DESIGN INFLUENCE ON BOUTIQUE HOTEL GUEST EXPERIENCE: A CASE STUDY OF BOUTIQUE HOTEL ROSA MALACCA, MALAYSIA

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to all my family and friends,
especially to my beloved parents for their endless supports.
Also to all my lecturers and my supervisor
Prof. Dr. Zainab Khalifah for their kind instructions.

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A research project would not be completed without others' supports and help.

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ABSTRACT

As experience economy grows, so does the tourism and hospitality industry, meanwhile, it becomes more complicated to get customers satisfied in this new era. Nowadays, travellers and hotel guests get into a hotel not only to sleep, but also seek an extraordinary experience which they would not be able to have at home. Additionally, design has been considered as the key factor to create unique experience in boutique hotels. Hence, this study aims to examine the determinants of guest experience and especially the role of design factor in the context of boutique hotel in Malaysia. In order to achieve the objectives, qualitative content analysis has been applied as the main research method. There are 881 online reviews about the case study of Rosa Malacca boutique hotel collected from TripAdvisor website. Coding and categorizing process are based on three main themes: physical environment, social environment, and trip-related factors, which are adapted from previous literature and studies. The findings of data show that 13 factors have been revealed in relation to shaping guest experience, and the design is the most influential factor for the hotel Rosa Malacca. Furthermore, findings also indicate the relationship between design factor, guest experience, and behaviour intentions in this research. Lastly, this study stands to benefit in both theoretical and practical perspectives: future academics, hoteliers, and hotel designers.

ABSTRAK

Dalam era baru ini, menjadikan lebih rumit untuk memuaskan pelanggan dalam industri pelancongan dan hospitaliti seiring dengan pertumbuhan ekonomi yang pesat. Kini, pelancong dan tetamu hotel memilih untuk menginap di hotel bukan sahaja untuk tidur, tetapi juga mencari pengalaman istimewa yang mereka tidak akan dapat di rumah. Oleh itu, reka bentuk dianggap sebagai faktor utama bagi mewujudkan pengalaman unik di hotel butik. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk memeriksa penentu pengalaman tetamu terutamanya peranan faktor reka bentuk dalam konteks hotel butik di Malaysia. Bagi mencapai objektif, analisis kandungan kualitatif telah digunakan sebagai kaedah penyelidikan utama. Terdapat 881 ulasan dikutip dari laman web TripAdvisor tentang kajian kes Hotel Butik Rosa Melaka. Proses pengkodan dan pengkategorian adalah berdasarkan kepada tiga tema utama iaitu persekitaran fizikal, persekitaran sosial, dan faktor yang berkaitan dengan perjalanan, yang disesuaikan daripada kajian terdahulu. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa 13 faktor telah didedahkan berkaitan dengan membentuk pengalaman tetamu, dan reka bentuk adalah faktor yang paling berpengaruh untuk Hotel Butik Rosa Melaka. Selain itu, penemuan juga menunjukkan hubungan antara faktor reka bentuk, pengalaman tetamu, dan niat tingkah laku dalam penyelidikan ini. Akhir sekali, kajian ini memberi manfaat kepada kedua-dua perspektif teori dan praktikal akademik masa depan, pengusaha hotel, dan pereka hotel.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

e-WOM	-	electronic Word of Mouth
F&B	-	Food & Beverage
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
NYC	-	New York City
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
WOM	-	Word of Mouth

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This chapter firstly provides the background to the study and an overview of tourism & hotel industry in Malaysia. Secondly, it explains the research problem, research questions, and the objectives of this research. Finally, the scope of study, significance of research, and dissertation structure will be discussed.

1.2   Background of Study

Nowadays, travellers and hotel guests get into a hotel not only to sleep, but also to seek extraordinary experiences which they would not be able to have it at home (Carrington, 2016). Guests are more likely to experience this in a boutique hotel due to its fancy design styles. The numbers of boutique hotel have been increasing globally in recent years due to higher demand and its increasing popularity. One of the main factors of pushing the growth of boutique hotels is that consumers become more interested in history, culture and art, which inspires the concept of boutique or design hotels (Freund de Klumbis and Munsters 2005).

