

# The Potential of Abandoned Heritage Buildings as Tourism Attraction: A Case Study in Papan, Perak

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the potential of abandoned heritage buildings as a tourism attraction, focusing on abandoned heritage buildings in Papan, Perak. These buildings, once significant in their era, now stand dilapidated and abandoned, evoking both aesthetic allure and safety concerns. Despite the inherent dangers, enthusiasts of dark tourism are drawn to these neglected structures. The study aims to investigate the viability of leveraging Papan's abandoned heritage buildings for tourism purposes. Key objectives include identifying the heritage significance of these abandoned buildings, assessing tourist expectations and satisfaction regarding Papan's abandoned buildings, and proposing strategies for their development as tourist attractions. Employing a quantitative method approach, the author distributed questionnaires to tourists who have and have not visited Papan. Findings indicate significant potential for Papan as a tourist destination, as evidenced by positive responses from respondents. However, dissatisfaction with tourism facilities and safety highlights areas for improvement. Overall, the research underscores the allure of abandoned heritage buildings and provides valuable insights for enhancing Papan's appeal as a heritage tourism destination.

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## INTRODUCTION

Abandoned heritage buildings have a unique cultural and historical legacy with enormous tourism development potential. These structures, which are typically remains of the past, are architecturally beautiful and tell stories from bygone ages. However, many of these structures in Malaysia have fallen into disrepair, resulting in the loss of priceless cultural heritage. This study looks into abandoned heritage buildings as a possible tourism sector in Malaysia, including a specific case study in Papan, Perak. Malaysia's heritage buildings witness the country's historical and architectural achievements, with influences ranging from colonial-era architecture to traditional Malay, Chinese, and Indian architectural forms. Despite its cultural significance, many heritage buildings in Malaysia, like those in Papan, Perak have been abandoned or neglected. The case study in Papan, Perak, serves as an important context for understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with abandoned heritage building tourism. Papan is a small town in Kinta District, Perak. The state capital of Ipoh is located about 16 kilometres to the south.

The word "plank," which refers to the town's earlier past as a lumber outpost, is how the Malay word for "town" was obtained (Durant, 2022). The Mandailing people, a group of ethnic Minangkabau from Sumatra, Indonesia, once inhabited Papan. The availability of Chengal timber, which was used to construct homes, boats, and furniture, drew the Mandailings to the region (Lubis & Khoo, 2003). Abandoned heritage buildings in Malaysia are important cultural treasures that provide unique insights into the country's history and character. These structures have enormous potential to contribute to the country's cultural tourism and economic growth. However, the neglect and ruin of these structures have prompted worries about Malaysia's cultural heritage preservation. The study intends to investigate the viability of revitalising abandoned heritage buildings to create a thriving tourism sector in Malaysia. The case study of Papan, Perak, a town entrenched in the tradition of the tin mining industry, is highlighted. As the business deteriorated, many heritage buildings in Papan became derelict and threatened further degradation or destruction. Understanding these buildings' potential as tourist attractions can help preserve their historical and architectural significance while promoting sustainable tourism in the region.

The research will provide useful insights into the issues and potential related to abandoned heritage building tourism. The study offers context-specific recommendations that can be applied to similar sites throughout Malaysia by thoroughly investigating Papan, Perak's situation. These ideas will be useful in developing effective policies and strategies for heritage preservation and tourism development, providing a balance between cultural heritage preservation and economic growth. Furthermore, the research contributes to the greater conversation in Malaysia about the preservation of heritage and tourism. Understanding the untapped potential of abandoned heritage buildings can play a critical role in developing responsible and community-oriented tourist activities as the country strives to promote sustainable tourism. Finally, the study backdrop emphasises the importance of abandoned heritage buildings in Malaysia and the importance of preserving their cultural worth. The Papan, Perak case study provides a unique opportunity to investigate the problems and opportunities of abandoned heritage building tourism, paving the way for the country's tourism sector to have a more sustainable and culturally rich future.

The problems statement focuses on two (2) significant challenges regarding Papan's historic buildings. Neglect and degradation cause these old buildings to lose architectural and historical importance (Tavakoli & Marzbali, 2021). As these structures are dilapidated, their unique cultural significance and heritage risk being forgotten or irrevocably ruined. Second, abandoned structures may endanger public safety and urban beauty. Dilapidated structures can become risky, endangering tourists and residents (Clearway, 2020). Furthermore, their neglected status can distract from the town's overall aesthetic attractiveness, reducing its potential as a tourist attraction. The unique character of the old town, with its richness of urban and architectural design, is related to historical and cultural heritage as resources that future generations should understand through awareness of the conservation process and as a tourist attraction from the strategy of regenerating former tin mining towns as cultural heritage resources (Mohd Shariff et al., 2022). The excerpt

highlights the significance of old towns, particularly those with a rich urban and architectural heritage, as valuable historical and cultural resources. These towns represent tangible links to the past and offer insights into previous eras' cultural, social, and economic dynamics. As such, future generations must be aware of the conservation process involved in preserving these towns' unique character and historical integrity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Buildings that were once emblems of thriving towns and bustling activity now stand as quiet memorials to bygone eras. These abandoned monuments have tremendous potential, not just as historical treasures but also as intriguing destinations that can pique the interest of travellers looking for unique cultural experiences. Exploration of abandoned buildings as a tourism attraction has grown in popularity in recent years, as heritage preservation and cultural tourism emerge as critical components of long-term tourism growth.

