also be utilized to encourage engagement between tourists and the destination. Previous studies consistently point out that better engagement between tourists, the host community, and the authority can positively contribute to the sustainable development of a destination, including the economic and social status of local communities (Le et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2025; Su, 2020). Basically, the development of heritage tourism can be classified into three components, namely, intangible cultural heritage, historical artifacts, and tangible heritage that passed down from the past generation to the next generation, whether physically or through social practices (Wu et al., 2019). Previous studies highlight numerous factors that can significantly determine tourist perception and behaviour towards historical and heritage destinations. Among those, the most factors studied include destination image, authenticity, personal motivation, awareness, word-of-mouth, and satisfaction (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Junaedi & Harjanto, 2020; Karim et al., 2024; Lee & Xue, 2020; Suryawardani et al., 2024). Therefore, this study was conducted with the aim is to examining tourist perception towards historical heritage destinations. Specifically, based on the quantitative approach, this study aims to determine the influence of destination authenticity, destination awareness, and destination image on tourist revisit intention to Bukit Melawati, Selangor.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Revisit intention

Generally, revisit intention reflects individual repurchase behaviour, which is commonly referred to as customer loyalty. In the context of marketing, loyalty is a vital part that needs to be considered in building a long-term relationship with customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). When it comes to loyalty, it is usually measured based on frequency of purchase, willingness to provide positive words about the products or services to others, and price tolerance (Mgiba & Madela, 2020; Mohamad, 2020, 2022; Stylidis et al., 2020). Basically, loyalty has been examined from both behavioural and attitudinal perspectives. However, the arguments and discussions remain insufficient and have always required further analysis from different perspectives (Begum et al., 2025; Chi & Phan, 2025; Yang & Peterson, 2004).

From a tourism context, tourist loyalty is frequently referred to as intention to revisit a destination or use the same tourism attractions and thus is willing to recommend it to others (Almodawer et al., 2025; Battour et al., 2025; Qiu et al., 2024). A prior study stated that it is common for visitors to search for information before making a decision to visit or revisit a destination. A prior information commonly searched by visitors includes the uniqueness of the destination, such as culture and heritage, safety and security, the quality of services, accessibility, facilities, activities, and many other (Musa et al., 2017). Notably, understanding revisit intention is essential for tourism studies, as it supports both tourism businesses and the sustainability of destinations. Despite its recognized importance in tourism marketing, research on tourist loyalty and revisit intention remains insufficient (Almodawer et al., 2025; Battour et al., 2025; Begum et al., 2025). Therefore, exploring tourists' revisit intentions continues to be relevant and should be studied from multiple perspectives, including in the case of heritage tourism destinations (Chen et al., 2024; Park et al., 2019a; Qiu et al., 2024; Raja et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2025).

Destination authenticity

Destination authenticity is acknowledged as a key element in heritage tourism. Literally, it was first introduced by MacCannell (1973) in sociological research, with the aim is exploring people's experiences at historical and cultural sites. The term authenticity is regularly associated with something such as real, genuine, and believability (Di Domenico & Miller, 2012). Besides, authenticity has always been portrayed as an original and

universal value, serving as a key motivator for tourists to travel to remote locations and engage themselves in different historical phases (Park et al., 2019). In addition, authenticity allows tourists to engage with and experience other cultures since it is closely tied to historical and cultural contexts (Asplet & Cooper, 2000; He & Timothy, 2024; Park et al., 2019). As tourists seek to experience the true essence of a destination, including its ecosystem, cultural heritage, and historical elements, it is important to note that authenticity plays a vital role in the sense of heritage tourism (Bassiony & Chahine, 2024; Li et al., 2025; Phat et al., 2025). Thus, it can be said that studies about destination authenticity remain significant, particularly when it is associated with cultural and heritage tourism (Chhabra, 2021; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Wu et al., 2019).

Previous studies consistently emphasize that maintaining authenticity at a destination will improve the overall quality of heritage tourism (Fu, 2019; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Le et al., 2024). Despite that, the authorities, including Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), also play an important role in preserving the authenticity of destinations to ensure sustainable impact on the environment and the livelihood of the local community (Su, 2020). Research indicated that perceived authenticity is a significant predictor of tourist satisfaction and revisiting behaviour at heritage tourism destinations. Furthermore, tourists who have authentic experiences are more likely to recommend the destination to others. Based on the discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Destination authenticity has a significant influence on tourist revisit intention to Bukit Melawati.