Tourism industry is a sector which involves a number of players, and hospitality industry is one of the main supporting sectors. Moreover, hotels can also be considered as an extension of the tourism destination experience since it influences tourists' overall travel satisfaction (Hui,Wan,&Ho, 2007). Meanwhile, the quality of destination's offering, for instance, hotel services play a significant role in delivering positive experience to tourists (Zabka, Brencic, & Dmitrovic, 2010). Hotel experience has usually been perceived as whole by hotel guests and tourists, however, according to the impacts of hotel attributes on guest's experience in latest research, both physical

environment and social interaction contribute to the hotel revenue along with guests' satisfaction (Ali, Hussain, & Ryu, 2017). The term "Servicescape" has been used by Bitner (1992, p.58) to describe the physical environment where the services take place. Physical environment consists of various elements including: space & function, signs, symbols & artefacts, and ambience. Furthermore, it has been mentioned by Han and Ryu (2009) that great servicescape is one of the key drivers to satisfy and attract guests to hotels.

1.3   Overview of Tourism & Hotel Service Industry in Malaysia

Tourism industry has been considered as one of the main economic drivers in Malaysia, which has numerous natural and cultural attractions all over the nation. As part of the service industry, Malaysian government has been proactively launching many campaigns and policies to boost its tourism growth (Bustamam, Teng, & Abdullah, 2014). As an achievement, the number of tourists travelling to Malaysia has increased from 20.9 million in 2007 to 25.9 million in 2017, and the amount of receipts has grown from 46.07 billion to 82.17 billion (Malaysian Ringgit) within ten years from 2007 to 2017. (Tourism Malaysia, 2018). Thus, referring to Deputy Minister of Tourism and Culture (MOTAC) Datuk Mas Ermieyati statement, tourism industry has been the third largest contributor to Malaysia's economy in 2016 (The Star, 2017).

Figure 1.1   Growth of Tourist Receipts in Malaysia from 2007 to 2017 (Tourism Malaysia)
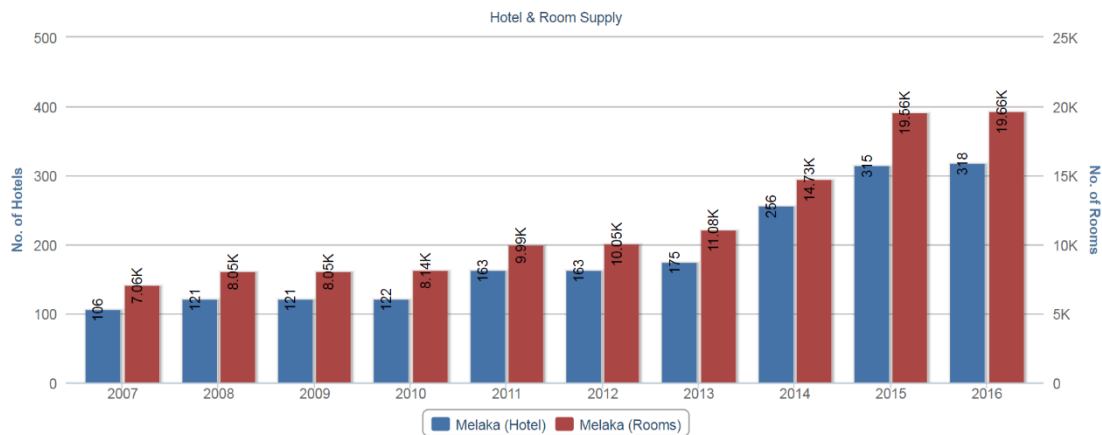
Figure 1.2   Growth of Hotels & Rooms in Malacca from 2007 to 2016 (Tourism Malaysia)