### Cultural Tourism and Heritage Preservation

Culture is defined as the shared patterns of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding learned through socialisation. These shared patterns identify a culture group's members while distinguishing those of another group (University of Minnesota, 2019). Nowadays, most social scientists believe that culture essentially consists of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible components of human societies. The way a group's members understand, use and perceive its artefacts, tools, and other physical and cultural components is what defines the culture as a whole. In modern cultures, values, symbols, interpretations, and viewpoints rather than actual items and other elements of human society set one (1) group apart. Symbols, artefacts, and behaviours are typically interpreted by members of a culture in the same or comparable ways (Banks & Banks, 1997).

Heritage preservation, on the other hand, refers to the attempts to maintain and protect a community's or region's tangible and intangible cultural assets. Cultural heritage conservation refers to steps taken to extend the life of cultural heritage while increasing the transmission of its essential historical messages and values. The goal of conservation in the realm of cultural property is to preserve the physical and cultural qualities of the object so that its value does not deteriorate, and it outlives our finite time span (Pessoa & Deloumeaux, 2009). The development of tourist infrastructure is crucial, but it should not deviate from the area's historical shape. Each recreated tourist object must match the original features and tradition (Ismagilova et al., 2015). Therefore, it is essential to approach the development of abandoned heritage buildings as a tourism attraction with a sustainable and responsible mindset. In Papan, cultural tourism and heritage protection go hand in hand. The abandoned heritage buildings in town play an important role in providing visitors with a true sense of history, identity, and authenticity. Travelers can immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Papan's past through cultural tourism, while heritage preservation activities ensure that these cultural assets are preserved for present and future generations.

### Definition of Abandoned Heritage Buildings

An abandoned building is defined as personal property left by an owner who intentionally relinquishes all rights to its control (Cornell Law School, 2022). These structures have cultural, historical, and architectural worth, and they frequently reflect previous eras and societal advancements. Changes in economic activity, urbanisation, population upheavals, natural calamities, or changing cultural and social dynamics can all lead to abandonment (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012). Despite their abandonment, these buildings have inherent cultural significance and can serve as focal locations for heritage preservation and cultural tourism. The scale and design of abandoned heritage buildings might range from small residential houses, traditional dwellings, commercial establishments, and religious structures to huge mansions, castles, or industrial complexes.

The preservation and adaptive reuse of abandoned heritage buildings are important for preserving a region's cultural heritage, connecting people to their history, and fostering sustainable tourism. By restoring these structures to minor preservation, they can be transformed into cultural landmarks, museums, galleries, restaurants, or other tourist attractions that provide visitors with unique experiences while also contributing to the economic and social growth of the surrounding community. Although this research aims to preserve the structures' originality as an abandoned town, the conservation and restoration of abandoned heritage buildings can also demonstrate a dedication to maintaining a nation's identity and architectural history for future generations.

### **Abandoned Buildings as Tourists Attraction**

The concept of abandoned buildings serving as tourist attractions is not a recent phenomenon in Malaysia or globally. Unbeknownst to many, abandoned tourism has long been ingrained in the preferences of Malaysians and international visitors alike. Notably, groups of paranormal enthusiasts frequently explore abandoned houses or structures, documenting their experiences for social media content. While the term "abandoned heritage buildings tourism" may not be explicitly coined, the existence of such activities underscores the growing popularity of abandoned building tourism. Several instances of once-abandoned heritage buildings in Malaysia have been repurposed by local tourism boards, transforming them into sought-after tourist destinations.

### **Kellie's Castle, Batu Gajah**

In Batu Gajah District itself, 13 kilometres from the Papan town, stands the majestic Kellie's Castle. Indeed, abandoned tourism is a phenomenon that has been around for a while in Malaysia. Kellie's Castle is an excellent example of a successful conversion of an abandoned heritage site into a popular tourist attraction while retaining the building's original appearance. Kellie's Castle is perched on a hill in Batu Gajah, Perak, beside the Sungai Raya (Raya River). Built in 1915 by Scottish planter William Kellie-Smith, it served as one (1) of the sites for the 1999 Oscar-nominated film *Anna and the King*, starring Jodie Foster and Chow Yun-fat. The castle was meant to include Malaysia's first lift, a 6-story tower, secret passageways, a tennis court, and a rooftop plaza for entertainment. Unfortunately, it was never finished (Tourism Malaysia, 2024).