Destination Awareness

Basically, awareness can be defined as the knowledge and understanding of the existence of something, whether intellectually or intuitively (Koufodontis & Gaki, 2022; Timothy, 2024). In tourism literature, destination awareness refers to an individual's knowledge of a tourist destination and the extent to which that destination comes to mind of the individual when considering vacation options (Hazarhun & Çetinsöz, 2024; Lee et al., 2025). A previous study mentioned that awareness and image are critical elements for first-time tourists (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). On the one hand, if the individual lacks awareness of a destination, there is a possibility that the destination may not be chosen. On the other hand, the destination awareness can extend beyond influencing destination choice, where it can enhance tourist interest and intention to visit and revisit (Damayati & Indrawati, 2023; Ervina & Octaviany, 2022; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011; Mohammed et al., 2022). For instance, a study by Ervina and Octaviany (2022) found that destination awareness positively influences tourists' decisions to visit Cibaduyut as a shopping destination. Similarly, Mohammed et al. (2022) reported that destination awareness significantly affected international tourists' intention to revisit the tourism destination in Ghana. Based on this review, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Destination awareness has a significant influence on tourist revisit intention to Bukit Melawati.

Destination image

Perceived image is an essential determinant of tourists' destination choices. The concept of destination image was first introduced to tourism studies by Hunt (1975) and has since become a central theme in tourism research. At the early stage, the description of the destination image is always associated with an individual's beliefs, ideas, and impressions towards a destination (Crompton, 1979). Many scholars have recognised that destination image is a multidimensional and multifaceted construct. Due to its complexity, a completely accepted definition remains unclear (Stylidis et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the perceived image typically reflects a tourist's overall impression of a destination and is commonly understood to comprise three core components, namely cognitive image (beliefs and knowledge), affective image (emotions and feelings), and conative image (behavioural intentions) (Stylidis et al., 2020).

Since the concept of destination image is wide-ranging, discussion on destination image usually focuses on its conceptualisation, dimensions, roles, and effect on tourist attitudes and behaviours (Junaedi & Harjanto, 2020; Lee & Xue, 2020; Pan et al., 2021; Suryawardani et al., 2024). Remarkably, a positive image about a destination not only enhances tourists' interest in visiting but also increases the possibility of repeat visits and word-of-mouth among tourists. Since the destination image is essential in destination branding, many tourism marketers,

Stylidis et al. (2020). Lastly, the construct revisit intention was measured using three items that were adapted from Ervina and Octaviany (2022). The data collection process has been done for two months, from May to June 2025, which covered all areas in Bukit Melawati, with the approximate response rate being 49%. Then, all the data collected were analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The pilot test was conducted to identify the reliability of the research instruments. At this stage, no changes are involved, as the Cronbach Alpha value for all variables studied is above 0.7. Then, the Multiple Linear Regression technique was employed to conduct inferential analysis.

RESULTS

Demographic analysis

This study has managed to collect a total of 295 responses from local and international tourists who visit Bukit Melawati. From that total, the majority are male (57.6%), followed by female (42.4%). Analysis on nationality indicated that 97.2% of the respondents are Malaysian, while the balance 2.8% are non-Malaysian, who came from the Middle East, Brunei, Indonesia, and China. The analysis has revealed that the majority of respondents belong to the Malay ethnic (73.4%), followed by Indian (13.8%), Chinese (8.3%), as well as Bumiputra Sabah and Sarawak (4.5%). Additionally, the research findings also showed that majority of respondents is fall under the category of age 18-25 years old (62.8%) followed by those under category of 26-30 years old (18.3%), 31-35 years old (8.6%), 36-40 years old (5.5%), and 41 years old and above (4.8%).

Analysis of the frequency of visits has found that the majority of respondents are first-time visitors (37.6%) at Bukit Melawati, followed by second-time visitors (31.4%), and those who have visited three times or more (31%). Additionally, analysis on the factors that can influence respondents' interest in visiting Bukit Melawati found that the most influential factor is its historical monument (46.2%). Then it is followed by a factor of good atmosphere for leisure activities (42.4%), beautiful scenery (40.7%), flora and fauna (35.5%), gallery museum (15.5%), and food and beverage (11.7%). Moreover, analysis of the sources of information discovered that information shared by friends is the most influential (56.9%), followed by information from family members (54.1%), social media (23.1%), travel review forums (20%), and mass media (e.g., radio, television, magazine) (12%). Ultimately, the analysis revealed that 81% of respondents expressed a strong intention to include Bukit Melawati as one of their future holiday destinations in Selangor.