Meanwhile, hotel industry has been growing very closely along with tourism industry as a facilitating product in the service industry. In many countries, hotel industry plays a very significant role of contributing to nation's GDP, increasing employment rates, and upgrading people's lifestyle (Cheng and Lu, 2013). Due to the growing number of tourist arrivals to Malaysia, from the year 2007 until 2016, hotel numbers in Malaysia has doubled with a growth from 2360 to 4961 hotels, simultaneously, the number of hotel rooms has increased from 160 to 321 thousand (Hotel Survey Malaysia, 2018). The huge demand of hotel rooms can be reflected by the incremental growth of hotels investment.
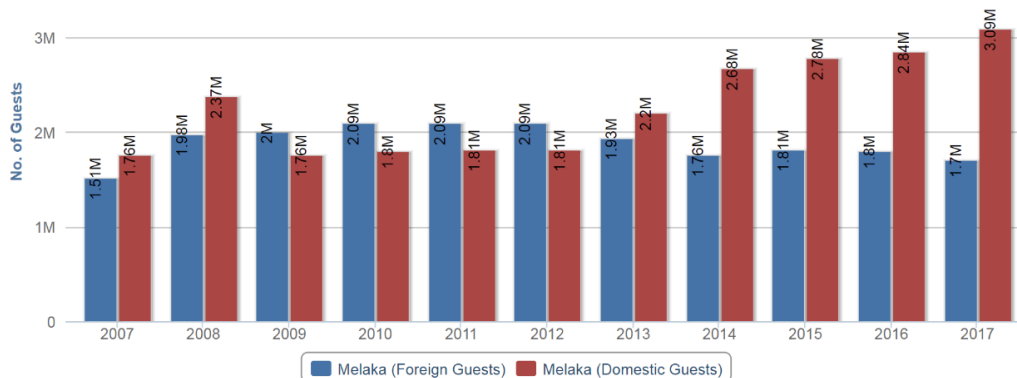
Figure 1.3   Growth of Tourist Arrivals in Malacca from 2007 to 2017 (Tourism Malaysia)

Since being listed by UNESCO as one of World Heritage Site in 2008, Malacca's tourist arrivals have been increasing constantly. The chief minister of Malacca Datuk Seri Idris Haron stated that 16.79 million of tourist arrivals has been recorded in 2017 by the state, and it's reaching the highest number to date. As a tourist destination, Malacca was selected as Top 10 Must-visit in Asia by Lonely Planet and

TripAdvisor (New Strait Times, 2018). The number of hotel guests in Malacca has been increased in total in the past ten years (2007-2017), especially the domestic guests have been growing from 1.7 million to 3.0 million per year (Tourism Malaysia, 2018).

Hotel industry has been contributing a significant role to attract overseas and local travellers to Malaysia. The mission of every hotel is to provide a better experience. Thus, this research is about to investigate the factors which influence the guest's experience, focusing on the design factor of the hotel. An excellent hotel stay experience would reinforce the image of tourism destination from the travellers' perspective (Yu, Byun, & Lee, 2014).

1.4 Problem Statement

As mentioned in the background, hotel guest's experience is usually influenced by two different perspectives, physical environment and social interaction, and many detailed factors can deliver various experience. Malacca, as a UNESCO site in Malaysia, which has rich heritage buildings, colonial style landmarks, and indigenous culture for tourists to explore. As a trend in many tourist destinations, ancient structures were likely adopted to become new hotel properties, especially boutique or lifestyle hotels. This emerging trend has been favoured by travellers in Malacca as well.

Although hotel guests usually perceived hotel experience holistically, it is crucial for hotel operators to understand what are the factors which shaped the structure of hotel experience, especially the design factor itself which affect customers' experience and satisfaction (PKF Hospitality Research, LLC, 2012). In other cases, many hoteliers paid more attentions on the form of hotel physical structures, however, many of them ignored the hotel functional design which could be more important to meet hotel guests and staffs' demands (Lin, 2014).