Today, Kellie's Castle as shown in Fig. 1 has been successfully transformed into an enthralling tourist destination that lures people from Malaysia and worldwide. Curious visitors seeking cultural experiences and historical insights are drawn to the castle's unusual blend of Moorish, Indian, and European architectural styles and intriguing pasts (Tourism Malaysia, 2024). Efforts to preserve the building's historic form have been an essential part of its adaptation for tourism. The restoration aims to preserve the castle's authenticity and historical relevance, allowing visitors to delve into its past and comprehend its creator's intentions. While some elements of the castle have been renovated for safety and visitor access, the overall building has been scrupulously preserved to retain its allure as an unfinished masterpiece.



Fig. 1. Kellie's Castle, Batu Gajah

Source: Authors (2024)

### **A' Famosa, Melaka**

A' Famosa is a fort in Melaka that is significant culturally and historically as one (1) of Southeast Asia's earliest remaining Portuguese architectural remnants. Located at the foot of St. Paul Hill, the gate is the only remains of the fort (National Archives of Malaysia, 2024). During the massive war between Melaka and the Portuguese in 1511, the Portuguese could never destroy the Melaka empire's fort, recognising the significance of a solid fort to secure the city. Alfonso de Albuquerque ordered the construction of a new fort, this time entirely of stone rather than wood, to ensure the strength of the new edifice (National Archives of Malaysia, 2024). The success of A' Famosa Fort as a tourist attraction as in Fig. 2, demonstrates how abandoned heritage monuments can be revitalised with minimal alteration while retaining their historical charm and cultural relevance. Melaka has leveraged the potential of the abandoned heritage structure to draw thousands of tourists each year.



Fig. 2. A' Famosa, Melaka

Source: Authors (2024)

## Papan, Perak

The assassination of J.W.W. Birch, the first British Resident of Perak, in 1875 changed the trajectory of Papan's history. Raja Ismail was sent to Skudai, Johor, during the Perak War. Around two (2) years following his expulsion as Papan's local ruler and mine owner, the British granted Raja Asal, a Malay-Mandailing leader, sole rights to work the tin mines. The Mandailings were originally from Sumatra and came to Peninsular Malaya in the 1820s to avoid the Padri War. Raja Asal participated in the Selangor Civil War with another Mandailing chieftain in Kuala Lumpur, Sultan Puasa, in the mid-1800s before relocating to Perak (Ammar & Izzaty, 2021). In 1848, Long Ja'afar, a businessman, discovered substantial tin ore resources in Larut, Perak, which sparked the growth of Malaya's tin mining industry. Kinta became the primary tin-producing district in Perak and throughout the Malay peninsula. By 1904, Malaya produced 50,000 tonnes of tin annually, accounting for half of the global output (Tourism Perak Malaysia, 2020). Before the implementation of the Briggs Plan, there were four (4) traditional villages located near Papan town as shown in Fig. 3. Three (3) of these villages were forcibly relocated to the Papan town area, resulting in the establishment of Papan New Village. This relocation was classified as a Type C New Village, which are suburbs or appendages to existing towns or large villages but have a unique identity of their own (Chew & Ooi, 2023), bracing the intrinsic worth of the ruins and crafting a captivating narrative around the site's past.

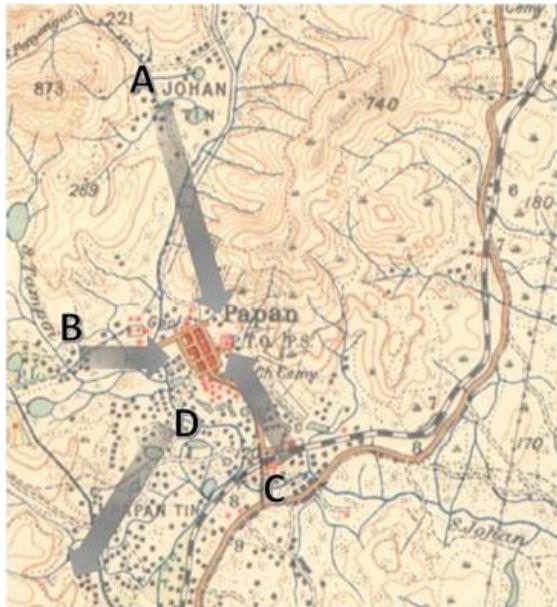


Fig. 3. Map of Papan ca. 1933. During the Emergency Period (1948-1960), residents of adjacent villages (A, B, C, and D) were compelled to relocate to Papan town as "Type C" resettlement under the Briggs Plan.