Inferential analysis

The Multiple Linear Regression was employed in this study for hypothesis testing. By employing this technique of analysis, this study can identify the most influential factor towards tourist revisit intention to Bukit Melawati, Selangor. Several assumptions need to be considered in employing this technique. This includes the examination of sample size, normality, multicollinearity, and outliers (Pallant, 2005). The evaluation of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values indicated no multicollinearity issues, as all predictors had tolerance values above 0.3 and no VIF values exceeding 10. Table 1 summarizes the VIF and tolerance values.

Table 1. The Tolerance and VIF Value

Constructs	Tolerance	VIF
Destination Authenticity	.373	2.684
Destination Awareness	.343	2.917
Destination Image	.383	2.613

Mahalanobis distance values confirmed that no standardized residuals exceeded the recommended cut-off, indicating no undue influence from individual cases. Residual plots showed no signs of heteroscedasticity, and the assumption of linearity was upheld. Histograms and normal probability plots confirmed that residuals were normally distributed. Overall, all regression analyses met key assumptions and were not affected by outliers. The analysis revealed that 49.6% of the variance in revisit intention to Bukit Melawati ($R^2 = 0.496$) is explained by destination authenticity, destination awareness, and destination image. This result can be described as individuals' intention to revisit Bukit Melawati is strongly influenced by these factors.

Hypotheses testing

The analysis revealed that destination authenticity has a significant influence on tourist intention to visit Bukit Melawati ($\beta=.174$, $t=2.525$, $p<.05$). Previous studies consistently suggest that the authenticity of a destination becomes an important predictor to build tourists' satisfaction and loyalty toward heritage sites (Fu, 2019; Li et al., 2025). Furthermore, destination authenticity is also found as a meaningful mediator construct in the relationship between cultural heritage and heritage destination attractiveness (Phat et al., 2025). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. Nevertheless, this study found that destination awareness has an insignificant influence on tourists' intention to visit Bukit Melawati ($\beta=.100$, $t = 1.387$, $p>.05$). Similarly, a previous study also found that destination awareness has an insignificant effect on tourist revisit intention (Ervina & Octaviany, 2022; Mohammed et al., 2022). This result indicates that although tourists are aware of Bukit Melawati, their awareness does not significantly influence their intention to visit. In other words, tourist revisit motivation may be driven by other factors beyond awareness alone (Mohamad, 2020, 2022). Hence, Hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Additionally, the research finding also indicated that destination image has a significant influence on tourist revisit intention to Bukit Melawati ($\beta=.485$, $t=7.146$, $p<.05$). Previous literature consistently agreed that destination image is one of the main components of a destination that can encourage people's interest and behaviour to visit a destination (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Crompton, 1979; Styliadis et al., 2020). Furthermore, since destination image is a multidimensional construct, a prior study has revealed that culture and environmental image play an important role in building tourist loyalty towards a destination (Lee & Xue, 2020). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is accepted. Table 2 below summarizes the results of hypothesis testing.

Table 2. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Variables	β	t	p	Results
H1	Destination Authenticity -> Revisit intention	.174	2.525	.012*	Accepted
H2	Destination Awareness -> Revisit intention	.100	1.387	.166	Rejected
H3	Destination Image -> Revisit intention	.485	7.146	.000*	Accepted

*Significant at $p<.05$

DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine the influence of predictors such as destination authenticity, destination awareness, and destination image on tourists' revisit intention to Bukit Melawati, Selangor. The analysis indicates that only destination authenticity and destination image significantly influence tourists' revisit intention. In contrast, destination awareness has an insignificant impact. Additionally, destination image has been found as the most influential factor among others. This result is consistent with the literature, which indicates that perceived image will significantly determine tourists' destination choice, loyalty, and revisit intention. In other words, the image of a destination plays an important role in attracting tourists' intention to visit. If a destination has a positive image as well as positive reviews on social media, it will increase interest in repeat visits among current tourists and the intention to visit among potential tourists. In the case of Bukit Melawati, this study proves that its image and uniqueness as an important historical site in Selangor positively increase tourists' behaviour to repeat their visit. Besides, the destination image is usually associated with the authenticity of a destination. Since Bukit Melawati is a notable historical site in Selangor, known for its Dutch legacy, the main criterion expected by tourists is its authenticity. The important history reflected in Bukit Melawati is the history of the Selangor Sultanate. By visiting Bukit Melawati, visitors have an opportunity to learn about the history of the Selangor Sultanate. Moreover, there is also the royal mausoleum where several Sultans from the 17th and 18th centuries are buried. Besides, visitors also want to experience the Dutch Legacy, including the fort, cannons, and lighthouse. Due to this important history, the element of authenticity has become significant in influencing visitors' behaviour.