However, there is little related research on the determinant of boutique hotel guest experience in Malaysian boutique hotel industry, especially the importance of

design factors in overall guest experience creating process. This study aims to fill this gap in boutique hotel industry in Malaysia.

1.5 Research Question

This research will examine the several issues about guest's experience related to the design factor of boutique hotels. Therefore, two main research questions have been formulated for this dissertation:

(a) What are the key factors which influence guest's experience in the boutique hotel context, and which is the most influential one toward guest's experience in the case study of Rosa Malacca boutique hotel?

(b) How important is the design factor in delivering unique experience in the case study of Rosa Malacca boutique hotel?

1.6 Research Objective

According to research issues and questions discussed above, two main objectives of this research has been developed as follow:

(a) To identify the factors influencing guest experience in boutique hotel context and investigate the most influential factor toward guest experience in the case study of Rosa Malacca boutique hotel.

(b) To discuss the degree of importance of design factors on creating unique experience for boutique hotels in the case study of Rosa Malacca boutique hotel.

1.7   Scope of Research

The scope of this research is to discuss about factors associated with guest's experience in boutique hotel of Rosa Malacca, which located in downtown Malacca. The only focus is online reviews extracted from TripAdvisor where all the comments are based on actual experience of the Rosa Malacca boutique hotel.

1.8   Significance of the Research

This study provides both academic and practical importance in the field of boutique hotel. The findings will be useful for researchers, hotel managers, and to a certain extent inspire future hotel designers.

1.8.1   From Academic Perspective

Related to previous research on boutique hotel and guest's experience, gaps will be filled in this study about design factors influencing boutique hotel guest's experience. Through identifying and understanding guest's perspective by the case study of boutique hotel in Malacca (Malaysia), more information will be contributed to academic research for future students and scholars who are interested in related research field.

1.8.2   From Practical Perspective

This study will benefit hotel managers and hotel designers practically. Firstly, all the findings will enhance hoteliers' awareness about the importance of hotel design's role from a holistic perspective. It will help hotel managers to understand that design factors might be key attributes to enhance guest's experience. Secondly, the findings of this study will provide useful information for hotel designers when they design and plan the physical environment for future boutique hotel projects. It will

help hotel designers to use the design as competitive advantages to satisfy the demands from the direct clients, the hoteliers, and potential hotel guests.

1.9 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation includes five chapters: (i) Introduction, (ii) Literature Review, (iii) Research Methodology, (iv) Analysis and Findings, and (v) Discussion and Conclusion.

Chapter one: Introduction. The first chapter elaborates the background of this research, meanwhile introduces an overview of tourism industry in Malaysia and discusses its relevance to boutique hotel industry. Furthermore, problem statements and research questions are generated to formulate the research objectives, and the scope of study is defined as well. Lastly, the significance of this study is discussed.

Chapter two: Literature Review. The second chapter will investigate the previous research and theories on boutique hotels and guest experience. Literatures about hotel servicescape are considered as significant in this research, it explained key attributes influencing guest's experience in previous studies. Moreover, online user-generated content analysis, as an effective research tool, will be discussed. Lastly, a conceptual framework is briefly explained.

Chapter three: Research Methodology. The third chapter focuses on the research design, research approach, study site, population & sampling, and the method of data collection. Content analysis and coding process are further explained. Finally, the evaluation of research results will be discussed.

Chapter four: Analysis and Findings. The fourth chapter presents the outcome of data collection from the online platform TripAdvisor, meanwhile the identified themes and factors will be discussed in this stage which is in relation to guest experience of Rosa Malacca boutique hotel. Finally, findings will be summarized into a framework.

Chapter five: Discussion and Conclusion. In this Chapter, findings and results of data analysis will be discussed in order to answer research questions and achieve research objectives. The contributions of this study will be elaborated based on the findings and discussions. Lastly, the limitations of study will be explained as well.

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