Source: Chew & Ooi (2023)

## Abandoned Heritage Buildings in Papan, Perak

There are also two (2) galleries to showcase the history of Papan that is the Galeri Warisan Papan and Galeri Sejarah Kampung Baru Malaysia, which is being operated by a group of volunteers by the name of Papan Heritage Conservative Group (Razali, 2023). Papan town's collapsed wooden beams and staircases indicate that the structures are potentially unsafe. However, it remains a haunt for the occasional Instagrammer who is in the chase of mysterious places or vibes for their photos as shown in Fig. 4. The



antics and acrobatics of posers do not delight the locals, who regard the intrusion as disrupting their haven of quiet. Despite their deteriorated appearance, several of the rotting homes still have occupants (Dass, 2021).



Fig. 4. The condition inside one (1) of the many Papan's lines of shophouses (left) and Pokok Banyan Berakar di Dinding, one (1) of the shophouses in Papan that has been grown by the root of a Banyan tree (right).

Source: Authors (2024)

### Tourist Expectation and Satisfaction in Heritage Tourism

In recent years, cultural tourism has grown significantly. Internal tourism plays a vital role in preserving heritage places. It enables tourists to participate in cultural and historical experiences that enhance their knowledge, appreciation, and understanding of a country's history and culture (Arumugam et al., 2023). The study found that three (3) variables (Tourist Motivation, Service Quality, and Tourist Satisfaction) influence tourists' decision to visit heritage sites (Kaharuddin et al., 2021). Tourist Satisfaction represents tourists' overall assessment of their experiences at heritage sites. It reflects how visitors' expectations are met or exceeded during their visit, including factors such as the site's authenticity, interpretive offerings, facilities' condition, and amenities' availability. Tourist satisfaction is a critical outcome indicator for destination managers, as satisfied visitors are more likely to return in the future, recommend the destination to others, and contribute to destination loyalty and a positive destination image.

### METHODOLOGY

The data collection method used was the quantitative approach. This method involves targeting the sample of tourists who have and have not visited Papan, Perak. This method aims to gather numerical data and measurable insights from a sizeable sample of tourists to understand their perceptions, motivations, and preferences toward abandoned heritage buildings as potential tourism attractions from both perspectives, to know their view about the potential tourism prospects in Papan, Perak. A structured questionnaire for potential tourists is created. The questionnaire includes closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items to ease data collection and analysis. It discusses different elements of abandoned heritage buildings, such as visitors' level of interest in such locations, their reasons for visiting, their expectations from experience, and their perspectives on the structures' historical and cultural significance. The questionnaire is a quantitative data collection technique that entails distributing structured questionnaires to potential tourists

visiting Papan, Perak. The researcher delivers hardcopy and softcopy questionnaires to a comprehensive set of respondents, including local and international tourists, in order to collect data. This data collection method provides for the systematic collection of numerical data, allowing the researcher to analyse and compare different visitor groups' perspectives, motivations, and preferences regarding abandoned heritage buildings as possible tourism destinations. The researcher designed a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions, Likert-scale items, and open-ended questions. The questionnaire is carefully prepared to gather useful information regarding visitors' interest in abandoned heritage sites, their reasons for visiting, their expectations, and their assessments of the historical and cultural relevance of the buildings.

Table 1. Questionnaire Structure

Section	Theme	Type of Questions
A	Demographic of Respondents	Close Ended
B	Respondents' Expectation and Satisfaction Level of Papan	1-4 Likert Scale
C	Recommendations of Strategies to Develop Papan as a Tourist Attraction	Close-Ended and Open-Ended Questions

Source: Authors (2024)

Questionnaires are made available in hardcopy and softcopy versions. Hardcopy surveys are distributed in person to travellers. At the same time, softcopy questionnaires are sent via online channels such as WhatsApp or social media to tourists who have previously visited Papan or plan to visit. The research aims to survey 100 respondents, ensuring a balanced ratio of those who have and have not visited Papan. This equitable distribution is vital for obtaining comprehensive insights. Respondents who have visited Papan primarily receive questionnaires on-site, facilitating direct engagement and immediate feedback. Conversely, softcopy questionnaires are disseminated via social media platforms and online links for those who have not visited Papan, enabling broader outreach and accessibility. This methodological approach ensures inclusivity and diverse perspectives in the research findings. Due to the challenge of securing respondents who have visited Papan, the final sample size for this study was limited to 80 individuals. This decision was made to maintain a balanced ratio between respondents who have and have not visited Papan, ensuring that both perspectives are adequately represented in the research findings. As a result, the questionnaire was closed once the desired number of respondents who had visited Papan had reached 40 in order to maintain the intended balance in the sample. Despite the smaller sample size, efforts were made to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected, allowing for meaningful insights to be derived from the research findings.

Table 2. The table shows the lower and upper limits of the answers to the Likert scale questions.