However, destination awareness has no significant influence on tourists' revisit intention to Bukit Melawati. This result explains that a tourist's intention to revisit a destination is minimally influenced by their awareness of the destination. Basically, people are aware of the existence of a tourism destination or attractions, but their behaviour is usually shaped by other factors such as social influences, word-of-mouth, publicity and promotion, a positive review, and a positive experience (Mohamad et al., 2025). In this digital era, tourists' behaviour is commonly influenced by information and experience shared by previous tourists on social media, including travel review platforms such as Expedia, Agoda, TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and Google Reviews (Mohamad et al., 2022). Additionally, the emergence of digital media with its interactive features has transformed conventional word-of-mouth (WOM) to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) through user-generated content (UGC) where internet users not only can share information about a destination, but also their experience, whether positive or negative, easily (Damayati & Indrawati, 2023). Accordingly, this study recommends that future research investigate the influence of new media, particularly social media, to better understand its role as a boundaryless marketing medium in raising public awareness of heritage tourism. It can be suggested that improving tourists' awareness and behavioural intentions towards heritage tourism destinations may require alternative approaches. As social media has been recognised as a powerful marketing medium, future research may yield new or differing insights compared to the findings of this study.

Since the analysis revealed that destination image is the most important factor that can influence tourist revisit intention to Bukit Melawati, this study provides suggestions to marketers, including the DMOs. The DMOs are suggested to emphasize the image of Bukit Melawati as a prominent historical site in Selangor. By doing this, the image and landmark of Bukit Melawati as a prominent historical site in Selangor can be strengthened. Thus, it can enhance emotional connection among visitors and encourage engagement with local communities, which ultimately can increase the repeat visits ratio. Notably, the role of digital media, particularly social media, cannot be denied. These platform plays an important role in positioning Bukit Melawati's image due to their interactive features and global reach. Besides, important to note that Malaysia on one of the countries that is rich with natural resources, culture and traditions, history, and heritage. Nevertheless, compared to neighbouring countries like Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, Malaysia lags in promoting heritage destinations as key tourism attractions. This is because most of the marketing and promotional strategies focus on other selected products rather than historical sites such as Bukit Melawati. Despite the uniqueness of Bukit Melawati, the promotion of Bukit Melawati has been slower compared to Kota A Famosa in Melaka and Fort Cornwallis in Penang (Hussin & Sulaiman, 2015).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Bukit Melawati is known as a prominent historical site in Selangor that is significant in the history of the Sultanate of Selangor. Based on the research findings, all the stakeholders, including the authority, industry players, DMOs, local communities, and tourists at Bukit Melawati, are encouraged to implement the principles of sustainable tourism development strategically and consistently. This practice is essential to ensure Bukit Melawati can continue to be relevant as an important historical and heritage destination in Selangor. Thus, its image and authenticity need to be preserved for future generations, not only for tourism development, but also for educational purposes, particularly in the sense of the history of Selangor. In addition, to enhance the image of Bukit Melawati, it is essential to ensure the continuous effort of marketing and promotion to position it as one of Malaysia's valuable heritage tourism assets. Important to note that choosing effective marketing tools is also crucial in increasing awareness among both local and international tourists, which ultimately can help with the sustainability of the local economy, social, and environmental.

Several limitations are faced in completing this study, despite the practical contribution. First, only three predictors, which are destination authenticity, destination awareness, and destination image, are examined in this study as predictors of tourists' intention to revisit Bukit Melawati. Therefore, other factors such as social media, eWOM, accessibility, social influence, satisfaction, and facility are suggested to be studied by future research. Next, to test the research hypothesis, a technique of multiple linear regression is employed. Hence, future studies are encouraged to employ multivariate analysis techniques such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to produce robust findings. In addition, future studies are also encouraged to incorporate suitable moderating or mediating variables, such as tourist satisfaction, to provide a better understanding of the relationships between variables. Furthermore, this study employed a cross-sectional design and convenience sampling, focusing solely

on respondents who had visited Bukit Melawati. As a result, future research is recommended to incorporate a multi-site approach to allow comparative analysis of tourists' attitudes and behaviours towards different heritage destinations. Lastly, to gain broader insights and validate the research findings, future studies are encouraged to test the same model at different historical or heritage sites and compare the results with this study.

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