Answer	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Strongly Disagree	1.00	1.75
Disagree	1.76	2.50
Agree	2.51	3.25
Strongly Agree	3.26	4.00

Source: Authors (2024)

Section A of the questionnaire is about the demography of the data sample, while section B is the questionnaire about the potential of abandoned heritage buildings as a tourism attraction. Section A is an open-ended question, while section B is a Likert-scale question. The data interpretation method used for section B uses the mean score. The respondents who visited Papan commented based on their experience,



while those who had never visited Papan showed their responses through the images provided in the questionnaire. This section is questioned based on the Likert scale 1-4 and is analysed using mean scores with lower and upper limits. The marks are calculated by mean score and are projected by lower and upper limits as shown in Table 2. Participation in the questionnaire survey is voluntary, and respondents are informed that their comments are kept personal and anonymous. This method encourages participants to provide honest and unbiased criticism. The questionnaire targets potential tourists from both local and international locations for the data sampling. Respondents targeted are the ones who have and have not visited Papan, and the number must be about equal. The respondents are randomly picked at the site, and the questionnaires are distributed online.

The author plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness and reliability of the data collection process. The author designs a structured questionnaire that includes closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items. Before the final distribution, the author conducts a pilot test of the questionnaire with a small group of respondents to identify any ambiguities or issues. Feedback from the pilot test is used to refine the questions and improve the clarity and effectiveness of the survey instrument. While observing, the author takes on a non-participant role, discreetly monitoring and recording tourists' behaviours, interactions, and reactions to Papan's abandoned buildings. This involves taking detailed notes and photographs to capture the physical condition of the buildings, visitor engagement, and any notable events or activities.

The author analyses the numerical data collected from the questionnaires using statistical methods. This involves computing mean scores, identifying trends, and comparing responses between different groups of respondents. The author ensures that all participants provide informed consent before participating in the survey or interviews. This includes informing them about the purpose of the study, how their data will be used, and ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. By fulfilling these roles, the observer/author ensures that the data collection process is thorough, reliable, and ethically conducted, leading to robust and meaningful research findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The author successfully gathered a sample of 40 respondents who have visited Papan and 40 respondents who have not. Among those who visited Papan, 21 respondents (52.5%) were female, while 19 respondents (47.5%) were male. Conversely, 14 respondents (35%) are male in the group who have never visited Papan, and 26 respondents (65%) are female. Of the respondents who have visited Papan, 22 respondents (55%) are between the ages 20-29 years old, five (5) respondents (12.5%) are between 40-49 years old, ten respondents (25%) are aged between 50-59 years old and three (3) respondents (7.5%) aged more than 60 years old. Out of the respondents who never visited Papan, one (1) respondent (2.5%) is under the age of 20, 29 respondents (72.5%) aged between 20-29, 5 respondents (12.5%) are between 30-39 years old, three (3) respondents (7.5%) are between 40-49 years old, and one (1) respondent (2.5%) aged between 50-59 years old and over 60 years old respectively. This age gap discrepancy likely arises from the data collection method; hardcopy questionnaires distributed on-site likely reached a more diverse age range, while online surveys predominantly accessed by social media users skewed toward the younger demographic.

Respondents' various reasons for visiting Papan highlight the historic town's multifarious attractions. Education and holiday factors both contribute mainly to the percentage with 15 respondents (37.5%) respectively. The education reason highlights the importance of Papan as a significant resource for academic research, providing a complex tapestry of historical and architectural features that enhance the educational experience. The high number of educational visits demonstrates the town's potential as a living classroom, providing individuals with a better grasp of local history and heritage. The Papan Recreational Forest Reserve and the Salu River became popular tourist destinations, highlighting the town's natural beauty and enticing visitors to photograph the abandoned buildings. This dual appeal—historical and

natural—distinguishes Papan as a unique location that caters to heritage aficionados and those looking for relaxation in attractive surroundings.

The percentage followed by respondents who come to Papan for work with eight (8) respondents (20%). Five (5) respondents are not native Papan villagers; they come to Papan from other parts of Perak. One (1) of the respondents, who is an antique collector, stated that the purpose of his work visit to Papan is actually to collect the leftover goods from the abandoned shophouses to be resold in his shop, ranging from small items like teacups to more significant items like the antique floor tiles. This shows that Papan abandoned buildings still hold many valuable items that have beauty in the eye of their beholder. Two (2) respondents (5%) came to Papan for family matters. Both of them originate from Papan and either stay there or visit their relatives. Among respondents who have visited Papan, 95% strongly agree or agree that Papan's abandoned town is an essential piece of history, with a mean score of 3.65. Similarly, 95% of respondents who have never visited Papan also strongly agree or agree, with a mean score of 3.45. The town's significance is in its role in the tin mining industry and in providing valuable insights into the nation's economic past. Papan's architectural heritage, which serves as a tangible link to bygone eras, is a source of national pride and historical significance.

The survey's exploration of respondents' perceptions regarding the allure of abandoned elements in Papan offers a fascinating insight into the appeal of dilapidation for visitors. Among respondents who have visited Papan, a majority (65%) strongly agree that the town's abandoned features are appealing, with an overall mean score of 3.58. Similarly, among those who have never visited Papan, a significant portion (57.5%) also strongly agree, with an overall mean score of 3.45.

The survey's exploration of the potential commercialisation of Papan as a tourist destination reveals widespread optimism among respondents. Those who have visited Papan and those who have not expressed strong agreement regarding Papan's potential as a tourist attraction with mean scores of 3.43 and 3.35, respectively. This shared optimism underscores a recognition of Papan's historical, architectural, and aesthetic significance, suggesting its suitability for commercialisation in the tourism industry. The respondents' positive outlook likely stems from a desire to safeguard, commemorate, and economically leverage Papan's unique heritage through tourism. Their enthusiastic response highlights the importance of strategic planning and preservation efforts in realising Papan's potential as an appealing and sustainable tourist destination.

The survey's exploration into the primary motivations for visiting Papan uncovers a diverse range of opinions among respondents, reflected in a spectrum of sentiments. While the mean score of 3.00 from respondents who have visited Papan indicates an overall agreement that abandoned heritage buildings constitute a significant reason for visiting, the distribution of responses reveals nuances. Among those who have visited Papan, three (3) respondents (7.5%) strongly disagree that they visited solely for the abandoned heritage buildings. In contrast, ten (10) respondents (25%) disagree, 11 (27.5%) agree, and 16 (40%) strongly agree that the abandoned buildings are the main reason for their visit.

Conversely, respondents who have never visited Papan express their likelihood of visiting in the future primarily for the abandoned heritage buildings, with 4 (10%) strongly disagreeing, 11 (27.5%) disagreeing, 14 (35%) agreeing, and 20 (50%) strongly agreeing. The mean score of 2.80 among this group suggests agreement that abandoned heritage buildings would be the main reason for visiting Papan in the future. Respondents were also asked whether they agreed with refurbishing Papan's abandoned town into adaptive reuse, akin to the transformation seen in Banda Hilir, Melaka, or Georgetown, Pulau Pinang. Among the respondents who have visited Papan, two (2) respondents (5%) strongly disagree, and four (4) respondents (10%) disagree with this proposition. Conversely, 12 respondents (30%) agree, and 22 respondents (55%) strongly agree with refurbishment into adaptive reuse. With a mean score of 3.35, there is a strong consensus among respondents who have visited Papan in favour of this proposal.

Out of the 40 respondents who have never visited Papan, 3 respondents (7.5%) strongly disagree, while no respondents voted to disagree. However, 11 respondents (27.5%) agree, and a majority of 26 respondents

(65%) strongly agree with the refurbishment into adaptive reuse. With a mean score of 3.50, respondents who have never visited Papan strongly support this idea. The survey findings reveal a strong consensus among both respondents who have visited Papan and those who have not in favour of preserving its abandoned features as unique tourist attractions. Among visitors to Papan, 67.5% strongly agreed, and 25% agreed with preserving these features, while among non-visitors, 60% strongly agreed, and 27.5% agreed.

The survey results highlight a strong consensus among respondents regarding Papan's tourism potential, particularly emphasising the appeal of its abandoned buildings. Among those who have visited Papan, an overwhelming majority strongly agree (67.5%) that Papan has the potential to be a tourism destination, highlighting its abandoned buildings, with an overall mean score of 3.65. Similarly, among respondents who have never visited Papan, the majority (60%) strongly agree with this statement, albeit with a slightly lower mean score of 3.45 than those who have visited Papan. The survey findings paint an optimistic picture regarding the likelihood of respondents visiting a refurbished and adaptively reused Papan, with a substantial majority expressing a strong desire to do so. Among respondents who have visited Papan, the overwhelming majority (90%) either agree or strongly agree with the prospect of visiting a refurbished town, with an overall mean score of 3.40.

Similarly, among respondents who have never visited Papan, the majority (95%) either agree or strongly agree, with a slightly higher mean score of 3.50 than those who visited. The survey's exploration into respondents' perceptions of current tourism facilities in the abandoned town of Papan reveals a notable discontent among participants. This question only applies to those who have visited Papan. Of the respondents who have visited Papan, seven (7) respondents (17.5%) were strongly dissatisfied, a high number of 25 respondents (62.5%) were dissatisfied, five (5) respondents (12.5%) were satisfied, and three (3) respondents (7.5%) strongly satisfied with the tourism facilities provided at the abandoned town of Papan, Perak. With a low mean score of 2.1, overall, respondents are dissatisfied with the tourism facilities provided at Papan. The dissatisfaction might stem from lacking distinct tourism facilities beyond locally funded signage and galleries. The absence of essential amenities like toilets or comprehensive information boards could contribute to the negative perception.

The survey results shed light on respondents' concerns and perceptions regarding the safety of the abandoned buildings in Papan, Perak, particularly in the context of potential commercialisation for tourism. This question also only applied to respondents who have visited Papan. Out of 40 respondents, seven (7) respondents (17.5%) strongly dissatisfied. A high number of 25 respondents (62.5%) were dissatisfied, five (5) respondents (12.5%) were satisfied, and three (3) respondents (7.5%) were strongly satisfied with the safety of the buildings if Papan is being commercialised as a tourist destination. The mean score of 2.13, falling into the "dissatisfied" category, underscores the prevailing sentiment among respondents.

Table 3. Summary of the results of the questionnaire.

No	Statement	Tourists who have visited		Tourists who have never visited	
		Mean	Answer	Mean	Answer
1	Papan holds an important part of history.	3.65	Strongly Agree	3.45	Strongly Agree
2	The abandoned buildings are the unique attraction of Papan.	3.57	Strongly Agree	3.45	Strongly Agree
3	The abandoned buildings in Papan is a good place as a tourism destination.	3.43	Strongly Agree	3.35	Strongly Agree
4	The abandoned buildings in Papan are the main reason respondents visit the town.	3.00	Agree	2.80	Agree
5	Respondents' view of Papan being refurbished to adaptive reuse.	3.35	Strongly Agree	3.50	Strongly Agree
6	Abandoned features are the unique characteristics that should be preserved in Papan as a tourist attraction.	3.58	Strongly Agree	3.45	Strongly Agree
7	Papan has the potential to be a tourism destination that highlights abandoned buildings.	3.65	Strongly Agree	3.45	Strongly Agree
8	Respondents will revisit Papan to see if the abandoned buildings are being renovated for adaptive reuse.	3.40	Strongly Agree	3.50	Strongly Agree
9	Satisfaction level of current tourism facilities are provided in the abandoned town of Papan.	2.10	Dissatisfied	N/A	N/A
10	The satisfaction level of the respondents on the safety of the abandoned buildings if Papan is being commercialised as a tourism destination.	2.13	Dissatisfied	N/A	N/A

Source: Authors (2024)

## Discussion

The research findings present a compelling case for the potential of Papan's abandoned heritage buildings as a tourist attraction. The insights derived from the data offer a nuanced understanding of respondents' perceptions and highlight various aspects that require further exploration and consideration.

### Complex Motivations and Multifaceted Appeal for Papan as a Potential Tourism Attraction

The survey results reveal that while abandoned buildings are a significant draw for tourists, they only partially define Papan's appeal. Respondents' motivations for visiting Papan are complex, incorporating historical, recreational, economic, and familial elements. Although many respondents are likely to visit primarily due to the abandoned buildings, their need for a more robust agreement suggests they also value the town's broader context. This highlights Papan's multifaceted allure, encompassing more than its historical relics. The results of the questionnaire clearly indicate that Papan retains significant appeal due to the tourism potential of its abandoned heritage buildings. The town's unique charm, rooted in its historical and architectural significance, continues to attract interest from both local and international tourists. This enduring appeal suggests that there is considerable potential for developing Papan into a more prominent tourist destination, particularly through activities that highlight its rich history and distinctive atmosphere.

Furthermore, Papan's atmospheric ruins and historical streetscapes offer excellent opportunities for photography workshops or art retreats. These activities could attract artists, photographers, and creative enthusiasts who are drawn to the town's unique aesthetic and the evocative scenes it offers. As depicted in Fig. 5, these activities have the potential to draw a diverse range of visitors to Papan, helping to boost local

tourism and stimulate economic development. By leveraging the appeal of its abandoned heritage buildings and integrating a variety of engaging activities, Papan can capitalize on its untapped potential as a compelling destination for heritage tourism.



Fig. 5. Hari Malaysia festival being held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2023 at the main road of Papan abandoned town attracts tourists from all over Malaysia.

Source: Authors (2024)

### **Sentiment for Preservation and Refurbishment of Papan Abandoned Buildings for Enhancing its Status as Heritage Destination**

The slight difference in mean scores between those who have visited Papan (3.35) and those who have not (3.50) suggests a consistent sentiment in favour of maintaining and refurbishing the town's abandoned structures. This indicates a shared belief that Papan has significant untapped potential as a thriving and adaptable destination. The positive response underscores the public's confidence in preserving Papan's historical charm while enhancing its status as a heritage destination. Strategic preservation and refurbishment plans should be prioritised to capitalise on this sentiment. This involves engaging with conservation experts and local stakeholders to develop plans that protect the historical integrity of the buildings while allowing for modern adaptations. Investment in restoration projects and infrastructure improvements, such as upgraded public amenities and well-maintained pathways, will transform Papan into a vibrant destination that appeals to tourists and respects its historical legacy.

### **Appreciation of Authenticity and Historical Identity of Papan Abandoned Town**

The data shows a strong appreciation among visitors for Papan's authenticity and historical identity despite the buildings' deteriorated state. Features such as weathered bricks and chapped plaster are distinctive attractions embodying the town's historical essence. This admiration underscores a collective desire to preserve these elements as integral components of Papan's identity and tourist appeal. To leverage this appreciation, it is essential to highlight and interpret these features effectively. Creating educational materials and interactive exhibits that explain the historical significance of these elements can enrich visitors' experiences. Additionally, preserving these authentic features while addressing structural issues will ensure they remain appealing and safe for tourists. This approach will help maintain Papan's unique character while enhancing its attractiveness as a heritage destination.

## **Challenges of Safety and Infrastructure of Papan's Abandoned Buildings**

The research highlights significant concerns regarding the site's safety, influenced by observable issues such as wild vegetation, compromised roofing, and fallen structures. These hazards raise safety concerns among visitors and could inhibit their confidence in the site's safety. Addressing these issues is critical to successful tourism development. A systematic approach to addressing safety concerns is necessary. This includes conducting thorough inspections and implementing necessary repairs to ensure structural integrity. Developing safety protocols, such as installing barriers and clear signage, can also help guide visitors and prevent accidents. Investing in infrastructure improvements, such as better restroom facilities and information boards, will also enhance the overall visitor experience and address existing dissatisfaction.

## **Sustainable Development and Adaptive Reuse for Future Tourism Attraction**

The findings underscore the importance of preserving Papan's identity and authenticity while repurposing its abandoned buildings for tourism. Most respondents favour adaptive reuse that maintains the buildings' abandoned features, highlighting their value as cultural and historical artefacts. This calls for sustainable development strategies that balance conservation with commercialisation. Adaptive reuse projects should be guided by sustainability principles and respect for historical context. Examples could include transforming abandoned buildings into museums, cultural centres, or boutique accommodations. These projects should integrate green building practices and consider the long-term impact on the local environment and community. By striking a balance between conservation and development, Papan can ensure its heritage is preserved for future generations while supporting economic growth through tourism.

## **Community and Stakeholder Engagement**

Effective tourism development in Papan requires collaboration among stakeholders, including local government, tourism boards, conservationists, and the community. Engaging these groups in planning and implementation processes will foster a sense of ownership and ensure that diverse perspectives are considered. Establishing a stakeholder advisory group can facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaboration. Regular community meetings and public consultations will provide a platform for residents to voice their concerns and contribute ideas. This inclusive approach will help address potential issues, build local support for tourism initiatives, and ensure that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed.

The research findings offer valuable insights into the potential of Papan's abandoned heritage buildings as a tourist attraction. While there is strong interest and support for developing the destination, addressing challenges such as inadequate facilities and safety concerns is essential to unlocking its full potential. By adopting a holistic approach that prioritises preservation, sustainability, and visitor satisfaction, Papan can transform into a compelling destination that celebrates its rich cultural heritage and attracts visitors from near and far. Through strategic planning, community involvement, and a commitment to preserving its unique character, Papan has the opportunity to become a vibrant and successful heritage tourism destination.

## **Conclusion**

This research paper is a pioneering effort to uncover the latent potential of abandoned buildings as a captivating tourist destination, with Papan, despite its small size, serving as a good case study. This shed light on broader issues, providing significant insights for future stakeholders, tourists, the local community, and the general public. While the prevailing sentiment might lean toward demolishing abandoned structures to make way for modern projects, this study provides evidence to support the opposite viewpoint. It depicts a thriving community of enthusiasts who see Papan's abandoned town not as remnants of neglect but as one-of-a-kind treasures worth preserving. The findings highlight the necessity of considering multiple viewpoints in deciding the future of historical sites, challenging the concept that progress always equals oblivion. The similarities between Papan's abandoned buildings and those of Kellie's Castle and A' Famosa

lie in their shared characteristics. Kellie's Castle and A' Famosa were once abandoned and dilapidated structures that attracted tourists due to their eerie appearance. These sites maintained their dilapidated features while enhancing safety to appeal to visitors. Similarly, Papan's abandoned buildings should be converted into tourist attractions, preserving their abandoned characteristics to maintain their unique appeal. This approach will allow Papan to leverage its historical and aesthetic value, attracting tourists while ensuring their safety.

In conclusion, as this research expands outside Papan's limits, it invites a broader discussion about the delicate balance between heritage preservation and development. It is a call to recognise the intrinsic value embedded in historical echoes and the potential for these abandoned structures to tell stories that will connect with current and future generations. In essence, this article acts as a catalyst for discussion, arguing for preserving historical charm in the face of inexorable development.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Nur Asyikin Khairudin carried out this research, designed, wrote, and conceptualised the central research idea, and Rohaslinda Ramele Ramli revised the article, supervised the research progress, anchored the review and revisions, and managed the article submission. Meanwhile, Abdullah Anas Abu Bakar and Retna Hidayah reviewed the final version of the article from the international and industrial views.

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